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FORTY-SECOND YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
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15 February 1993

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THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 27 APRIL 1992]

FORTY-SECOND YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES VOLUME 219

THIRTEENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1992-93

House of Commons

Monday 15 February 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disability Living Allowance

1. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the target period within which applicants for disability living allowance should receive a decision; and what target he has set for responding to representations from hon. Members on behalf of constituents in respect of applications for disability living allowance.

4. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what new steps he is taking to ensure that the delays in responding to applications for disability living allowance are eliminated.

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Nicholas Scott): Current targets are that 60 per cent. of applicants for disability living allowance should receive a decision within 30 days and 95 per cent. should do so within 55 days. However, the latter target is under review. The Benefits Agency has also undertaken to reply to correspondence from hon. Members within an average of 20 days.

I meet the chief executive of the Benefits Agency regularly to review progress. As I have already advised the House, the level of work outstanding on disability living allowance has been reduced to normal levels—60 per cent. of new claims are being cleared within 30 days and older cases are being targeted.

Mr. Michael: I have had a rash of letters from the head of the Benefits Agency since I tabled this question, but none met the 20-day target—most of them were replies to letters that had been hanging around on his desk for three months or more. Does the Minister recognise that by the time constituents go to their Member of Parliament they have often been trying to get sense out of the system in person, by letter and by telephone for a year or more? Does he also recognise that these are some of the most vulnerable people in our society? Whom does he want us to blame—the head of the Benefits Agency, for running a sloppy and incompetent administration? Or should we not blame the Secretary of State and seek his resignation?

Mr. Scott: If the hon. Gentleman was present for previous exchanges on the matter, he will know how much the Government and the agency regret the backlog that was caused by the early surge of claims for disability living allowance. I am confident that it is now under control and that targets will be met in future. As for letters, the agency gave priority to the clearance of claims. It is now writing to Members of Parliament with an up-to-date report on the way in which the claim have been decided.

Mr. Sheerman: Is the Minister aware of the widespread anxiety about the quality of decision making by the Benefits Agency on disability living allowance? If the quality of decision making is bad, it will store up a great deal more trouble and anxiety for the vulnerable people who are affected. Will the Minister give two assurances? First, will he thoroughly investigate every allegation in *The Sunday Times* article yesterday and report to the House? Secondly, will he give a belated Valentine to the people affected and say that no one will lose out as a result of knock-on effects or any other repercussion caused by the disgraceful circus of disorganisation?

Mr. Scott: No one will lose money, because the payment of any benefit that is awarded will be backdated to the time of the claim. [HON. MEMBERS: "What about the knock-on effects?"] As for other backlogs, outstanding letters from Members of Parliament should be cleared by the end of February. I believe that from then on we shall be in a steady state.

Mr. Alan Howarth: In considering the administrative practicalities of providing support for disabled people rapidly, sensitively and cost-effectively, as I know is his wish, will my right hon. Friend also look sympathetically at the case for providing cash rather than services to certain severely disabled people who would rather organise their own personal assistance? Is there any reason why the Government should not give a fair wind to the private Member's Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe)?

Mr. Scott: On the latter point, it will rest with local authorities from April this year to provide packages of community care. Local authorities are not enabled to pay cash, but they will be able to provide services. It is the intention of colleagues in the Department of Health that disabled people should be closely involved with the development of those packages. As the House already knows, I intend to legislate in the near future for a successor body to the independent living fund.

Mr. Spring: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that more than 200,000 people who were not benefiting previously have benefited from the introduction of the new disability living allowance? Is that not striking proof positive that the Government are mindful of the needs of the disabled and of helping constructively in that respect?

Mr. Scott: I well understand my hon. Friend's remarks and I am grateful to him for his support. The concept and, increasingly, the delivery of DLA has been spectacularly successful. Hundreds of thousands of people have benefited from it and the self-assessment system is working extremely well—better than any of the previous arrangements. The staff of the agency are to be congratulated on their achievement.

Mr. Frank Field: For those constituents who come to our surgeries because they are gaining no money from the benefits, could the Minister give us the timetable during which their claims will be met and paid?

Mr. Scott: I have already told the House what will happen to new claims, which will be met within targets. The Benefits Agency intends to ensure that all claims received up to December last year will be handled by April this year.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: May I thank my right hon. Friend for the way in which he responded to the embarrassement of riches in terms of the number of applicants for disability living allowance? Is it not worth pointing out that since 1979 the Government have increased spending on the long-term sick and disabled by 170 per cent?

Mr. Scott: That is true, and DLA will further increase that figure. About 370,000 awards are being made under DLA, which is a great achievement.

Mr. Dewar: Does the Minister accept, as he must on the evidence, that the DLA experience has been a disaster for the many applicants left in limbo and also for the benefits system? The news that many people, some with no money coming in from a benefit source, will have to wait until April will add to the distress. Does the right hon. Gentleman defend the distinction made by the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, who argues that no DLA file has been lost, although some are difficult to find? Has he seen the reports about a DLA filing system which does not fit the files and is 40 miles from the officers who take the decisions? How on earth could something like that arise?

Mr. Scott: The remote filing system at Nelson serves not only DLA but a considerable number of other benefits and it seems sensible to keep those files at a central point. I acknowledge that there were delays, which caused considerable distress to a large number of customers during the early days of the benefit. I have apologised to the House for that, and I have acknowledged that the surge in claims at the launch of the benefit caused the problem. We are largely through that, and shall be able to meet targets from now on.

Pensions

2. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the average value of an occupational pension *(a)* in 1979 and *(b)* in the latest year for which figures are available.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Miss Ann Widdecombe): I am sure that my hon. Friend will be pleased to hear that between 1979 and 1988, the latest year for which figures are available, it is estimated that the average value of occupational pensions in payment rose from £34 per week to £51·80 per week at 1988 prices—this represents an increase of about 52 per cent.

Mr. Coombs: Will my hon. Friend confirm that about 70 per cent. of recently retired people obtain occupational pensions, and that that trend has been rising steadily throughout the past decade? Can she confirm that it remains Government policy to encourage as many people as possible to follow that means of provision?

Miss Widdecombe: Yes, I have pleasure in confirming that my hon. Friend's figures are correct. They exclude the 5 million people who now provide for themselves through personal pensions, which is another sign of the Government's commitment to a proper combination of private and public provision for retirement income.

Mr. Norman Hogg: Is the Minister aware that retired local government officers in Scotland on average receive only £2,014 per annum from occupational pensions? Does she accept that that is below the figure bandied about as the sort of pension paid to retired local government officers? Does that not show that, before the Government start to tamper with the state pension, they should have regard to the fact that many occupational pensions do not pay that much money to their pensioners?

Miss Widdecombe: I was pointing out that occupational pensions pay an increasing amount to their pensioners. The figures are somewhat depressed if one includes in them those who retired when occupational pensions were in their infancy. The hon. Gentleman is perfectly capable of understanding what an average is, however, and that if there is an average pension, some people will receive far more than that and some will get somewhat less.

Mrs. Chaplin: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the occupational pensions industry is increasingly equalising the pension age at 65 and that it would be helpful from its point of view if we equalised the state retirement age at 65 as well? I declare an interest in that I fully intend to work until the age of 65 at least.

Miss Widdecombe: I am delighted to hear that my hon. Friend intends to work until she is 65 and I am sure that she will represent her constituents well throughout that time. The Government are entirely committed to equalising the state pension age and our equalisation proposals were set out in a consultation document. Those four options are still under consideration.

3. **Mr. Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his policy on maintaining the value of the basic retirement pension in real terms.

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): Since 1979, we have more than fulfilled our pledge to maintain the real value of the basic state pension.

Mr. Burden: The Secretary of State will recall that since the Government scrapped the link with earnings, single pensioners and married couples are, respectively, about £17·65 and £28 per week worse off. My city of Birmingham has more than 103,000 pensioners living in poverty who are forced to choose between having a decent diet and meeting the cost of rising fuel bills. Some 39 per cent. of them have no central heating and 45 per cent. have no loft insulation. Can the Secretary of State or the Government really be proud of their record of cutting the value of the state pension?

Mr. Lilley: Because we have focused additional resources on the most needy, and because we have encouraged people to make increased provision over and above their basic state pension, the average income of pensioners has risen more every year under this Government than under the five years of the previous Labour Government. So the answer is yes, we are proud of our record and the hon. Gentleman should be ashamed of his.

Mr. Dunn: Will my right hon. Friend condemn a policy that seeks to means-test the state pension as well as to discourage private provision? Is he aware that such a policy is now an official policy of the Labour party?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right—it is a most extraordinary combination for any political party to adopt. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) has specifically required his social justice commission to consider means-testing every universal benefit, including the basic pension. The Opposition are bound to follow such a policy because of their commitment to uprate that pension in line with earnings rather than prices. If they are to get extra resources for the most needy, they will have to means-test that pension and they know it.

Mr. Kirkwood: Notwithstanding the Secretary of State's assurances about the Government's intention regarding price protection for the basic state pension, does he acknowledge that the value of that pension depends to a large extent on fuel bills, food bills and public utility costs? If there is any truth in the rumour that the Treasury is considering imposing value added tax on those items, will the right hon. Gentleman's Department ensure that those costs are made up through the social security system?

Mr. Lilley: As the hon. Gentleman knows, we do not answer hypothetical questions, but he will be interested in the fact that if, since 1979, pensions had been raised in line with the pensioners index—the index which looks specifically at the goods and services that pensioners buy —rather than with the retail prices index, as we have done, pensioners would be receiving £6·65 per week less.

Pensions and Benefits (Choice)

5. **Mrs. Roe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has for increasing the control and choice individuals have over their social security benefits and pensions.

Mr. Lilley: As my hon. Friend knows, the Government are committed to enabling individuals to take greater control of all areas of their lives. Our policy on earnings-related pension provision is an excellent example of that commitment. Since 1988, 5 million people have taken out personal pensions, in addition to the 11 million people who are members of occupational pension schemes.

Mrs. Roe: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, since 1979, Conservative Governments have maintained their manifesto pledges to increase the basic pension in line with prices? Does he agree that that clearly demonstrates that Conservatives take their manifesto pledges seriously? Will he therefore take this opportunity to condemn the scaremongering carried out by Labour Members of Parliament who frequently suggest that we are about to break our pledges?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Conservative party has a reputation second to none for keeping its pledges. The uprating statement in the autumn demonstrated that we keep our pledges to pensioners and families, despite the scaremongering by Labour Members which preceded the outcome of that round. The Labour party has a lot to be ashamed of, as it broke its pledges to pensioners, cut the real value of pensions by 60 per cent., cut the Christmas bonus and robbed pensioners through inflation, which wiped out their savings.

Mr. Rooney: Does the Secretary of State realise that social security benefits constitute a two-way package whereby people contribute to the national insurance fund and then, in return, when the time comes, make their claims? In the 13 years of the Conservative Government there has been a 50 per cent. increase in the rate of contribution, but a withdrawal of the earnings-related element, sickness, unemployment and invalidity benefits, widows pensions and a range of other matters. How does the Secretary of State answer that charge?

Mr. Lilley: I do recognise that. As I said to the Select Committee on Social Security, I think that there is more strength in the contributory principle than many intellectuals believe. However, the hon. Gentleman had better have an argument with one such intellectual, the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) who, in his leadership statement, questioned whether the Labour party should maintain the distinction between national insurance benefits, which are available only on the contribution test, and means-tested benefits. I said that I recognised that issue raised by the hon. Gentleman, but does the Labour party? And will the Labour party keep its long-standing commitment to that principle? It seems not.

Mr. Brazier: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the best ways of encouraging alternative provision, especially occupational pension provision, is the control of inflation, and that no occupational pension fund, however well funded, could cope with the inflation levels that occurred under the last Labour Government?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is right. We are uprating the pension by 3·6 per cent.—the rate of inflation prior to the uprating statement. The current, most recent, figure is 1·7 per cent.—half that level. That means that during the past 12 months inflation has risen less than it did on average for every month of all five years of the last Labour Government.

Mrs. Golding: Is the Minister aware that the only choice open to many pensioners is to live from hand to mouth? Why does he close his eyes to the desperate plight of those pensioners who are refused additional benefits because they receive tiny occupational pensions?

Mr. Lilley: We have been increasing the amount of resources channelled to pensioners with the lowest incomes. I am sure that the hon. Lady will welcome the fact that in the uprating statement I was able to confirm that, on top of the increase in line with inflation, an extra £500 million would go, through the pensioners' premiums, to those on the lowest incomes.

Mr. Lidington: Is my right hon. Friend aware that thousands of Maxwell pensioners had no choice because membership of the pension scheme was a condition of their employment? Has my right hon. Friend a message for those office holders who are still haggling and delaying the unfreezing of the common investment fund, which should be paid to the benefit of those pensioners in need?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend powerfully makes his point, which I think will have much support on both sides of the House. We hope that Sir John Cuckney's request is successful and that matters will be resolved rapidly. We want those involved—liquidators, solicitors, executives or trustees—to bring about an early settlement and distribute the money so that the pensioners know that they can keep receiving their pensions.

Pensions

6. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what changes he is considering to the state retirement pension.

Miss Widdecombe: We have more than maintained the value of the basic state pension since 1979.

Mr. Winnick: If the Government have really dropped the idea of means-testing state pensions—we do not know for certain whether they have—is not that only because of the outrage in the country when reports appeared last week, such as the one in *The Sunday Times*, which clearly showed that that was what the Government intended to do? What possible justification can there be for raising the state pension age for women from 60 to 65? There is no justification: it was not in the Tory election manifesto, and it would be quite wrong to take that step.

Miss Widdecombe: On means-testing the basic state pension, the more intelligent Members on both sides will be aware that our manifesto promises are a somewhat better guide than press speculation. Furthermore, actions speak louder than words. As we promised in our manifesto to uprate pensions in line with prices and, despite immense public expenditure pressures, still went ahead and did that in the autumn statement, I find it amazing that the hon. Gentleman has not yet realised that we take our manifesto promises extremely seriously.

Dr. Spink: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the greatest threat to pensioners, particularly those on small fixed incomes, is inflation and that in one year of the Labour party's term of office more than a quarter of the value of the basic pension was wiped out by inflation?

Miss Widdecombe: Indeed—for all the talk by the Opposition about how pensioners would be better off from an earnings link, the fact remains that when the Labour party practised it, not only did inflation wipe out the value of the increases but retirement income actually rose no more throughout the whole time of the Labour Government than it has risen every year during our period of office.

Independent Living Fund

7. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on future arrangements for the operation of the independent living fund.

Mr. Scott: Details of these arrangements will be announced shortly.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Is the Minister aware that, putting it mildly, there seems to be some confusion between his Department and the Department of Health about the arrangements from April this year? Can he clarify the suggestion that there will be a £500 per week maximum for payment from the independent living fund plus the value of local authoriity services to any one client and that clients requiring more than that amount will be expected to enter residential or nursing care permanently? If that is so, and if care capping is to be introduced by the Department, does he accept that that completely undermines the whole process of assessment being introduced in the community care changes with effect from April?

Mr. Scott: I shall certainly not be tempted into commenting on what I understand was a leaked document. As I have already made clear, the time will come when it will be right for me to announce to the House the full arrangements for the assessment and delivery of services, and any additional cash which may be necessary to support independent living for disabled people.

Mr. Bradley: When the Minister considers future arrangements, will he look again at the chaos governing relations between the disability living allowance and applications to the independent living fund? Although he said in an answer to me that the trustees have discretion to take applications from people who have applied for DLA, in practice that discretion has been taken away by the trustees due to lack of funds and they are taking applications only from people in receipt of the old attendance allowance. That is a double blow to people waiting in desperation for their DLA to come through. They are doubly disadvantaged because they will not now be allowed to apply to the ILF. Surely the Government have some responsibility for this chaos and for ensuring that people are not doubly disadvantaged, first by having to wait for the DLA and then by losing out in terms of money from the ILF. Will the right hon. Gentleman look into future arrangements and ensure that people are compensated for the chaos that the Government have created?

Mr. Scott: No, I do not believe that that is so. I can only repeat that it would have been open to the trustees of the independent living fund to use their discretion to deem people to be in a position in which they would qualify for a payment from the ILF. We are, in any case, only about six weeks away from the beginning of the next financial year and the launch of the new independent living fund.

Transfer Payments

8. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has to reduce the current levels of public expenditure on social security transfer payments.

Mr. Lilley: Our spending plans were set out in the autumn statement on 12 November 1992.

Mr. Banks: Does the Secretary of State accept that there is something deeply offensive about an evening-suited Prime Minister standing up at the Carlton club and addressing a bunch of well-fed Tories about the possibility of people on benefit having to work to get their benefit? Is not it outrageous that the poorest in our society, particularly unemployed people, should have in effect to pay twice over for the economic incompetence of this most stupid and recalcitrant Government? For the sake of better clarity, will the right hon. Gentleman now make it quite clear that under no circumstances will a Conservative Government means test the basic state retirement pension —yes or no?

Mr. Lilley: The world has been a better place since the hon. Member and his party improved their sartorial appearance. Under the previous Labour Government, whom the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) supported, one condition of receiving benefit was that one did nothing. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister that it is more sensible to look for ways of increasing the opportunities and requirements for people to do something—to improve their qualifications, to improve their contact with work and to contribute to the community. I think that that has widespread support. I made it quite clear that, unlike the social justice commission, which was established by the leader of the Labour party, we have no plans to means test the basic pension.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Does my right hon. Friend recognise that there are no questions about child benefit, because one of the ways of ensuring the welfare of children is for the Government to go on meeting their manifesto pledge, which was also set out in the autumn statement, that child benefit will continue to recognise that when people have children their taxable capacity is reduced but their needs increased? The child cash allowance is more equitable than a child tax allowance.

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend will know that we have no plans to abandon our manifesto pledge, which we upheld in the autumn statement.

Mobility Allowance

10. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people receive mobility allowance; and what was the figure in 1979.

Mr. Scott: In 1979 an estimated average of 95,000 people received mobility allowance. By 1992. the figure had risen to 660,000—almost a sevenfold increase. The introduction of disability living allowance has extended help with mobility costs even further.

Lady Olga Maitland: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on those excellent figures. Will he confirm that they show an increase of 173 per cent. in real terms? Does he agree that that is acceptable progress compared with the carping and jeering of Labour Members, whose party always failed to deliver the same level of support to sick and disabled people?

Mr. Scott: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend. I am particularly glad that, unlike the Labour party, we were able to introduce the disability living allowance in one go rather than having to phase it in over four years. I am delighted at the success of the new lower rates that have been introduced for DLA, which will make a significant improvement in the provision for mobility costs.

Mr. Wigley: May I press the Minister further on the reply that he gave earlier? Is he aware that since he last answered the question four weeks ago, hon. Members have received replies that had been waiting two or three months and that his assurances do not ring all that true? When will all those who are waiting have their cases cleared up, because it is they who are suffering from the Government's subterfuge in staging the introduction of the benefit?

Mr. Scott: I well understand the puzzlement of hon. Members who have received letters informing them of the outcome of claims that were settled weeks ago. It is perfectly understandable for the Benefits Agency to have concentrated on clearing those claims first and then bringing hon. Members up to date. Hon. Members' letters should be cleared by the end of this month. All new Members' letters will now be met within the 20-day target. Last year's claims will be cleared by April, and reviews and appeals should be cleared by May.

Mr. Milligan: I welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement about the speeding up of the payment——

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must ask Question 11.

Disability Living Allowance

11. **Mr. Milligan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action he is taking to improve the administration of the disability living allowance.

Mr. Scott: As I have said before, I take a close, personal interest in the administration of disability living allowance and meet the chief executive of the Benefits Agency regularly to review progress and discuss the improvements in hand. Apart from the steps already taken, the agency is reviewing the procedures for processing claims, setting up additional processing centres and increasing the training for staff.

Mr. Milligan: I welcome the additional announcements that my right hon. Friend has made for speeding up the payment of DLA, which will also be welcome to my constituents. Is he aware that dozens of my constituents have had their applications lost and have waited months without a reply, and that, according to *The Sunday Times* yesterday, more than 1,400 people are in that situation? Can he explain how that has happened and what measures he is taking to deal with the problem?

Mr. Scott: I say to my hon. Friend as I have said on a number of occasions, both from the Dispatch Box and in other forums, that we recognise that there was an unexpected surge of claims following the successful launch of the new benefit, and particularly as a result of the success of the advertising campaigns. There is no doubt that the agency went through a rough time early on in overcoming the problems. I am sure that it is now in a position to overcome them and that we can look forward to a much smoother path.

Mr. Alfred Morris: Can the Minister or the Benefits Agency now say how many DLA claimants died before their claims were processed and how long they waited in each case?

Mr. Scott: The short answer to the right hon. Gentleman's question is the same as it was when he last asked it—no.

Residential and Nursing Care

12. **Ms. Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations his Department has had from care providers regarding the costs of residential and nursing care.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Alastair Burt): Several representations have been received recently, from both individuals and representative bodies.

Ms. Eagle: Is the Minister aware that the cost of a weekly place in a residential or nursing care home as calculated by his Department falls up to £50 short of the real cost? Can he comment on the fact that the Government's hope that the cost-care gap will be made up by charitable donations is pie in the sky, given both the scale and length of the recession and the fact that the National Lotteries Bill will reduce charitable income even more? What will the Government do to put payments for care places on a more secure footing?

Mr. Burt: I am sure that the hon. Lady will be pleased to know that expenditure on people in homes has increased enormously since 1979 from the £10 million spent then to £2·5 billion spent now. The last uprating increased the amount going into homes by over the rate of inflation—by about 3·6 per cent. The hon. Lady will appreciate that no Government can make a commitment to pay all the fees up to the full limit because that would lead to the abuse that there was before.

The amount of money spent by the Government on people receiving benefits in homes will stay at the level of commitment that we have now. The new system of community care will also ensure that that amount of money is best spent on domiciliary care, the independent sector or local authority care. I am sure that local authorities will administer the new system with the care with which it has been administered up to now.

Mr. Willetts: Is my hon. Friend aware that the main concern among private providers of residential accommodation in nursing homes is the risk of a vendetta by left-wing local authorities from 1 April, who, for purely ideological reasons, will refuse to finance the cost of accommodation in such homes?

Mr. Burt: My hon. Friend will be aware that matters relating to the registration of homes are the responsibility more of the Department of Health than of this Department, but I am aware of the concerns already expressed to Departments about such matters. The quality of care delivered to the elderly has been immeasurably increased over the past decade partly because of the quality of care in the independent sector, and the way in which that has increased and encouraged the delivery of quality care in the local authority sector. The quality of care given to elderly people by all providers is substantially better than it was a decade or 20 years ago.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Is the Minister aware that the Government have forced local authorities to get rid of their beds? The Government have put enormous pressure on people to go into private homes. There is a real fear that after 1 April many of the most damaged people will not be able to pay for their accommodation in the private sector because of the Government's actions and the lack of money available to local authorities. How does the Minister satisfy those people? There are many who are terrified of what will happen to their elderly, who in many instances are mentally handicapped.

Mr. Burt: Substantial resources have been placed into the community care system to cover situations such as those to which the hon. Lady has drawn attention. Before a new system comes into place, there are always concerns about what might happen on the actual day. We know that the amount of money put in and the degree of care exercised by local authorities will ensure, for the first time, that proper consideration is given to individual cases and all cases. This approach will ensure also that the available money is best spent to the benefit of everyone. I am sure that the hon. Lady would not want to return to a system where limited resources were poorly spent. I am convinced that the amount of money and the degree of care that will be exercised will ensure the success of the community care policy.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Citizens Charter

27. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what progress has been achieved in implementing the citizens charter.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. William Waldegrave): We have made good progress in implementing the charter. More than 90 per cent. of our initial commitments have been met or are in hand.

Mr. Hain: Will the Chancellor of the Duchy confirm that if the Government proceed with their plans to privatise Parcelforce and the Royal Mail sections of the Post Office, none of the quality of service, entitlements and obligations set out in the citizens charter will apply? Or was that the right hon. Gentleman's agenda all along?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman, who is an expert in these matters, knows that no final decisions have been made. As in other private utilities, there is the regulator. The charter covers those utilities.

Ms. Mowlam: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that both he and the Prime Minister have emphasised, in relation to charters, the importance of prompt replies to correspondence? Goals have been set for British Telecom and British Gas, for example. What are the goals for the right hon. Gentleman's unit? I wrote on behalf of someone in Swanage, Dorset, and it took him two months to reply.

Mr. Waldegrave: I apologise for that—it was inadequate service. All Departments of State have published targets for answering their letters, and we should meet them.

Market Testing and Competitive Tendering

28. **Mr. Congdon:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what measures he uses to assess the benefits of market testing and compulsory competitive tendering; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: In market testing, Departments assess savings in costs; and improvements in quality, such as reliability and timeliness. They monitor how these benefits are delivered in practice.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment is responsible for compulsory competitive tendering. The benefits of CCT are being assessed through a continuing programme of research commissioned by his Department.

Mr. Congdon: I welcome that answer. Given the success of the competitive tendering programme, especially in local government, will my right hon. Friend ensure that market testing in central Government delivers the savings that we desire?

Mr. Waldegrave: Yes, I can confirm that. I am sure that my hon. Friend will be pleased that when my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence recently announced what amounted to the saving of two regiments, he was able partly to attribute that to the savings that he has made in his Department as a result of market testing. That is a good example of market testing leading to proper savings.

Mr. Madden: What action are the Government taking to safeguard the confidence of taxpayers' records when sections of the Inland Revenue are privatised?

Mr. Waldegrave: Any privatisation in that Department or any other in which confidentiality is involved would need contracts to cover that. Major state secrets in the defence industry have been possessed by the private sector for generations, and there is no essential difference elsewhere.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will my right hon. Friend join me in regretting the insensitivity of Labour-controlled Lancashire county council, which has bought six Mercedes tipper trucks at a time when many jobs are on the line at Leyland Daf, which produces extremely good——

Madam Speaker: Order. The Chancellor of the Duchy is not responsible for a local authority's purchasing policy.

Mr. Waldegrave: I believe that that is the correct judgment, Madam Speaker, as always.

I have to say that there are many things about Lancashire county council that my hon. Friend and I find surprising, perhaps not least the one that she has mentioned.

Compensation

29. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many charters contain provisions for compensation to be paid to members of the public.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science (Mr. Robert Jackson): All charters contain information about what to do if things go wrong. Six charters contain provision for financial compensation. Those include the British Rail passengers charter and London Underground customers charter.

Mr. Bayley: Will the Minister give a firm guarantee that all the provisions of the BR passengers charter will apply to private sector train operators if the Government go ahead with privatisation, or will the private sector be let off the hook?

Mr. Jackson: The charter will apply to everyone who operates a service. Meanwhile, it applies to BR. The House should know that it is not simply a question of compensation for individuals, which the hon. Gentleman may have had in mind; there is a provision under which fares are reduced in a particular area if the service to it is performing below standard.

Citizens Charter

30. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many citizens charters are now in place; how many more are expected; when these are expected; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert Jackson: We have published 30 charters, including the Ulsterbus charter launched today. We plan to publish at least 10 more in 1993. Those charters empower the consumers of public services, better enabling them to insist on good quality services and proper redress where things go wrong.

Mr. Greenway: Has my hon. Friend seen the interesting Fabian Society pamphlet by Margaret Hodge, the former Labour leader of Islington council, in which she welcomes the publication of local authority performance indicators such as those proposed in the citizens charter? Will he now consider extending the charters and strengthening them to ensure that they are effective for all citizens?

Mr. Jackson: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to Margaret Hodge's pamphlet. A number of serious Labour leaders in local government are coming out in support of some of the Government's actions. Margaret Hodge said—and it is something that is not often supported by Labour Members:

> "Most important, Government can insist that authorities submit their services to external validation . . . They can insist on publishing outcomes and they can compare performance between authorities".

That is the approach of the charter, the approach through local authority audit and the approach endorsed by Margaret Hodge, who has great experience of local government. It is an approach opposed by far too many Labour Members.

Mr. Stevenson: Does the Minister accept that, despite the citizens charter, many people who rely on the activities —or inactivities—of the Benefits Agency are suffering badly because of its inefficiency? Because of that serious problem, will the Minister undertake urgently to review the provision of compensation for those who are adversely affected by that inadequate service? Will he report to the House on that matter as quickly as possible?

Mr. Jackson: Like the hon. Gentleman, I heard the point made on that subject during Social Security questions earlier. A full apology was made for the circumstances surrounding disability living allowance. The position is improving and it will be put right. I shall draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security to the hon. Gentleman's suggestion about compensation.

Quangos

31. **Mr. Elletson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many non-departmental public bodies were in existence in *(a)* April 1991 and *(b)* April 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: There were 1,412 non-departmental public bodies in existence in April 1992 compared with 1,444 in April 1991. The April 1992 total is the lowest since the data were first collected in 1979.

Mr. Elletson: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his answer—the fall in the figures is small, but welcome. Will he comment on the increase in the number of quangos that would have occurred under a Labour Government, especially in view of the Labour's plans for regional women's units and specialist——

Madam Speaker: Order. Not only is the hon. Gentleman's question out of order, it is hypothetical. If the hon. Gentleman has a substantive question that is in order, I shall take it.

Mr. Elletson: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that over the past year there has been a substantial fall in the number of quangos, which significantly would not have occurred under a Labour Government?

Mr. Waldegrave: As you decisively said, Madam Speaker, any reference to a Labour Government is indeed very hypothetical.

My hon. Friend is entirely right: there has been a fall. There are now 800 fewer quangos than there were in 1979, and 100,000 fewer people are employed in them.

Scientists

32. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will take steps to discourage scientists trained in the United Kingdom from seeking work outside the EC.

Mr. Waldegrave: No. It would be wrong to do so. Science is international. The United Kingdom benefits from scientists coming here from other countries, and our own scientists benefit from experience overseas.

Mr. Mackinlay: Does the Chancellor of the Duchy realise that his reply is breathtaking in its complacency —and also unpatriotic? Is he not aware that 1,000 British scientists are allowed to work in the United States alone, and that a real gap exists—both in terms of the graduates who seek to work in research science, and in terms of our ability to maintain them? Is it not time that the Government ensured that proper rewards existed in this country to encourage scientists to stay here working and developing their skills? Should not the Government also ensure that a proper career structure exists for research scientists?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman is getting a little carried away. The universities' own statistical records show that there has been a net inflow of scientists every year since 1983. There is a tiny movement either way: about 1 per cent. leave each year. If we hark back to the long-distant days of Labour government, we find that about 35 per cent. of those with PhDs left for the United States in the 1960s. The figure is now rather under 10 per cent.

As for my reply being unpatriotic, is the hon. Gentleman really saying that it was unpatriotic of Freeman Dyson to go and work at Cornell university with Feynman? That is madness.

Mr. Bowis: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), who normally endears himself to the House, has looped the loop in his question? Does not Britain provide the world —particularly the developing world—with a great benefit by sending its experts, especially its scientists, to help other countries to develop? Does it not also encourage young people to come to this country to train as scientists, and then to return to their own countries? Neither would be possible if my right hon. Friend listened seriously to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is right. All of us who spend our time going around university science departments welcome the fact that we hear many different accents from all over the world. Science is international. We are attracting as many scientists to this country as leave our shores—indeed, more. Of those who leave, the majority leave for short-term appointments and many subsequently return.

Dr. Moonie: It is very sad that the Chancellor of the Duchy fails to distinguish between going abroad voluntarily to expand one's career horizons, and being forced abroad by the grossly inadequate remuneration given to research scientists in this country and the utter failure to provide them with an adequate career structure. Would the right hon. Gentleman care to comment on figures produced by the Science and Engineering Research

Council and the Medical Research Council over the past year, which show a 15 per cent. fall in the number of PhD awards?

Mr. Waldegrave: I would be the last to say that more cannot be done to encourage science careers in this country, and I hope that we shall present appropriate proposals. It is wrong, however, to adopt the broad-brush approach of saying that every scientist who leaves the country represents a setback, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not adopt such an approach.

Citizens Charter

33. **Mr. Tracey:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when the next interdepartmental meeting on the citizens charter will be held; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: On Wednesday, under the chairmanship of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

Mr. Tracey: That is extremely good news. At the meeting, will my right hon. Friend ensure that standards of service and propriety in local government—particularly in Labour-controlled Lambeth council—are well examined?

Mr. Waldegrave: That might take up rather too much of our time. Others are interested in the matter, including the Audit Commission, which is right. That leads me to a natural development of my hon. Friend's point. Conservative Members welcome, for example, the Audit Commission's publication of comparative performance indicators for local authorities; the Opposition have opposed them at every turn.

Ms. Abbott: Does the citizens charter offer any recourse to British Rail pensioners who, it seems, must stand by and watch the Government loot their pension funds to the tune of £4·25 billion, something about which those pensioners will, apparently, have no say?

Mr. Waldegrave: I do not think that the hon. Lady is right about that matter, but I shall write to her further.

Lady Olga Maitland: Will my right hon. Friend take the opportunity at Wednesday's meeting to press for further publication of the league tables to ensure better services all round?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is entirely right. The Opposition, including their distinguished representative who is sitting on the Opposition Front Bench, the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher), always claim that they are in favour of open government, but whenever the question of the publication of information arises, such as the league tables on school information, they are against it.

Science In Higher Education

35. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he last met the chairman of the Higher Education Funding Council for England to discuss funding for science in higher education.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. Friend has not recently met the distinguished chairman of the Higher Education Funding Council, but it so happens that I met the chief executive only a week last Friday.

Mr. Miller: What steps does the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster intend to take to stop the long-term decline in science funding in universities? Does he acknowledge that the dual support system is under threat and that that will have an adverse effect on attracting industrial funds to our universities?

Mr. Jackson: The hon. Gentleman is mistaken to talk about a fall in funding. Support for higher education in England will rise by 7·3 per cent. in 1993-94, or 4·4 per cent. in real terms. The figure for Scotland is about the same and that for Wales is about 9 per cent. The hon. Gentleman says that the dual support system is in jeopardy. We do not accept that it is. Total funding for academic research through the dual support system is now above £1 billion. The HEFC has allocated £673 million for research 1992-93. Estimated expenditure in higher education institutions by the research councils—the other part of the dual support system—in the current financial year will be £367 million. These represent considerable increases in funding over recent years.

Citizens Charter

36. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster at what age people become citizens for purpose of each charter promulgated by the Government.

Mr. Waldegrave: People of all ages can—and do—benefit from better quality services promoted by the citizens charter.

Mr. Hughes: That was not really the answer that I expected. The important issue, which I hope the Chancellor's Department will address—in conjunction, I assume, with the Home Office—is the ridiculous state in Britain whereby people come of age for different civic rights at different ages: some at 16, some at 17, some at 18 and some at 21. It would be much easier and much more in line with international practice to have a clear age of majority, which at the moment is meant to be 18, that applied to all civic rights and duties. Can the Chancellor look into that possibility and bring forward a proposal to that end?

Mr. Waldegrave: Every Member of this House will have his own views on that issue. I shall look into the matter. The difficulty is that I cannot imagine that anyone would welcome the age for any of those civic rights and duties going up. To bring the age down in certain respects would involve very controversial matters for the House. The hon. Gentleman has, however, raised a serious matter and I shall consider it.

Dr. Kim Howells: At what age might the patients of Wessex regional health authority be able to complain, through the citizens charter, about the fact that the health authority was ripped off for an undisclosed sum of between £23 million and £63 million of taxpayers' money to pay for a computer system that never worked and which made a lot of people rich?

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should table a substantive question if he wishes to deal with a matter of that nature.

Justices of the Peace

37. **Mr. Bennett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement about recruitment of justices of the peace in the duchy.

Mr. Waldegrave: The recruitment of justices in the duchy area follows the same pattern as in the remainder of the country. Advisory committees recommend suitable candidates after interviewing applicants and considering the balance of the bench, which takes into account age, profession, residence and political views. In this way we try to ensure that a bench broadly reflects the community that it serves.

Mr. Bennett: Does the Minister accept that my constituents, particularly those who live in the Reddish and Brinnington wards of Stockport, feel very aggrieved that the bench in Stockport does not reflect the social composition of the whole of Stockport but appears to reflect the membership of the Conservative party and of secret societies, such as the masons, rather than a proper cross section of the population? What is the Minister going to do to ensure that we have a judiciary on the bench represents the whole of the area that I represent?

Mr. Waldegrave: One of the things—and the hon. Gentleman has been helpful in this regard—is to bring forward more volunteers. The hon. Gentleman will be pleased that since he quite legitimately began pursuing the matter in 1988, the number of people from the Reddish and Brinnington wards has increased from five to 13. That is an improvement and balances the number from the Denton ward. We must get good candidates and we need the help of the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) and all hon. Members in that regard.

Citizens Charter

39. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make it his policy to extend the citizens charter into the private sector.

Mr. Robert Jackson: The Government are pleased that so many private sector concerns are adopting the charter approach. However, I must emphasise that the purpose of the citizens charter is to raise the quality of service in the public sector where many customers have little choice about the services that they receive.

Mr. Banks: Yes, but if the Government are continually reducing the scope of the public sector through privatisation, surely the logic follows that the charters, which are mostly useless, should be extended into the private sector in respect of which hon. Members deal with a host of complaints. May I suggest that the Minister could start with a citizens charter for bank customers? Some customers have to face the most ridiculous charges imposed by greedy, grasping banks which, of course, are always looking to support the Conservative Government.

Mr. Jackson: The hon. Gentleman must make up his mind whether he agrees with his party's line on public ownership. I notice that he has been saying that the privatised bus and rail services would be absorbed back into the public sector. Some of us wonder how that squares with the commitment of the Leader of the Opposition to the proposition that ownership is irrelevant.

Sellafield (Discharge)

3.30 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland) *(by private notice)*: To ask the Minister for the Environment and Countryside if he will make a statement about excessive discharges of radioactive material which occurred at Sellafield on Thursday 11 and Friday 12 February 1993.

The Minister for the Environment and Countryside (Mr. David Maclean): Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution and Her Majesty's nuclear installations inspectorate were informed of an incident at Sellafield at 1600 hours on Friday 12 February. The information indicated that the release occurred from the B204 stack as a result of work prior to decommissioning in building B203 which shares a ventilation stack with B204. This preparatory work in B203 was stopped as a result of the release and will not recommence until HMIP has reported.

HMIP and NII arranged for inspectors to visit the Sellafield site on Saturday 13 February to investigate the background to the release. B203 is a redundant building which has been shut down for 10 years. It is important that this and other buildings no longer in use are properly and safely decommissioned. We understand that as part of the preparatory work on decommissioning a small amount of alpha-emitting radioactive material was disturbed and emitted into the atmosphere. It is estimated that from the start of the incident to date, about 1,000 mega-becquerels of activity has been released. British Nuclear Fuels monitoring shows that emissions have dropped substantially. The most recent results show that emissions are down to about 20 mega-becquerels over a 24-hour period.

The House will be interested to know that the current authorised discharge limit is 4,300 mega-becquerels per annum, although BNFL has been operating well within that limit in recent years, at about 100 to 200 mega-becquerels per annum. We therefore regard the incident as serious, although it is well within safety limits.

The House will also wish to know that on the basis of pessimistic estimates, the increase in dose to the public close to the plant is approximately 10 micro-Sieverts. The annual average dose in the United Kingdom is 2,500 micro-Sieverts.

Starting with HMIP and NII's preliminary visit to the site on Saturday, 13 February, a full investigation is in hand. There will be a further visit by HMIP and NII tomorrow. Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food inspectors have also arranged for samples to be taken around the site perimeter. The results of this investigation will be reported to the chief inspectors of HMIP and the NII. I have asked the chief inspector of HMIP to report to me on all the circumstances of the incident, the lessons to be learnt and the actions to be taken for the future. I shall, of course, publish that report.

I emphasise that the incident occurred in redundant plant and is not associated with normal or planned operations on the Sellafield site.

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to the Minister. Although we can all agree that the incident was serious, does the Minister agree that it is also unacceptable that one quarter of the annual authorisation of certain radio nucleides should be discharged in just 24 hours? Is it not also unacceptable that it took the management of British Nuclear Fuels longer than one would expect to make the incident public, especially bearing in mind that my hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) and I visited the site on Thursday and Friday last week and were not informed that those excessive discharges had taken place?

Does the Minister accept, and will the management of British Nuclear Fuels note, that such behaviour does nothing to inspire confidence in them and the way in which they discharge their responsibilities? Can the Minister tell me and my constituents more about the qualitative nature of the radio nucleides which escaped? It clearly was not a contemplated and managed discharge, but an accident which should not have happened. What radio nucleides were involved? Is it true, for example, that one was americium? Can the Minister identify any others?

Will the Minister ensure that there will be the most rigorous and searching inquiry? I welcome his assurance that a report will be published. Is there any indication yet that British Nuclear Fuels might have exceeded the terms of its operating licence or failed to sustain best management practice in the conduct of the decommissioning? Can the Minister tell us whether any legal proceedings against the company will follow this totally unacceptable series of events?

Mr. Maclean: Of course it is always unacceptable when such unplanned incidents take place. The fact that hon. Members visiting Sellafield at the time were not informed, although that is not a legal requirement, would seem to be a rather extraordinary discourtesy. I suggest that the hon. Members for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) and for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) take up that matter with the management of the plant.

I am, of course, concerned about the reporting time to Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution and to the NII. HMIP and NII will look at that matter, and I expect them to report back to me. I can tell the House at this stage that the radio nucleides which were emitted were all those that one would associate with the plutonium atom. Of course, in due course I shall publish full details of whatever the radio nucleides were when we have that information.

I am not aware of any breaking of the licensing conditions, but of course that is a matter for Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution and NII when they carry out a thorough investigation to determine whether the best management practices were used. I stress to the hon. Gentleman that the authorities were not actually decommissioning at the time; they were undertaking some preparatory work, looking at ventilation shafts and trying to improve systems before actual decommissioning should take place. Obviously, I cannot say anything about whether legal proceedings would follow; that depends on the investigations carried out by the inspectors, and they must determine whether there is a legal case to answer.

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Does my hon. Friend the Minister understand that there will be considerable concern at the seriousness of the incident? Will he confirm the figures which I thought I heard—that people living closest to the site will receive a dose estimated at 10 micro-Sieverts, compared with what is held to be the danger point of 2,500 micro-Sieverts? Am I right in understanding that that means that the dose which the people closest to the site may have received will be between a quarter and a half of 1 per cent. of the safety level? If that is so, may we not take comfort from the fact

[Mr. Michael Jopling]

that our safety rules and arrangements are such that the release of such a minute amount of material has led to widespread concern and a statement in the House?

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. Friend is right in principle to draw attention to the small amount of radioactivity emitted locally and normal background radiation. The level of 2,500, which includes radiation emitted through medical processes as well, is not a safety limit or a danger limit; it is the normal dose emitted throughout the country in an average year. The safety level would be many times higher than 2,500, which makes my right hon. Friend's point even better. The fact that we have a full investigation of what has been a small emission shows how rigorous the inspectorate systems are in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): In addition to the figures that the Minister gave as to the level of discharge relating to the current authorisation level, can he confirm that the discharge recorded is about 300 mega-becquerels higher than the authorisation limit currently being discussed by HMIP and British Nuclear Fuels, which is about a third or a quarter as much again as is now regarded as acceptable? What will be the consequences of the discharge for the current application for thermal oxide reprocessing plant and the Government's consideration of that?

Mr. Maclean: That is highly speculative and has no connection whatever with the draft authorisation currently being considered by HMIP. It is for HMIP to determine what any new level should be.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Bearing in mind the presence on the site of the hon. Members for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) and for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie), and their tendency to meddle in things, can my hon. Friend confirm that there is absolutely no question of their having left any doors open or pressed any buttons while they were on the site?

Mr. Maclean: I do not think that the hon. Members for Copeland and for Kirkcaldy would wish to push any nuclear buttons; I believe that their policy on that has changed now.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Can the Minister confirm that the only reason why we have had an answer to this private notice question today is that, coincidentally, the discharge happened at the time my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) and others were present at the plant? The truth is that many such discharges take place in nuclear power plants up and down the country which we never hear about.

It is high time that we had a full-scale public inquiry into the effectiveness and safety of nuclear power generally, especially when we are examining the question of the energy markets and the coal industry. We are subsidising nuclear power to the tune of £1·2 billion a year, and we are in the process of allowing Sizewell to add to that figure.

Mr. Maclean: As usual, the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) is talking absolute nonsense on the subject. Nuclear installations regularly report incidents and releases, and do so on every occasion. The fact that we have a statement in the House today is not because of any cover-up, as the hon. Gentleman suggests, but simply because the hon. Member for Copeland asked for it.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Is the Minister aware of the considerable concern along the north Wales coast about the effect on health of radioactivity coming from Sellafield? The incident will have caused additional dismay, especially in view of the level of cancer which has been experienced along that coast recently. Can the Minister give an assurance that every aspect of the leak will be thoroughly investigated by the NII, especially those aspects which may be relevant to the decommissioning of nuclear power stations so that if there are lessons to be learnt they can be learnt before the decommissioning of further stations?

Mr. Maclean: There would be grave cause for anxiety and alarm only if people grossly exaggerated the release which has taken place. I hope that the facts and figures that I have given to the House today will allay any anxieties. I have said that there will be a full investigation by HMIP. It will report to me on any further action which may be necessary before we start a programme of proper decommissioning. I have also said that we shall publish that report fully.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): The Minister has said that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will do some testing. Will he assure the House that the results of that testing will be published? Can the south of Scotland and its agriculture industry, which has suffered previously from radiation leaks, be assured that testing will be undertaken properly and that the leak will have no effect on livestock and the food market in the south of Scotland?

Mr. Maclean: It does not help the hon. Gentleman's constituents or the food market in the south of Scotland or anywhere else to compare this incident with the Chernobyl incident. That is the only other major incident which has affected the food chain in Britain. The two incidents are totally different. The hon. Gentleman does a grave disservice to our industry by comparing them. I can assure the House that all the facts and figures that we collect are regularly published. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food publishes copious volumes of all the testing undertaken throughout the United Kingdom.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): In view of the major leak from the same site in the 1950s, which was not revealed to the country for many years, perhaps the Minister would like to review the statement that he has just made to the House. In view of the recent incident, the long history of incidents at the site—under various names and various managements—and the pending prosecutions against BNFL for four breaches of the site conditions, can the Minister seriously tell the House that he is happy and satisfied with the management and safety of the site?

Mr. Maclean: The site is inspected regularly by HMIP and NII. I know of no country in the world which has such rigorous standards for nuclear safety as we have in Britain. If there are lessons to be learnt before decommissioning of old plant takes place, they will be learnt. That is why I look forward to the report from HMIP, which will give us and other countries good guidance on how one may undertake safe decommissioning of very old nuclear plant.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Will the Minister reconsider once again his statement that there have been no previous incidents which have resulted in the contamination of food? In 1957, 11 tonnes of uranium were burning out of control at Windscale—now Sellafield—resulting in large-scale contamination of milk in the area. For a long period before that, Windscale contaminated the area by discharging to the atmosphere when it was a bomb factory. There has been a history of deception by the nuclear industry in Britain. Why do the Government not come clean and turn up on Friday to vote for a genuine freedom of information Act?

Mr. Maclean: I was not referring as far back as 1956 and the Windscale inquiry. The hon. Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) certainly suggested that more recent incidents of nuclear pollution had affected the food chain in Britain. I stand by what I said: it is of no help to constituents, food producers or food consumers in Britain to suggest that an incident of 1,000 mega-becquerels released into the atmosphere is responsible for massive contamination of the food chain. It is nonsense to suggest that or to compare the incident with Chernobyl.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Are there not great dangers in Members of Parliament using exaggerated language about problems which may exist in parts of the nuclear industry? In addressing a question to the Minister, may I tell my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), who suggests that incidents at Sellafield are not necessarily reported to the country, that every time an incident takes place at Sellafield the local Members of Parliament are informed? On this occasion there was a day's delay, but we are always informed. It is quite wrong for any Member of the House to compare what happened last week to what happened in 1957. In terms of damage to the environment, the incident last week was infinitesimal compared with that of 1957, which was an incident that we all regret.

Mr. Maclean: It is not often that the hon. Gentleman and I are on the same side in our reaction to an incident. I congratulate him on his wise words and commend them to all Members of the House.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): Can the Minister confirm that, while he said that the discharge was 1,000 mega-becquerels, the total discharge during 1991 was 274 mega-bequerels? Therefore, the incident is four times the total annual discharge, according to the last recorded facts, and should not be dismissed as minor. Can the Minister tell us why the discharge authorisations are so organised that no limits were broken in that instance? It cannot be right that one quarter of the plant's annual discharge limit went up one chimney in one day; surely the time scale of discharges ought to be taken into account, and not merely the total annual limit.

Does not the incident emphasise the importance of HMIP taking the utmost care, and erring on the side of caution if necessary, in their current consideration of discharge limits for Sellafield, including the thermal oxide reprocessing plant? Does not the incident throw into sharp relief the Government's drive for deregulation and self-monitoring of pollution discharges? There must be no cutting of corners in relation to the concern for the protection of public health and of the environment that we all share. Opposition Members demand that the highest and toughest standards, enforced and monitored by the public sector in the public interest, should be maintained to safeguard the public and the environment.

Mr. Maclean: So do the Government—that is why HMIP and NII inspectors were on site on Saturday morning, why their investigation is under way and why I shall publish the report that the chief inspector of HMIP makes to me. Judging from the earlier part of the hon. Gentleman's remarks, it is a pity that he did not listen to the wise words of his hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours). I did not play down the incident or say that it was not serious; I said that we considered it serious, although it was well within the existing authorisation limit of 4,300 mega-becquerels.

The emissions during that three-day period were more than has been emitted by Sellafield as a matter of practice during the past few years. The emissions were within the authorised limit, which is for Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution to set. It is not for me to pronounce on the limit or for the House to pontificate on it. We have independent inspectors and regulators, who are admired for their independence. They set safety limits and regulatory requirements. Although the emission was unacceptable, it was within the authorised limits; that is the important point that the House should bear in mind, plus the fact that the emission was very low indeed.

Maastricht Treaty

3.53 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Douglas Hurd): With permission, I should like to make a statement on the process of ratification of the Maastricht treaty.

As the House knows, the purpose of the Bill before the House is to ensure that United Kingdom law, where necessary, conforms with the provisions of the Maastricht treaty.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of State said in this House on 20 January that if amendment No. 27 were carried, United Kingdom law would not conform to the provisions of the treaty and that the United Kingdom would therefore be unable to ratify the treaty.

Those remarks were, of course, based on legal advice. However, in the light of discussion in this House and elsewhere, further careful and detailed consideration was given to the matter, and the Attorney-General and the Lord Advocate were asked for their advice. I think it right, with the agreement and on the authority of the Law Officers, to inform the House of that advice, at the earliest practicable opportunity, and to explain the Government's position in the light of that advice.

In accordance with our usual practice when legislating, clause 1 of the European Communities (Amendment) Bill has been drafted to incorporate in our domestic law all amendments and protocols to the treaty of Rome which were included in the treaty on European union—the treaty of Maastricht.

The House will recall that the protocol on social policy authorises the other 11 member states of the Community to have recourse to the institutions, procedures and mechanisms of the treaty of Rome for the purposes of implementing their agreement on co-operation in the social area—the so-called social chapter. Most significantly, it specifies that acts adopted by the Council under the terms of the protocol shall not be applicable to the United Kingdom.

Amendment No. 27 would exclude from the scope of clause 1 of the Bill the protocol on social policy. That is all that amendment No. 27 would do. The amendment would not have any effect on the treaty itself. It would not change the agreement among 11 into an agreement among 12. It would not bring the social chapter into effect in this country. The amendment would simply exclude the protocol from incorporation in domestic law under the European Communities Act. The legal question is therefore whether the United Kingdom could ratify the treaty even if the protocol were not incorporated into domestic law.

The Law Officers advise that, if the amendment were carried, acts adopted under the protocol would still not apply to the United Kingdom. That is because it is of the very nature of the protocol that acts adopted under it should not be applicable to the United Kingdom. It follows that no rights and obligations arise from those acts which need to be given effect in our domestic law.

In summary, the Law Officers consider that, while incorporation of the protocol in domestic law is desirable, it is not necessary for ratification or implementation of the Maastricht treaty. In other words, there would be no impediment to ratification if the amendment were carried because acts adopted under the protocol would still not apply to the United Kingdom.

I must make it clear that there can be no question of the United Kingdom ratifying the treaty except through the normal parliamentary procedures. The House will have the opportunity on Third Reading, after detailed consideration of all aspects of the Bill, to decide whether the Bill should pass into law. The United Kingdom will not ratify the treaty unlesss the Bill is approved by Parliament. But amendment No. 27 is not a proposal to adhere to the social chapter and its passage would not be a decision that this country should do so. The Government will continue to oppose the amendment because, as I have said, incorporation of the protocol in domestic law would be desirable. But, in the light of the Law Officers' advice, if the amendment were carried it would have no effect on our ability to ratify the treaty. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. This is an important statement which the House has been waiting to hear. The House must come to order to hear the Foreign Secretary.

Mr. Hurd: It constitutes a different siituation from that implied by the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) when he moved the amendment and the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Minister of State in the House on 20 and 27 January. I regret that the legal advice then given to the House was not correct.

The Government's position on the substance of the matter remains unchanged. We continue to believe that the social chapter will harm growth and jobs in this country. We intend to press forward with the Bill so that we can ratify the treaty which I, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer negotiated at Maastricht, and which won an overwhelming majority on Second Reading in this House.

Madam Speaker: It may assist the House if I say a few words about the Foreign Secretary's statement. I felt it right to allow the Government to correct a mistake that had been made as soon as it came to light. Some questions will no doubt arise seeking clarification of what has been said. Page 500 of "Erskine May" states:

> "The House is not formally aware of the detailed proceedings of any committee until the bill has been reported; and attempts to refer in the House to proceedings on a bill during its consideration in committee are consequently irregular."

Therefore—*[Interruption.]* Order. The House must come to order and listen to this important announcement.

Therefore, any consideration of further proceedings in Committee on the European Communities (Amendment) Bill cannot be pursued in detail with either the Foreign Secretary or myself. The House cannot legislate in two places at once. I trust that hon. Members will appreciate that when I judge it time to move on.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): I am grateful to the Foreign Secretary for agreeing to make a statement today in response to my request. I am sure that he welcomed the opportunity to try to remove at least some of the confusion and disarray in Government circles resulting from the mess that the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and others have got into over their fanatical determination to deny the benefits of the social chapter to the people of our country. I wish that the right hon. Gentleman had been able to remove the confusion and disarray set in train by the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), on 20 January in this Chamber when he said that he was speaking on legal advice.

As today's statement is about the fourth different interpretation that we have had of the Government's position in the past five days, why should the House or the country have any more confidence in today's opinion than they were able to have in any of the others, including that of the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Watford, which has been so summarily dismissed by the Foreign Secretary in the Chamber today? I am surprised that the Minister of State has not accelerated the process of his already tendered resignation.

Does the Foreign Secretary recall that, from the outset, starting with the statement made by the Prime Minister, the House has been promised

"that common consent in this country is exercised through a parliamentary democracy and through the voices and words of Members of Parliament in this House."—[*Official Report*, 3 June 1992; Vol. 208, c. 832.]

If that has any meaning, why are we being told that the Government intend to ride roughshod over decisions made in the Chamber of the House of Commons? Does it not make a charade of the proceedings when we are told that —as the Foreign Secretary said in a radio interview— regardless of the decisions of the House, the Government will verify or ratify the Maastricht treaty only as it was when the Government agreed to it? What is the purpose of the weeks and weeks of deliberations in the Chamber and elsewhere if no effective change can be made?

If the right hon. Gentleman takes the view that he apparently does of amendment No. 27, which I tabled on behalf of the Labour party and which we shall certainly continue to press to a vote, why has he reiterated this afternoon the Government's determination to oppose it? What is the purpose of opposing it if, as he says, it makes no difference to the final outcome of events?

The truth is—and the right hon. Gentleman knows it —that our European partners would be pleased to see this country endorsing the social chapter of the Maastricht treaty, as they have done themselves. Today's statement reiterates the briefing heavily given on Friday to the effect that the Government would use the royal prerogative to ignore Parliament. The statement has the same message and the same impact as that briefing. The BBC said today that a Foreign Office official was now describing that briefing as mischievous nonsense. If it was, why did the Government indulge in the briefing in the first place—as they clearly did just a few days ago?

Amendment No. 27 was tabled on 30 May 1992, almost a year ago. The Government have wriggled, produced one explanation after another, and finally come to today's further explanation of why it is necessary to oppose the amendment and of what the legal consequences will be if it is not opposed or defeated. We had no confidence in the first Government position; we had no confidence in the position as explained by the right hon. Member for Watford; and we have no confidence in the statement by the Foreign Secretary this afternoon.

Mr. Hurd: I shall take the hon. Gentleman's points in sequence. I had intended to make a statement today, having received the advice of my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General last Thursday—I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that.

There is no question of riding roughshod over the will of the House. If the House, against the Government's advice, carried amendment No. 27, that would be the decision of the House, and it would mean, perforce, that the protocol that we are discussing would not be incorporated in the domestic law of this country. That would be a pity, because it is desirable that it should be, for the sake of completeness and tidiness. But for the reasons that I have given, on the advice of the Law Officers, it is not essential.

This leads to a crucial point. The House will be aware that the purpose of the Bill which, as you rightly said, Madam Speaker, is before a Committee of the House is to make United Kingdom law compatible with the union treaty. Two types of amendment can be and are being moved to it. Any amendment that would render United Kingdom law incompatible with the treaty would have the effect of making it impossible for the treaty to be ratified. Thus, from the Government's point of view, it is necessary for such amendments to be defeated.

Other amendments, while we may oppose them as undesirable, do not render United Kingdom law incompatible with the terms of the treaty. Another amendment that can be cited in this respect is the one about membership of the Committee of the Regions. We can argue about that and reach a decision on it; we can in either event ratify the treaty. Although the Government would seek to oppose that class of amendment, it would not, if carried, have any implications for ratification. The advice of the Law Officers is that amendment No. 27 falls into this latter category.

Now that he has said his piece, I think that the hon. Member for Copeland would probably accept the background as follows. The aim of his amendment, which, as he says, has been around for a long time, was to make it impossible for the Government to ratify the treaty in its present form and so, as the hon. Gentleman has just said, to bring about an intergovernmental conference at which we, the Government, would have to choose between accepting the social chapter and abandoning the treaty —that was the hon. Gentleman's declared aim. That, to use the hon. Gentleman's phrase of 20 January, was the predicament in which he prides himself on seeking to place us. But his amendment does not achieve that aim, for the reasons that I have just given; it does not have that effect. We made that clear at the earliest practical opportunity after my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General made it clear to me.

May I say something about the hon. Gentleman's main point, which must have been drafted before he heard what I had to say? There is no question of the decision about the Bill, and therefore about ratification, being made anywhere except in this House or in the other place. After thorough discussion, this House will decide whether to pass the Bill. If there is no Bill, there is no ratification of the treaty; and that is what parliamentary sovereignty means.

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): Is not the position that Parliament makes laws and the Executive have the authority to make treaties? Is not the position that, as long as this Parliament enacts all the legal provisions that flow from the Maastricht treaty, and as long as Parliament approves the treaty in principle, as the House did on Second Reading, the Government are free to ratify the treaty? What steps will my right hon. Friend take to get that simple point into the mind of the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham)?

Mr. Hurd: As my right hon. Friend says, ratification of the treaty is a matter for the Executive, but it is our practice, and must be our practice, not to ratify a treaty until Parliament has approved such changes in our domestic law as flow from the obligations of the treaty. That is why the Bill has been introduced before we ratify and why the Bill needs to be passed before we ratify.

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): Is not the simple point that where there is a political will there is a legal way? Will the Foreign Secretary now tell us, quite directly, whether, if he had not received this new and convenient legal advice, he and the Government would have been prepared to jeopardise the treaty, irrespective of the damage that would be done in Europe, rather than accept the social chapter, irrespective of what Parliament said?

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman knows, because he and I have discussed this across the Floor on several occasions and personally, of the very strong objections in terms of jobs and economic growth that every Conservative Member feels to the social chapter and its consequences for this country. The question in the form that he puts it does not arise.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the real reason for all this confusion, chaos and mess is that the Maastricht treaty is riddled with contradictions and, furthermore, that the arrangements that he has just described will not alter that position? Does he agree that the time has come to ensure that this treaty goes in the dustbin of history?

Mr. Hurd: I give a general answer to my hon. Friend's general point. The world is in substantial turmoil, both economic and political. The destruction of the treaty of Maastricht would add substantially to that turmoil. It would frustrate much of what we are trying to do, and if we were held responsible it would substantially reduce our say on matters of vital concern to us in Europe and the world.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Is the Foreign Secretary aware that, far from reassuring the House about the Government's use of the royal prerogative, he has confirmed it? The treaty was signed by the royal prerogative. The royal prerogative—the right to control a Bill—allowed the Bill to be drafted in such a way as to make the amendments meaningless. The right hon. Gentleman says that if amendment No. 27 were made it would have no meaning. Why? Because the Bill and the long title were drafted in that way. Is it not a fact that the whole problem about Maastricht is that all laws made under Maastricht thereafter will be made by the royal prerogative? If the House passes that Bill and the treaty is ratified, the legislative competence of the Council of Ministers in Brussels will get wider and wider, and that affects the domestic rights of the electorate and of the House. That is why the British people should have a say and why Parliament should have the right to amend the Bill in a meaningful way before it is put to the House. He has made the issue much clearer in his answer today.

Mr. Hurd: The right hon. Gentleman is making his usual case against the treaty of Rome and the European Communities Act 1972. Of course they affected the situation, but the constitutional position remains as I set it out to my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell). Ratification of the treaty is an executive matter, but the Executive does not and cannot act unless and until Parliament has approved the necessary changes in domestic law. There is nothing new about that principle, although the right hon. Gentleman may wish to change it. The treaty of Maastricht involves no new principles.

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that there was never any intention to bypass Parliament in order to ratify the treaty? Will he also show some sympathy to those opponents of the Bill who have been prepared to vote in favour of the social contract, which every one of my right hon. and hon. Friends opposes, and even deprive them of their preparedness to vote for the proposition that the moon is made of blue cheese?

Mr. Hurd: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. The political truth is surely that there is a majority in the House —that is demonstrated over and over again—in favour of ratification of the treaty. I believe that there is a majority against the social chapter. But the voting on amendment No. 27 is not central to either issue.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that, if what he said today is correct, what the Minister of State said on 20 and 27 January on advice from the Law Officers was wrong? Would it not be a good thing for Law Officers to attend the Committee?

In respect of the prerogative, while it is true that certain titles of the treaty are subject to debate in the House and are part of the Bill, does the Foreign Secretary agree that titles I, V, VI and VII are not? Would it not be possible —indeed, is it not his intention—to ratify those titles by the prerogative? If he were really concerned with parliamentary democracy, would not the way forward be to print the whole of the treaty as schedules to the Bill so that we could go through it as we go through our domestic legislation?

Mr. Hurd: On the second point—I have heard the hon. Gentleman on that theme before, in Committee—he knows that those titles deal with intergovernmental co-operation. That is one of the characteristics of the treaty of Maastricht, although its critics would not always accept that. There are no obligations here that need incorporation into domestic law, and that is why they are not included in the Bill.

There is a point in the hon. Gentleman's first question, although I should like to correct him on one factual matter. What my right hon. Friend the Minister of State said on 20 and 27 January was said on advice not from the Law Officers but from legal advisers within the Department. In introducing the amendment, the hon. Member for Copeland went astray, and that is why I linked the two in my statement.

There are lessons to be learnt from this. My conclusion, and the error for which I have expressed regret and for which I take responsibility, is that we should have put the matter to the Law Officers of the Crown earlier. If the House wishes further advice on the meaning and effect of the proposed legislation, Law Officers are willing to be present when the Committee stage of the Bill resumes.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): As we were misled on previous occasions, will the Foreign Secretary tell us which Department's legal advisers gave the legal advice? In view of his clear statement, will he agree that it is outrageous, and contrary to the standards of a Conservative Government, that Cabinet Ministers should go on television and say that those voting for the amendment would be voting to apply the social chapter to Britain? In view of the content of the protocol, can he tell us who pays for the social chapter? It seems that the protocol says that we pay only the administrative costs. Could we not clarify these matters before we proceed?

Mr. Hurd: I shall try to do so. The legal advice came from within my Department. Those who are members of the legal profession and others will accept, I believe, that what I am about to say is true. In this sort of situation there are legal considerations on either side of the argument. The question at the end of the day is not whether those views or considerations are valid but which set of considerations is the more important. My right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General, in weighing the different considerations, came to the conclusion that I have reported to the House. That answers my hon. Friend's second point.

What my hon. Friend says about costs is accurate. I am advised by the Law Officers that the United Kingdom is obliged under the social protocol to contribute to such administrative costs to the institutions. It is not clear when or whether such costs will arise. If and when they do, I am advised that the likelihood is that they will be a charge upon the Consolidated Fund, as authorised under the 1972 legislation.

Mr. Geoffrey Hoon (Ashfield): Is not the central dilemma facing the Foreign Secretary that he states that the incorporation of the exemption is desirable but then states that the passing of amendment No. 27 would not have any effect? If I understand the matter correctly, the right hon. Gentleman has said that it is necessary for tidying-up purposes to incorporate the social protocol into United Kingdom law. Is not the reason for that to ensure that if a United Kingdom citizen took a case based on the social protocol before the European Court of Justice, he or she would be met by a defence in British law, namely, that we had already legislated by means of the exemption? Is not the right hon. Gentleman's version of the legal position now creating still further uncertainty for the future?

Mr. Hurd: The legal advice is clear, and I have already given it. As a normal course of events, we seek to make the description of these clauses comprehensive. That is desirable for the sake of tidiness and completeness. The question is whether that consideration—it is the one that the hon. Gentleman is talking about—implies or constitutes necessity. The advice of my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General is that it does not.

Sir Cranley Onslow (Woking): Will my right Friend confirm for the benefit of any hon. Member who may have thought that by voting for amendment No. 27 he or she could effectively destroy the Maastricht treaty that that fox has now been shot?

Mr. Hurd: The effect of the amendment would not be negligible. On that score the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon) was wrong. It would be that the protocol would not be incorporated in domestic law. It would not have any wider reach than that.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): Is not this entire business a shambles and a farce that sheds great discredit upon Foreign Office Ministers and the Law Officers? The House is entitled to have proper and up-to-date legal advice. That is something for which we have asked and which we have been denied on several occasions during our consideration of the Bill.

What is the consequence of what the Foreign Secretary has discovered? A few days ago he gave the clear impression during an interview on the radio that there would be serious trouble if amendment No. 27 was agreed to. He gave the impression that he was prepared to use the prerogative power to prevent that. The storm that followed has led the right hon. Gentleman to have an emergency meeting with the Law Officers and others. The fifth cavalry has come to the rescue with a new version of the meaning that would follow from the passage of amendment No. 27. Are we not in the most ridiculous position of having, late in the day, one Law Officer's explanation when we could easily get other explanations at later stages of the Bill?

Mr. Hurd: The right hon. Gentleman is not being fair. I shall send him the transcript of what I said in the broadcast. Although I was tempted to do so, I deliberately and specifically did not enter into the legal thicket because I had not received my right hon. and learned Friend's advice. I spoke on matters of substance, which I have repeated today. I stated our objections to the social chapter and our intention to ratify the treaty as we signed it. It would not have been right to have given the particulars of my right hon. and learned Friend's advice to any of the media before informing the House today, which we have done. I asked my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General for his advice substantially before last week.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): I thank my right hon. Friend for again reiterating the primordial sovereignty of the House in making such decisions. In relation to the question of the my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash), who suggested that the Maastricht treaty should be consigned to the dustbin of history, will my right hon. Friend remind the House that 10 countries have ratified the treaty and that Denmark is about to do so with a significant majority? Should not the House proceed with the Bill as quickly as possible?

Mr. Hurd: I agree that that is the position, and that it is for this House to decide such matters. We have made a mistake, which I have acknowledged. However, the Labour party has also made a mistake in tabling an amendment that it supposed would put us in the predicament that has been described. It does not.

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): The Foreign Secretary said that the present legal opinion is that the protocol on the social chapter does not create rights or impose obligations on the United Kingdom and its domestic law, and that therefore it does not have to be incorporated into domestic law. Surely there must be other articles, protocols and declarations of the Maastricht treaty which are in exactly the same position. Will the right hon. Gentleman publish a list of those in *Hansard* so that we may know what they are? In particular, will he confirm that all articles and so on leading to stage 3 of economic and monetary union are in exactly that category?

Mr. Hurd: The Committee will come to those matters point by point. I said—and the right hon. Gentleman was listening—that there are two sorts of amendment to the Bill. The Government have, of necessity, to defeat one sort if we are to ratify the treaty, because they affect the treaty. The other sort does not affect the treaty, but we may still wish to resist such amendments on grounds that are discussed and debated in the House. I gave as an example the composition of the Committee of the Regions. On the question of stage 3, the right hon. Gentleman knows that the protocol involved is quite different and, unless it is accepted and incorporated, the opt-out negotiated by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister would not have effect and the obligations of stage 3 would be imposed upon us. That protocol is in a different position from that pertaining to amendment No. 27.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, while the Opposition are playing ducks and drakes with the Bill, large and small businesses throughout the country are having to make commercial judgments that will affect both employment opportunities and the prosperity of the United Kingdom? Businesses wishing to come to this country to invest are also affected. My right hon. Friend's announcement today will be most welcome to the business sector.

Mr. Hurd: There is a strong feeling that we need to get on with the Bill. The House has quite rightly been given—indeed, it has taken—substantial time to consider the Bill. At the end of a very detailed and long consideration the House will make a decision on Third Reading whether to pass the Bill and thus enable the Government to ratify the treaty. It is very much in the national interest that that should happen.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Does the right hon. Gentleman realise that many of the opponents of closer European union argue very much about the democratic deficit between the institutions of Europe and this place? Does he not accept that his Government have today exposed a democratic deficit between the Executive and the legislature? Even if we voted in favour of the principle of the social chapter, the Government would still say no. Does not that mean that the concept of parliamentary sovereignty has been undermined once and for all? Would it not be better, therefore, to accept the Scottish constitutional legal position and to put the whole issue to the people in a referendum, with the option of including the social chapter?

Mr. Hurd: The Committee may have an opportunity to consider the hon. Lady's suggestion before long. That is another example of a matter that must be debated in its own terms. The hon. Lady's premise is wrong, however: if carried, amendment No. 27 would not impose the social chapter on the country, and she does the cause of democracy and orderly debate no good by claiming that it would.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): In view of the various strands that the Foreign Secretary seems to have identified in terms of legal advice, how can we be certain of any of the legal advice given to the Government in respect of any of the clauses and other provisions that we have discussed?

Mr. Hurd: That question has already been asked, and I have already answered it. I have mentioned the willingness of Law Officers to be present in Committee to answer points of legal importance that are addressed to them.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Why does not the Foreign Secretary admit that, in the course of the past few days, the Government have been scared in losing a very important vote inside Parliament, which has debated the Bill line by line and clause by clause? Over the years, most of us have been told that, when a Government debating an issue are defeated on an amendment, they must accept it in principle. If the amendment has not been worded correctly, it is the Government's job to ensure that it is.

The Foreign Secretary is now saying, "We do not like the idea of losing in Parliament, so we are going to move the goalposts and rig the system. We are going to tell the British people that Parliament does not matter as far as we are concerned, and that we are going to go to higher authorities"—a gang of lawyers who can give the Government advice, provided that they have enough money to hand out. The whole thing stinks to high heaven.

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman knows better than that. His is artificial indignation, as the whole House can tell. He knows what the amendment says and what it does not say. He knows that, if the amendment is carried, it will not impose the social chapter on this country; and he knows that, at the end of the day—although he will be in the minority—it will be for the House to decide whether to approve the Bill and ratify the treaty. That is the essence of parliamentary sovereignty.

In this country, we have a more detailed system of examination. By the time that we reach Third Reading, the House—or, at any rate, those who, like the hon. Gentleman, are particularly interested—will have spent day after day weighing up the matter. Ultimately, however, Parliament will decide—not the royal prerogative, the Executive or the lawyers.

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): Does not my right hon. Friend agree that the country's European and social policy should be determined on sound principles such as those employed by Baroness Thatcher when she introduced the Single European Act—the Government have followed them ever since—rather than on technical manoeuvring of the kind employed by the Opposition and a few little Englanders on the Conservative Benches?

Mr. Hurd: I agree. We accept that there is a social dimension to the life of the Community, and we have a better record than most in going along with what has already been agreed. We believe, however, that the extension of that dimension that is implied in the social chapter is harmful—or, rather, would be harmful—to growth and jobs in this country. That is why we shall continue with our policy of resisting it.

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West): Is the Secretary of State aware that a very worrying air of incompetence is emanating from the Treasury Bench over this whole affair? Does he agree that that incompetence is causing a very worrying threat to the passage of the Bill and the ratification of the treaty, something about which some of us, who have spent many hours on the Bill, feel very concerned? In addition, some of us, who have spent a lot of time on the clauses, and in particular on amendment No. 27, feel very annoyed that we seem to have been wasting our time because of the Government's inability to get their act together. Why were not the Law Officers called in to make a statement to the House before now?

Mr. Hurd: This debate arises not from a Government amendment but from one tabled by the official Opposition, on a basis clearly set out by the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) at the beginning but which has proved to be, to use the hon. Gentleman's phrase, incompetent. I am not resiling from the regret that I have already expressed; I am willing to repeat it. I am also willing to repeat my wish that the Law Officers had been invoked earlier. But that is the position, and the position is now clear.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): Will my right hon. Friend note that those who asked for legal advice, having got it, do not like it? That is because they were hoping to enforce the social chapter on this country through this initiative—if you like, through the back Delors. Can my right hon. Friend say whether the Opposition will now withdraw it? Many of those who put their names to this effort, particularly those in the Labour party and the Liberal party, claim to be positive Europeans, whereas those on this side of the House who argued for the amendment are anti-Community through and through.

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend makes a fair summary of the political points.

Dr. Cunningham: We tabled amendment No. 27 10 months ago. For 10 months, the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for the Environment, the Secretary of State for Employment, the Minister of State—the right hon. Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones)—and the Home Secretary—indeed, almost every member of the Cabinet—accepted our interpretation of the amendment, yet suddenly, when the Government apparently face defeat after so many Ministers so frequently have been so wrong, a new legal opinion appears. Is not that very convenient for the right hon. Gentleman? Outside this House, however, people will conclude yet again that, when this Government govern, expediency is the rule of the day and priniple is nowhere to be seen.

Mr. Hurd: The hon Gentleman is understandably nettled because the amendment that he tabled is—and I use the phrase in its legal sense—incompetent. I have explained the background and the sequence of events. I have also explained that, some time ago, but after 27 January, it seemed to me to be necessary to ask for the advice of the Law Officers. That has recently arrived and I have immediately communicated it to the House. The result of that advice is perfectly clear: that the amendment, if carried, would prevent the incorporation of the protocol in the domestic legislation of the House, and that would be its full scope.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. At the beginning of the statement you drew a distinction between the proceedings in a Committee of the whole House and the proceedings of the House. Obviously the House appreciated your advice. While it is perfectly true that the matter that we have been discussing in the House is being considered in a Committee of the whole House, would you care to reflect upon the fact that the House, in another shape, has been given conflicting advice? In those circumstances, I suggest that there is a need for the Attorney-General, as the senior Law Officer, to come before the House, not the Committee, and make a statement.

I would simply say in passing, and in conclusion, that this is a matter of significant importance to Parliament, to our rights and to our sovereignty. I do not believe that it is sufficient simply to say, as may well be said, that there will be a statement in Committee. This is a matter for the whole House sitting as a House, and not as a Committee. I invite you, Madam Speaker, to reflect on that with the advice of the Clerks. We should, at the first opportunity, have a statement from the Attorney-General.

Madam Speaker: As the House knows, and as the hon. Gentleman appreciates, that is not a point of order for the Chair. I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern. All I can say to the House is that the Treasury Bench has heard the hon. Gentleman's request. We must leave it at that for the time being.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. There can be no further points of order on that matter because I have just dealt with it. If there are different points of order, of course I must take them.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): On a different point of order, although on a similar argument, there is a Scottish situation——

Madam Speaker: Order. Will the hon. Gentleman resume his seat? What he is saying is that his point of order is not a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. Salmond: It is a point of order for the Chair.

Madam Speaker: If it is a point of order for the Chair, I will hear the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Salmond: I know that you, Madam Speaker, are anxious to protect the rights of Scottish Members and will be aware of the Scottish aspect, which the Government should also hear.

Madam Speaker: I am sorry?

Mr. Salmond: There are different Law Officers for Scotland.

Madam Speaker: Of course. I recognise that and that is why I was so concerned to ensure that a member of the Scottish National party was called during today's statement.

Housing

4.40 pm

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): I beg to move,

That this House is alarmed by reports from all areas of the United Kingdom regarding the acute shortage of low cost housing available for rent or for purchase under all systems of tenure or ownership; calls on the Government to provide urgently for the release of capital receipts derived from the sale of council property from all previous financial years for housing investment both directly by local authorities and by partnership schemes and for links to be established between agencies providing housing, health and social care to ensure that provision is made for all people in need; and further calls on the Government to ensure that people have the right to decent and appropriate conditions including facilities for the disabled.

It is perhaps a pity that such an important debate on matters relating to housing has been delayed due to the farce that we have just seen. If the Government had got their act together, we would have had another 45 minutes to deal with this very important subject.

It is easy to fall into the trap of suggesting that problems in one's own constituency are unique. I had no idea of the scale of the housing crisis facing this country outside my area of the north-west of England until I compared notes with my colleagues. If we want to begin to tackle the problems, we do not need the Government's laid back approach of "It'll be all right on the night"; we need radical action from the Government. I will refer in detail to my constituency to give the House a flavour of the problems in one constituency which is by no means the worst off in the land, but by no means the best off.

My constituency comprises part of the borough of Ellesmere Port and Neston and part of the council area of the city of Chester. Some 10,000 electors live in the latter part. There are 4,500 people on the housing waiting list in the borough of Ellesmere Port and Neston and 5,000 in the city of Chester area.

I want to examine the facts in some detail and I hope that that will demonstrate to the House that the problem lies not with local authorities, private landlords, housing associations or the owner-occupied sector, but right here with the Government. The problem is their failure to recognise the importance of the links between the breakdown in the economy generally and the growing crisis in housing.

In the rural Chester area, the council has undertaken a major survey to determine the extent of rural housing need. The results of two pilot surveys show an under-estimation of need in respect of the housing waiting list. There is a substantial level of requests for rented accommodation in preference to owner-occupation.

In its 1992 report, the Rural Development Commission highlighted the problems and cited Chester as a case study. The report refers to the low average wage of often less than £3 an hour—against a background of the Government wanting to abolish the wages councils—and the average private rent of £63 a week. The report also refers to other difficulties in respect of trying to resolve the problem in rural areas. Thirty seven per cent. of Chester's rural council housing stock has been sold off. With a rural turnover of 6 per cent., which is substantially less than the urban area, there is a real problem.

Since April 1989, there has been a 25 per cent. increase in the housing waiting list in the borough of Ellesmere Port and Neston, from 3,276 to 4,492. As bad as that figure is, it hides the real problem which is the time that people have to wait in order to be housed. I will refer to harsh statistics to illustrate my points and I ask hon. Members, many of whom on the Conservative Benches live in relative opulence, to think carefully about what the figures mean.

With regard to the increase in the housing waiting list from 3,276 to 4,492, in April 1987, a family with one child had to wait just one month in Ellesmere Port and Neston on average to obtain council accommodation. That reflects a well-run Labour-controlled authority of which there are many up and down the land. Regrettably, as a result of the Government's policies, that waiting time has increased to 42 months——

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling): Well run?

Mr. Miller: The Government Whip may criticise that point from a sedentary position, but I challenge anyone to criticise the authority which has managed its housing stock extremely well. The Government are responsible for the increase in waiting time to 42 months.

The main contributory factors to the increase in waiting lists are constraints on new build, the effects of the poll tax, stress related to family breakdown, unemployment and repossessions. After 14 years of Tory trial and error, one would have thought that the Tories would have got it right; but no, the problems continue. It is the public's trial based on Tory errors.

In this month's *House Builder* magazine, the Chancellor of the Exchequer displays an awe-inspiring ignorance. Under the headline, which I found difficult to believe,

"The Government's done its bit",

the Chancellor argues that the housing market can look after itself after his autumn statement. What complacent drivel. Having set out what is so obviously a flawed argument, he concludes:

"the Government cannot underwrite the housing market; nor can it insulate the building and construction trades from the economic cycle."

When the Prime Minister eventually realises that the Chancellor just is not up to the job, I suggest that he looks at the cartoon linked to that article in which the Chancellor is pointing to building workers saying, "Gentlemen, over to you." Yes, any one of them could do a better job than the present incumbent. Any one of them could demonstrate the clear links between the state of the economy and the construction industry. Any one of them could tell the Chancellor that his autumn statement was just a drop in the ocean. Any one of them would have more concern for the needs of the homeless and people living in inadequate accommodation than the Chancellor.

Mr. Charles Hendry (High Peak): As the hon. Gentleman referred to the autumn statement, is he aware that the £577 million allocated to housing associations has already led to 11,000 houses being brought back into use by housing associations?

Mr. Miller: The hon. Gentleman is somewhat premature: that has not happened. If he waits a little longer, he will hear my economic analysis and I hope that he will then appreciate that the scale of the problem is much greater than has been suggested. If the Chancellor spent less time evicting his own tenants and more time thinking about the nation's economic plight, perhaps he would really start to understand what is happening.

In the *House Builder*, under the byline "Absent jury", the president of the House-Builders Federation, Mr. Tony Hillier, states:

> "Clearly, the economy dominates all. The slump in the housing market is inextricably linked to the continued failure of the general economy to move out of recession. The jury is still out on whether the Chancellor's Autumn Statement was sufficient to stimulate the economy into decisive action. The Government clearly does not believe that a recovery in housing is a pre-condition for recovery in the wider economy, and we at the HBF have suspended judgment to see who is right."

People at the HBF obviously believe one thing and the Government believe another. He went on to say:

> "When I took chemistry 'A' level, many years ago, I grappled with molecular theory"—

I was attracted by that statement, because I grappled with molecular theory as well—

> "which taught me that life was made up of various sub-atomic particles—protons, electrons and neutrons. In my journey through life I have since discovered a further particle, which seems to be the main building block of life: that is, of course, the moron.
>
> It seems to me that it is this particular particle which generates much of the housing policy of the DOE and other Government departments."

I could not put it better myself. Mr. Hillier's knighthood obviously goes down the Swanee.

My staff have been talking to local estate agents. I thank the estate agents who took part in my little survey. It was particularly important because it was an attempt to put into perspective some parts of the problem that we face. I shall describe to the House some of the anecdotal comments that came from estate agents. The first said:

> "Not wonderful—not very good at all!"

She said that things picked up after the new year but fell again and that if interest rates stayed down they would improve. According to that estate agent, it is basically supply and demand. She has many properties on her books without chains but they are not moving either. Property prices are down by 20 per cent. to 25 per cent. in the past two years. The second estate agent said:

> "There are positive signs of improvement this year, busier than last year."

Although there are more properties on the market, they are not selling any more. Lots of people appear to be waiting for interest rates to fall again. When the market picks up and house prices are realistic, they should sell. Another estate agent said that last year was the worst year on record. Prices dropped by 10 per cent. That estate agent was a little more encouraged by the beginning of 1993, but he said that that

> "could be wiped out by a rise in interest rates and local employment setbacks."

The importance of that for the hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Gedling) is that, according to the estate agents to whom I have spoken, there are direct links between the general economic situation and the needs of the housing industry. Another estate agent said that redundancy worries and possible job loss are more important than keeping the brake on interest rates. The general links are clearly seen by estate agents.

As the House can see, estate agents' views are not all necessarily bleak in respect of the owner-occupied sector. But, even if one were to take the most optimistic of those comments, unless the supply side is addressed in terms of the low-cost end of the market, there can be no solution. We simply have too few houses to meet the nation's need for housing of a decent standard. Add to that the problems of negative equity and the problems in the private sector start to become even more clear. Negative equity more than doubled last year to £2·68 billion. Also, 27 per cent. of people buying the cheapest property have negative equity. If this year's fall in house prices continues, by the end of the year negative equity will double.

A resolution of the issue of confidence raised by the agents to whom I referred will occur only when the economy gets back on the move. Of course, most people bar the Chancellor think that a house-building programme that targets the low-cost sector would have an early impact on confidence. In turn, that would provide an incentive to the marketplace and take pressure off local authorities by increasing interest elsewhere in the spectrum, and remove or at least reduce the number of repossessions. In turn, the chain reaction would release precious resources which could be used to address many other pressing social problems. The formula is quite straightforward and simple.

Examples of how the system has gone wrong can be seen throughout the country. The Minister for Housing and Planning recently suggested that mandatory renovation grants might be abandoned entirely due to the financial pressures that they are placing on local authorities. Although financial pressures on councils are undoubtedly increasing, such a step would be extremely short-sighted. It would accelerate deterioration of the housing stock, affect the most vulnerable groups in society and reduce the supply of housing.

As hon. Members know, housing capital finance is an extremely complex subject. Capital expenditure can be derived from three sources: first, permission to borrow money; secondly, housing capital receipts; and, thirdly, rent income. The Government issue a basic credit approval which covers all council activity, not just housing. However, they do that in stages to make it appear that capital allocation is being made specifically for housing. The first stage is the announcement of the housing investment programme allocation. That in itself does not confer permission to borrow, but it is the Government's assessment of what a council needs to spend on its capital works.

I shall set out in careful detail the next part of my argument because it shows the anomaly between the way the Government manipulate the figures and the real facts facing local authorities. In the case of my local authority, the "receipts taken into account" figure significantly increased in 1993-94. That represents central Government's assessment of the council's ability to finance capital expenditure from usable capital receipts. The figure is based on actual usable capital receipts as at 31 March 1992, plus an estimate of the likely usable receipts that will be generated in 1992-93. However, the latter figure is modified as though the relaxation on capital receipts rules that was announced in the Chancellor's autumn statement had applied from 1 April, which of course it did not.

For Ellesmere Port and Neston, matters have been made worse by the fact that the council received a one-off windfall capital receipt of more than £3 million before 13 November 1992. Therefore, although it was able to use only 50 per cent. of that money, the Government treated it as 100 per cent. usable. That was a general fund capital receipt, not a housing capital receipt. Moreover, the Government have made the assumption that that represents the typical usable capital receipts during the year and therefore the figure has been projected to 1993-94. The effects of that perverse methodology in

[Mr. Miller]

calculating receipts taken into account is that in 1993-94 the housing capital programme will lose credit approvals amounting to £793,000, which actually relates to general fund capital receipts, half of which the council is not allowed to use anyway.

By comparison, it is estimated that additional usable housing capital receipts released as a result of the Chancellor's autumn statement are £280,000 in 1992-93 and £572,250 in 1993-94. Against that, the amount of set-aside capital receipts—the amount of capital receipts which the council owns but is not allowed to spend—is approximately £11·5 million. That logic is perverse and must be changed.

Mr. Nick Raynsford (Greenwich): My hon. Friend rightly highlighted the perverse logic of the Government in their attitude to capital receipts. Is my hon. Friend aware of the even more perverse position of the Minister of Housing ten years ago—he was a junior housing Minister at that time—when he was advocating the use of all accumulated capital receipts as absolutely essential for the housing programme? That is an extraordinary inconsistency on the part of the Government who now claim that they cannot release the £5 billion which is available and would make such an enormous difference in meeting housing needs.

Mr. Miller: I bow to my hon. Friend's knowledge and expertise in the field of housing. I agree with him wholeheartedly that not only my small detailed example but the whole logic of the Government's position is perverse.

This morning, I received a letter from the Maritime Housing Association which set out the difficulties that the association faces. Maritime housing is an area supposedly being helped by the current Administration. The association wrote to me on behalf of all members of the committee of management to express concern about the level of average housing association grants for rental schemes which is projected for 1994-95 and 1995-96. A small housing association is expressing that view. It has written to all Members of Parliament in the greater Merseyside area. I hope that the Minister will take on board the points which have been made. We face serious issues.

The *House Builder* is not a left-wing tract as far as I am aware. In that magazine, the Minister for Housing and Planning takes a marginally more enlightened view on which I congratulate him. He says,

> "There can be no doubt that the issues surrounding Housing are among the most important facing us today."

When I first read that statement I thought that the Minister had seen the light and was on his way to Damascus. He continued by saying—[HON. MEMBERS: "He does not know where it is."] He does not know where the article is, either. He continued by saying, and I think that it is a quote from the Department of the Environment's annual report:

> "The Government's aim is to ensure that a decent home is within the reach of every family whether it is owned by them, rented from private or social landlords or part owned and part rented."

He then goes on to promote a series of solutions, some of which I would go along with. However, the problem is his failure to distance himself from that wretched Chancellor and recognise the scale of the problem facing the country. He said that his package is

> "to provide a kick start"—

Labour Members were criticised for using "kick start" during the election—

> "to the depressed housing market, while at the same time providing some additional 20,000 social homes this year."

I have to say to the Minister that that simply is not enough. His logic and financial methodology are suspect in the extreme.

Earlier, I accused the Minister of underestimating the scale. Why did he do that? He did it simply because, with all the expertise at his fingertips, he is satisfied with a target figure of 20,000. The Institute of Housing says that the target should be 100,000. Shelter agrees with that view, as do the Housing Corporation and that other well-known left-wing think tank, the Audit Commission.

In considering action for the Budget, the Chancellor would do well to examine the arguments of the Institute of Housing. The institute says,

> "House building is one of the most effective ways to create new employment because it is labour intensive. Every £1 million invested in new houses or renovation creates as many as 50 new jobs. If 100,000 new jobs can be created overall, something over £750 million would be gained by the Exchequer. Most construction products are produced from United Kingdom sources so the import bill for expanded house building will be modest. House building primarily stimulated United Kingdom materials suppliers. Part of the cost of the investment programme would be offset by savings in benefits and recovered tax income."

On the same theme, Shelter says,

> "In 1990 nearly 5,000 building firms became insolvent, followed by 7,000 in 1991. The building employers estimate that an average of 600 jobs—about 300,000 in total—will have been lost each working day in the past two years to the end of 1992. Another 100,000 could be lost by the end of 1993.
>
> Each unemployed person costs the state, on average, £8,900 in benefits and lost tax. In just two years the collapse of the construction industry may well have cost the Exchequer £2,700 million, and much more if unemployment in related trades is considered . . . If lost corporation tax and stamp duty are included, the recession in the construction industry has probably already cost over £4,000 million."

Later, I will set out arguments as to why that figure is larger.

The motion talks about links between different agencies and appropriate housing for people with disabililities. What do I mean by that? One of the most frustrating aspects of public administration in the United Kingdom is the way in which everything works in little boxes. Departments and, indeed, empires build up in splendid isolation with no knowledge or even a care about the rest of the world. In addressing the problem which we face in that area, we can examine the health links. Shelter argues that

> "meeting the needs of homeless people costs more per person than meeting the needs of the rest of the population."

That is fairly obvious. It says that the issue is causing considerable concern to health authorities—we have not seen any action on that—but, as yet, there are no estimates of cost. Similarly, few studies have estimated the costs of bad housing. The Department of Health has recently estimated that the cost to the NHS of treating illnesses created through condensation runs at £800 million per year. We must add that to the figure of £4,000 million and all the other health cost implications.

Likewise, much of what happens on the ground with regard to social services relies on the good will of local authority officers trying desperately to solve the housing-related issues which stem from, for example, care in the community. We need a lead from the top to resolve some of the housing-associated problems.

My final illustration of the need for greater cross departmental links relates to people with disabilities. Is there not a basic human right for people to be housed in appropriate conditions or are the Government happy to see people such as the young man I saw a fortnight ago whose mother is becoming more and more ill coping with his disability? The Government are not allowing the local authority to spend money which is available to provide that man with proper ramps or a stair lift. Not only should existing moneys be released; we should have a long hard look at the method of delivery.

Even the Department of the Environment recognises that people with disabilities are discriminated against, although it does not seem to do much about it. In early 1992, data showed that only 30 accessible homes were being built for every 100,000 disabled people and that there were 1,170,000 outstanding requests for adaptations to existing homes. I doubt whether there is a better example of discrimination anywhere in the United Kingdom.

I shall now turn to the economic issues and the solutions to the problems with which I have been dealing. I know that my hon. Friends intend to expand some of the arguments that I have set out. Many of the necessary solutions are well described in a document published by Shelter last year called "Moving Forward. A Programme to Meet Housing Need." On council and housing association empty homes it says:

> "These would be brought back into use through rehabilitation and improvement work. Councils could also fund housing association repairs in return for nomination rights for homeless households currently in temporary housing. The programme envisages that 30,000 empty homes would be repaired and brought back into use over a five year period."

The programme also deals with private sector leasing and purchase. It says:

> "Councils should be allowed to offer owners of homes, used on a lease, a cash sum to buy the home when the lease expires. There are currently an estimated 17,500 homes used on lease by councils in England, with the majority in London."

The programme makes recommendations about private purchase. It says:

> "This would involve the purchase of private unsold and repossessed homes by local authorities and housing associations from developers, lenders and private owners. Advantage could be taken of the current state of the private housing market."

The programme also deals with private and Government empty homes. We often hear comments from Conservative Members about the number of empty local authority homes. The number of empty homes is very large. Throughout the land a total of 640,000 houses are vacant, many of which are in the private sector and require finance in the ways that were described earlier. Some empty homes are in local authority hands and 31,000 are in Government hands.

The Government could take a lead in making empty homes available through an expansion of shared and low-cost home ownership. An expansion of the existing programme of shared and do-it-yourself ownership through housing associations would meet the needs of many households. Of course, it is also necessary to expand new build. I refer hon. Members back to my earlier comments about the House-Builders Federation. That new build clearly needs to be demonstrably targeted towards the homeless.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): I have listened with great interest to the hon. Gentleman's detailed knowledge of the housing market. It is so detailed that I sometimes think that he misses the wood for the trees. If the ideas that he sets out are so obvious and straightforward and have no effect on the public sector borrowing requirement, why does no other western industrialised country follow those policies?

Mr. Miller: The answer to that is yes, of course they do. There are plenty of examples. Clearly, the one difference between other countries and Britain is that we have a different pattern of ownership. But the methodology that I have described for solving some housing problems has been applied elsewhere in Europe.

Mr. Barry Porter: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Miller: No. I shall finish now. The hon. Gentleman will have his opportunity shortly, if Mr. Deputy Speaker allows.

My motion refers to the release of capital receipts. The pace of that release should not be determined by the Department of the Environment on its own. It is time that the Department got together with the Department of Health, the Department of Social Security and the Treasury and conducted an analysis of the overall cost to the economy in the way that I have described. It could then launch a crusade aimed at attacking the terrible evil of the current housing shortage in our society. Such an approach would produce huge social advantages but would also have enormous economic benefit.

Vision and original thought have not been the hallmarks of this Administration, so I shall not be greedy and ask for the impossible. But the real work has been done and Opposition Members will have no objection if the Government pinch our ideas and those of some of the organisations that have advised them. For the homeless, for those living in inadequate conditions, for those in financial difficulty and for the unemployed, we need action and we need it now.

5.14 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): I congratulate the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) on his success in winning the ballot. I have listened carefully to the comments that he has made on housing. It will probably not come as any surprise if I say that I do not agree with them. However, I am delighted to have this opportunity to speak on housing. First, it gives me an opportunity to talk about my constituency of Basildon. Secondly, it gives me an opportunity to talk about the reports in my local newspaper of the visit to my constituency last week of the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle).

Before I deal with those points, I pay tribute to our Front-Bench team on housing. My hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) has great expertise on housing. I do not think that there is anything that my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) does not know about housing: he is a superb Minister and I pay tribute to his many initiatives.

Hon. Members: Where is he?

Mr. Hendry: My hon. Friend may have heard Opposition Members ask from a sedentary position where my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning is. My hon. Friend may be aware that this afternoon our hon. Friend the Minister is visiting a hostel in London, examining the needs of homeless people.

Mr. Amess: I thank my hon. Friend for that remark; sadly, good manners do not appear to be so highly regarded as they once were.

My hon. Friends and I have absolutely no idea what the Labour party stands for these days. Socialism appears to have been dumped, although very quietly. The Labour party does not say publicly that clause 4 has been abandoned. It is all about winning elections. Nowhere can one see the Labour party's hypocrisy more clearly than on housing. What does the Labour party stand for?

Mr. Miller: If the hon. Gentleman is saying that he agrees with the programme that I have just set out, we welcome that.

Mr. Amess: I thought that I had started by saying that I did not agree with the content of the speech of the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston. I wish to talk briefly about the Labour party's policy on housing. Nowhere can one see its hypocrisy more clearly. The Government introduced the right to buy. The two socialist parties—Labour and the alliance—fought that Bill word for word and line by line. They did not want council tenants and new town commission tenants to have the right to buy.

However, when the policy proved popular, Labour and the alliance changed their view. There was no longer talk of buying back the properties. All of a sudden that was quietly dumped, although Labour was in difficulty with its left-wing councils throughout the country. Lambeth is not an isolated case. Socialist-controlled Basildon district council is one reason why the Conservative party is in the majority and the Labour party in opposition. When the market got into difficulty and interest rates rose, the Labour party decided that it was not such a good idea for people to own their own house.

The Conservative party has a consistent policy on housing. We want to give people the opportunity to live in decent property.

Mr. Raynsford: Cardboard boxes?

Mr. Amess: We want people to be able to own their property, if they want to do so. The hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) is talking about cardboard boxes from a sedentary position. I shall deal with that point.

It does not matter who is the Member of Parliament, the No. 1 subject about which people come to constituency surgeries is always housing. It is not what the Opposition parties think.

Mr. Raynsford: Yes, it is.

Mr. Amess: As far as I am concerned it is not. The problem is caused by the popularity of transient relationships—*[Interruption.]* If Opposition Members listen, they will learn what I mean. Conservative Members are not frightened to stand for something. We understand that Opposition Members are frightened to enunciate their policies, but I am glad about that.

I was talking about the popularity of transient relationships. Men walk in and out of relationships; they produce children with one woman, abandon her, go on to another woman, produce more children, and so on. Those women and children are the victims of many of the policies supported by Opposition Members, who should be ashamed of themselves.

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): My hon. Friend touched on a fundamental question—the instance of family breakdown in our society—in an interesting and pertinent way. Does he agree that we hear precious little about that from Labour party Members, who have no idea how to deal with that central question?

Mr. Amess: How right my hon. Friend is. Labour Members have no interest in family life and do not want families to stay together. They are interested only in designer socialism. The hypocrisy is that Labour Members, who always pretend to support the working class, come to areas such as Basildon, thinking that they know best how ordinary men and women should live their lives, but my constituents do not want to be told what to do by socialists——

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): The hon. Gentleman has mentioned a well-known prejudice of Conservative Members. The number of broken relationships has decreased and is not significantly different from the number 15 or 20 years ago. The big difference is that, according to the Duke of Edinburgh's report on housing, there are 2 million fewer homes available for rent than there were in 1980. Does the hon. Gentleman want to comment on that? The lack of homes in the rented sector, rather than marital breakdowns, is to blame for our housing difficulties.

Mr. Amess: I have no idea where the hon. Gentleman gets his figures, but he is wrong about both issues.

I was talking about the breakdown of settled relationships. It is no good people coming to our surgeries because they think that the council or the state can be a substitute family. That is not good enough. I want men to be responsible for their offspring. The Conservatives will be dealing with that problem from 1 April.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice (Lewisham, East): I was fascinated by the hon. Gentleman's definition. He mentioned transient relationships and settled families, but it has to be one or the other. I remind him that only he, or someone like him, could make such statements about women. I assure him that none of the women with young children who have come to my surgery have done so to get council housing.

Mr. Amess: That is less than generous of the hon. Lady. She knows perfectly well that that is not what I said.

My experiences in Basildon are not very different from those elsewhere in the country. Fathers of children should take some responsibility for their accommodation. I do not want the women or children to be punished, but I want there to be some responsibility——

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): Tell that to Cecil Parkinson.

Mr. Amess: If the hon. Member for Leeds, West will calm down, I shall come to his remarks and his visit to Basildon shortly.

I am talking not merely about the popularity of transient relationships, but about my experience of families in the east end of London, who stayed together and helped one another out. It is sad that 16, 17 and 18-year-olds leave home and have to live in cardboard boxes—as the hon. Member for Greenwich said—but in this day and age there is no need for anyone to live in a cardboard box.

Under this Government, this is a free country, and any hon. Member can travel anywhere and can visit other Members' constituencies. If the press reports are accurate, the hon. Member for Leeds, West—who is more than able to intervene if reports are not accurate—visited my constituency last week and advised my constituents at a meeting on how to vote in a ballot on the transfer of housing. I find that extremely interesting. I do not know how many times he has been to Basildon. My home is there, I have represented the town for more than 10 years and I know the people only too well.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): It is nine and three quarters.

Mr. Amess: Does the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) want to intervene? It appears not.

The hon. Member for Leeds, West advised my constituents how to vote. As the House knows, Basildon is the finest town in the country—probably the finest town in the whole world—so it is not surprising that people wish to come and see how we do things. One thing that my constituents do not like is socialism. My constituents threw out the rotten socialist council, which I had had to deal with for the past nine and three quarter years, last May—if the hon. Member for Burnley wishes to quibble about the difference between nine and three quarters and 10 years. Fifteen Conservatives stood and 15 won the election, with swings of between 20 and 50 per cent. from the socialists to the Conservatives.

It is amazing for the hon. Member for Leeds, West to visit Basildon. In all the years I have represented the town, the Opposition Front Bench has known that Basildon Labour party is crazy and that its policies are bringing the Labour party into disrepute as it tries to fool the electorate so as to gain power at the next general election in four or five years' time. The Opposition Front Bench have distanced themselves from Basildon, but the hon. Member for Leeds, West seeks wisdom and has visited Basildon.

Since 1960, succeeding Labour councils have promised Commission for the New Towns tenants that they would take over their properties. Socialist councils have said that they would be happy to take over the properties. Under the Labour Government in 1977, the council could have done so, as Labour-controlled Harlow did.

Mr. Barry Porter: My hon. Friend's description of the joys of Basildon almost brought tears to my eyes. I have never had the privilege of being there and I am not sure that I shall be putting that situation right either. The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) mentioned capital receipts, and I understand that my hon. Friend intends to come to that subject. Is it not the case that there would not have been any capital receipts to argue about if it had not been for a Conservative Government?

Mr. Amess: How right my hon. Friend is. I will tell the House how much the stupidity of the socialist-controlled council has lost my community charge payers.

In 1977, the council had the opportunity to take over the housing, as Labour-controlled Harlow did, but said that it was too expensive. In 1976-77 the council was in deep consultation with the Department of the Environment and got to the point of taking over the property. At the last minute, it phoned the Department and the deal was called off. Goodness knows how much that cost us.

The council could have taken over CNT housing stock, which then comprised 15,000 properties, at any time during the next eight or nine years. The Conservative Government even shortened the time required under the transfer scheme from six to three months, but nothing happened until 1985, when socialist-controlled Basildon district council put in an offer. It offered £500,000 for those properties, although the current value of the remaining 12,000 properties is £113 million. Since that time, the dear socialist council has spent more than £300,000 of ratepayers' and community charge payers' money on propaganda to kid the people that it wanted to take over those properties. That is the nonsense with which my constituents have lived year in, year out, month in, month out. Yet the hon. Member for Leeds, West went to Basildon to advise my constituents about housing transfer.

Mr. Battle: I have listened with care to the hon. Gentleman. I was invited to Basildon because tenants have particular questions that they want answered. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would care to tell me the answers that he will give to his constituents, because he knows that CNT tenants will be transferred to a new housing association. That association claims in its propaganda that it will give rent guarantees, but those guarantees can only apply to those tenants when their rents go through the roof as a result of his Government changing the grant rates in the next two years.

Mr. Amess: I shall refer to those issues later. The hon. Member for Leeds, West may then feel that he would like to apologise——

Mr. Battle: Answer the question.

Mr. Amess: I will. I do not need to be told my duties by the hon. Gentleman. I fulfil those duties; that is why I was elected in 1983, in 1987 and in 1992, and that is why I shall run for office again in 1997. I take no lectures from Opposition spokesmen who know nothing about local issues.

The Labour council has spent more than £300,000 on propaganda. It has wasted that money on broadcasting a message that had nothing to do with housing need. That message was simple, "The wicked Conservatives are awful —vote Labour." The cost of the current advertising to CNT tenants about the transfer to the council is being borne by the Government.

The previous socialist council even spent money producing a video to put its message across. There was one famous occasion when I led a delegation of joint estate management representatives, together with a tenant representative—he later became deputy leader of the socialist council—to the Minister then responsible for new towns, Lord Skelmersdale. We played that video in front of that tenant representative after he had told the Minister

[Mr. Amess]

how fair the council had been in putting its argument. It was the equivalent of a video nasty. A little old lady was shown coming into an office with a letter some 8 ft long which was supposed to demonstrate the size of the rent increases that the wicked Conservative Government and the wicked housing association had set. Such is the irresponsible frightening nonsense that we have had to put up with from the socialist council.

Mr. Battle: That is not true.

Mr. Amess: Yes, it is. Frankly, the hon. Gentleman does not know the issues and he does not know what he is talking about.

Mr. Raynsford: Would the hon. Gentleman like to confirm to the House that in the past four years the average rents of housing associations have risen by 107 per cent.—that is according to the core monitoring figures produced by the National Federation of Housing Associations—while the income of housing association tenants has increased by 25 per cent? Would he recognise that council rents have also been pushed up, ahead of the rate of inflation, as a direct result of Government policy? Does he accept that his remarks are inappropriate, bearing in mind the Government's responsibility for forcing up the rents of those who are tenants of councils and housing associations?

Mr. Amess: I do not accept that; presumably that was also the feeling of the electors in 1987 in Fulham.

The socialist council wreaked havoc, worry and fear, particularly among elderly tenants, for purely political reasons. It should be absolutely ashamed of itself. My hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) mentioned capital receipts and it is worth noting that that socialist council, through its disgraceful behaviour, lost for the residents of Basildon between £80 million and £100 million in capital receipts by not taking over dwellings and leaving them with the CNT.

The Basildon Community Housing Association is a home-grown one whose members are non-political. The BCHA also handles the Siporex estate, which is home to 830 low-quality properties. My hon. Friend the Minister will be aware that that housing association is planning to do everything possible to bring that estate and the Cosmos housing in Vange up to standard.

The hon. Member for Leeds, West met a number of individuals in Basildon and put his argument, but he should note that the rent of the CNT tenant who opts to transfer to the BCHA will not increase until October 1994. It will then only rise by the rate of inflation until October 1997. After that, the association aims to set a rent increase of not more than 2·5 per cent. above inflation. Under the Government I have no doubt that the inflation rate will be extremely low. That is a cast-iron guarantee and it will be part of a legal agreement between BCHA and the CNT. That will ensure its delivery.

The hon. Member for Leeds, West has said in the House today and to my constituents that they should look for a copper-bottomed guarantee on rent. I understand that, but as BCHA is the only body able to offer such a guarantee, one would have expected the hon. Gentleman to advise my constituents to vote for transfer to that association. The council cannot give a rent guarantee as its finances are decided year by year. One could speculate about possible rent increases for council tenants.

I know that the hon. Member for Leeds, West also had something to say to my constituents about repairs, but BCHA has guaranteed that it will deal with all major repairs within five years. Again, that guarantee will be subject to a legal agreement with the CNT. The association will also employ local contractors and will seek to create employment and training opportunities for local residents through such work. It will maintain, inside and out, the homes of those who opt to transfer to it.

One need only look at Basildon council estates—for example, Craylands—and talk to the tenants to see that the council, when it was socialist, had a shameful record of neglect. Those socialists who ran the council chamber misled and confused people about the difference between commission and council houses. If the hon. Member for Leeds, West had been better briefed he would have known about that.

When in Basildon, the hon. Member for Leeds, West talked about tenants' rights, as is the socialist way. Apparently he talked about the benefits of protected assured tenancies as opposed to secure tenancies, but tenancies will be no less secure under the BHCA and tenants will certainly not lose their rights.

The local Labour party and its friends in the tenants action group are now putting considerable effort into the ballot. I understand that they are saying that when they regain control of the council everything will go back to how it used to be. God help my constituents if everything goes back to how it used to be. My constituents certainly do not want things to go back to how they used to be, which is why the socialist council was thrown out last year.

There is to be a by-election in five weeks' time, not for a Conservative seat, but for a Labour seat. There are only 13 socialists left on Basildon council. The socialist councillor who came in with bright ideas has thrown in the towel as he cannot take the fight any more. He has emigrated to New Zealand, and rumours abound that the leader of the Labour group, who works at the treasury department in Walworth road, has decided that he will no longer stand. One by one, the socialists responsible for destroying community life—they tried to do so, but were unsuccessful in Basildon—are throwing in the towel and running off.

When the Conservatives took control of the council last May, they were left with hardly enough money to collect the refuse, let alone concentrate on housing. The socialists appointed a number of politically motivated council employees, which was an absolute disgrace. Officers should always be politically neutral and independent. It is not for officers to make political decisions, but for the elected representatives. It is quite wrong for local government officers to become party political. If they do not like what the Conservative council is currently doing, they should leave with good grace.

When I hear interventions from Opposition Members trying to laugh at housing associations—*[Interruption.]* If they are laughing at me, I am delighted. Their arrogance in laughing at me shows that they have learnt absolutely nothing from their defeat in the last general election, which is good news for my hon. Members.

Mr. Battle: Hon. Members?

Mr. Amess: My hon. Friends. I know that the hon. Member for Leeds, West is starting to become uncomfortable. That is entirely understandable after the things that I have said today.

When the Conservatives took over the council, they found themselves in a difficult position as there were a number of politically motivated local government officers. Such officers should be entirely neutral and should not make political decisions. It is quite wrong for them to do so.

At present, the Conservative-controlled council is doing a magnificent job in difficult circumstances. As the present chairman of housing has said, it is extraordinary that the Labour council, as it was until last May, promised for years to take over the CNT properties, but did not. It has taken a Conservative council to do so—and it has taken a socialist Member of Parliament to visit my constituency and advise my constituents to vote in favour of a Conservative council.

I shall not give my constituents any advice about how they should vote in the ballot as that is entirely a matter for them. They will not take lectures from any hon. Members, whatever their political party. My colleagues and I will be vigilant to see whether any intimidation takes place during the ballot. If any socialists visit elderly people's homes, as they have done over the past 10 years, to collect ballot papers and mislead people, I shall ensure that the severest action is taken against those socialists.

5.45 pm

Mrs. Bridget Prentice (Lewisham, East): How does one follow the speech of the hon. Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess)? It will be quite difficult. I shall begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) on securing the debate on an important subject that involves one of the most dreadful problems facing any individual or family in this country: the prospect of not having a decent home in which to live.

There are some things in life that we should be able to take for granted, and having a roof over our heads is one of them. I am sure that many hon. Members can recite many examples of the tragedies facing constituents who come to their advice surgeries, hoping that their Member of Parliament can help them to find a decent home. The people that I meet in Lewisham, East are not asking for very much. They simply want a decent home, with space for their children to grow and play, where they can feel secure and get on with the rest of their lives. That is something that we would all expect for ourselves and we all hope to try to achieve for our constituents. However, too many people spend years on waiting lists. They live in overcrowded and sub-standard accommodation with little prospect of anything better. If they are young and single, their chances are even less.

I shall concentrate on the position in London and the horrendous housing crisis in the nation's capital. There are more than 40,000 families in temporary accommodation in London. That probably means that about 100,000 children have no permanent home. That number has been steadily increasing every year for the past 11 years. It may surprise Conservative Members to learn that two-thirds of all temporary accommodation in this country used for homeless families is here in London.

Those figures, enormous as they are, do not tell the whole story. They do not include the single homeless who are not counted in the statistics because, under the Housing Act 1985, their need is not considered a priority. I—and I dare say many of my colleagues—have to tell young people who visit the surgeries that they have little chance of being housed. Therefore, we now have on the streets of our capital city 2,000 people sleeping rough.

Mr. Streeter: The right hon. Lady, sorry, the hon. Lady —I am sure that that was a premonition on my part— mentioned people coming to her surgery asking for advice. Does she ever recommend that they approach housing associations or seek accommodation in the private sector, or does she—like many, if not all, of her colleagues—think only of council houses and believe that nothing else will do?

Mrs. Prentice: I certainly advise those people who come to my surgery of the realities of life and the housing problems that they face under the Conservative Government. I advise them to seek housing association nominations. Lewisham council and its local housing associations work closely together, and the council nominates people to housing association lists. I advise people to seek accommodation in the private rented sector, but they tell me that it is difficult because of the amount of money initially required. People have to pay lump sums that they simply do not have in their pockets, so it is nonsense to suggest that they should use the private rented sector.

Some 5,000 people are in bed and breakfast accommodation which is often poor quality. There are 15,000 people in short-life property and 17,000 in hostels. There are 80,000 people in London in overcrowded households. For any nation to admit to such figures is surely, at the very least, embarrassing. For Britain to do so, with 500,000 construction workers on the dole, is a national disgrace.

Homelessness is only the most obvious expression of the housing crisis in London. We should never forget the thousands of people living in poor and deteriorating housing—the overcrowded families, the people with disabilities trapped in their homes because access is poor or impossible, and the growing numbers of home owners facing mounting debt and repossession.

Let us examine what is happening here in our capital city. More than 1·1 million of London's homes are either unfit for human habitation or are fit but in need of serious renovation; 79 per cent. of the unfit houses—four out of five—are in the private sector. A quarter of a million households are on council waiting lists. Many of them are families with children, elderly people or people with disabilities who need specialist accommodation. More than 60,000 households in London are defined as seriously overcrowded, and about 110,000 council tenants are on council transfer lists.

These are staggering figures, yet in 1991-92 only 500 new homes were built by councils and a further 1,800 were made available through conversion and renovation. To call that a drop in the ocean is an understatement.

London's councils could house only 9,000 families and enable another 17,000 to move. At that rate it will take 25 years to house the people already on waiting lists and another six and a half years to transfer existing council tenants. The fact is, however, that these people will not be

[Mrs. Prentice]

rehoused, because others with more pressing needs will join them, every day of every week of every year, in every London borough.

I have already said that the numbers of families in temporary accommodation continue to rise. That is because London's councils are accepting about 38,000 families—as they did in 1991-92—but can provide accommodation for only about 25,000 of them.

We tend to think of the housing crisis as affecting only those who want to rent. That is simply untrue. Although repossessions have slowed a little in the past year, the number of people in arrears has markedly increased. According to some figures, about £169 million is owed to building societies in mortgage arrears. My hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston spoke about negative equity. Four out of 10 of the people in London who bought their homes between 1988 and 1991 have an average negative equity of £5,500—yet prices continue to fall, and although building societies are beginning to accept lower repayments, I fear that as unemployment relentlessly rises their goodwill will soon disappear and people will be out on the streets.

So what is to be done? Clearly, the Government do not know, and the hon. Member for Basildon has even less understanding of the housing crisis.

Mr. Miller: He has left.

Mrs. Prentice: Having delivered his polemic, the hon. Gentleman has indeed disappeared from the debate.

The Government have made no plans to deal with the problems of homelessness in London. They have not even conducted a survey of London's housing needs. Instead, we have been showered with publicity about two initiatives which do no more than recycle existing public spending. I agree that they have been worthwhile initiatives, but they can hardly be considered adequate. They have had only a marginal impact on the situation in the capital.

First, there was the two-year £300 million homelessness programme, which at least recognised that there was a problem that needed dealing with. When it began, 31,485 families were in temporary accommodation. When it finished, 37,058 households were in temporary accommodation—hardly a startling success. It is tragic that nothing has replaced that programme. Despite the best efforts of the Association of London Authorities and the London Boroughs Association, the Department of the Environment has resisted any increase in the share of resources to councils and housing associations in line with levels of homelessness.

Then there was the rough sleepers initiative, with £96 million provided over three years, followed by another £60 million. I agree that the initiative reduced the numbers of people on the streets in central areas of London, but it did not solve the problem. About 1,500 permanent places were found, together with some temporary beds in hostels. Yet, as my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford), a recognised expert on this subject, will probably say if he has the opportunity to speak, we need about 10,000 permanent places for single homeless people to stop the hostels being clogged up with people who cannot move to more permanent accommodation.

Another aspect affecting particularly London, and perhaps other areas too, is that of refugees. The Government have done nothing to help councils in this respect. My constituency contains about 41 households with refugee status and recognised as homeless, but the Government have offered no help to councils with refugees on their lists.

The same questions can be asked about the Government's help for homeless former home owners, and the same reply will be heard. The Government have done little or nothing for them. London has been the scene of the greatest number of repossessions, and the mortgage rescue schemes, which have flopped, have done nothing to help these people, who bought their homes during the 1980s and earlier. The Government refused to talk to councils or lenders about resolving the problem.

The autumn statement, which concluded the housing market package of about £570 million for housing associations, would provide in London only about 3,500 houses—less than a year's increase in the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation. Because of the tight rules, the associations have found it very difficult to buy enough cheap properties in high-cost areas—the very ones in which there is the most acute need of affordable rented accommodation.

The London boroughs have tried hard to come to terms with the problem, co-operating with one another in trying to deal with homelessness. They have cut down on the use of bed and breakfast; Lewisham borough council does not use it at all. They have expanded private sector leasing schemes—from fewer than 3,000 in 1988 to about 24,000 today. They have tried to cut the costs of bed-and-breakfast accommodation by implementing a pricing policy and an hotels inspection and grading system. And they have made new arrangements with the housing associations so that they have many more nominations. They also provide hostel and winter shelters for single homeless people and fund voluntary sector homelessness projects.

What the councils need—like the homeless of London—is just a little help and support from the Government. The Government will reply, "We are letting councils use their capital receipts until December of this year," but that is no great shakes when we remember that, because of the recession, sales of land and homes have declined and prices are depressed. Much of what councils can sell has already been sold at discounts to housing associations and tenants. The Government are clawing back the receipts in any case through the estate action schemes and urban programmes. If they really wanted to give a serious boost to the economy they would free up the £5·1 billion of accumulated receipts.

Even the distribution of receipts that we have will not be equal across the nation, and efforts will have to be made to target the areas in greatest need. London needs an agreed plan to reduce homelessness, drawn up by the Department of the Environment, local councils and others concerned about the crisis in the capital, and, after proper consultation, to set out precise targets and time scales.

Local councils and the voluntary sector should be given responsibility for implementing an expanded single homelessness programme to cover the capital. The Government should increase the priority attached to homelessness and temporary accommodation levels in allocating capital resources to councils and housing associations. They can do that simply by adopting the ALA—LBA proposal of a comprehensive homelessness indicator.

It is high time that the Government started talking sensibly with the London associations and revising arrangements for the winter shelter programme by allowing shelters in outer London boroughs such as Croydon and Newham, where there was clearly a need in the past year but no funding. They should change the private sector leasing scheme to allow councils to take up to 20-year leases instead of phasing out the grant that meets a portion of the cost of those leases. They should work jointly with councils and lenders to plan a range of initiatives to support home owners. There must be a specific grant to assist in rehousing refugees.

I said that it was rather tragic that we should have to have a debate on housing in a society where having a roof over one's head is something that we all take for granted. I repeat my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston on raising the subject, and I am only sorry that such a tale of neglect and dereliction of duty must be laid squarely at the Government's door.

6.1 pm

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): My name appears on the Order Paper under a different topic—victims support. I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) on being lucky enough to win the draw, in which I came second.

We are debating an issue of multiple sadness and deprivation. My hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) spoke of the problems of splitting relationships and how marriages break down so often. We are talking about the victims of crime and the victims of housing. I shall talk about the problems experienced by victims of crime because they relate directly to the issue of housing. Hon. Members will be glad to hear that I have torn up my speech on the victims of crime.

It should be the first duty of every criminal court to consider victims before passing sentence. At present, it is the last duty of a criminal court to consider victims, who are very much an afterthought. I want offenders to be brought directly into the system to pay for——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. The hon. Gentleman is trying very hard to steer a thin line, but he is straying from the subject of housing. If he can keep his remarks to that he will be in order.

Mr. Booth: I am grateful for your correction, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Reference has been made to the 80,000 void properties under local authority control and the 400,000 private sector void properties, rather than the 600,000 quoted by Opposition Members. Those properties offer scope to deal with housing and social problems. Crime and housing need are linked evils of society. It is one of life's ironies that the criminal often targets the weakest members of society, and often those who already have housing problems. Under an advanced criminal justice system, and in a civilised nation, with the right housing priorities, we must put the interests of the victim first. That is why I rise to add my contribution, and I am grateful for being allowed to make this intervention on behalf of such sufferers.

6.4 pm

Mr. Nigel Jones (Cheltenham): I shall be brief because other hon. Members wish to speak.

I welcome the opportunity to debate the housing crisis and congratulate the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) on securing the debate. I am in two minds about whether I should have preferred a debate on victims of crime as my constituency office was broken into over the weekend.

Hon. Members will remember that our last opportunity to debate the housing crisis was on a Liberal Democrat Opposition day on 16 November.

Mr. Hendry: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that since that date the Committee considering the Housing and Urban Development Bill has sat for many weeks? Will he explain why he, as his party's spokesman, has not bothered to turn up?

Mr. Jones: Yes, I am happy to explain my actions to the hon. Member. He will remember that on Second Reading my party voted for the Bill because of a conversation that I had with a Minister, whom I shall not name as he is not present. He asked for our support to send a strong message to the Dukes, who opposed leasehold reform. I told the Minister that I was not in favour of the Bill and that most of it was bad, with one or two good bits. The Minister told me that he would be prepared to consider amendments in Committee. I put that to my colleagues, and my Scottish colleagues in particular were dead against believing anything that Ministers said. I, being a new Member, told them that as it was only Second Reading I was prepared to recommend that they vote for the Bill in the hope that some amendments would be passed. In the first five sittings of the Committee, I attempted to pass some amendments, including some to make the Scottish aspects of the Bill separate from its other provisions. I also attempted to amend its leasehold provisions. The Minister declined to accept those amendments.

Mr. Banks (Newham, North-West): He stitched you up.

Mr. Jones: I felt stitched up——

Mr. Banks: Never trust a Tory.

Mr. Jones: —and decided to concentrate on other duties. In future, I shall never trust a Tory.

Mr. Tony Banks: That's the stuff. It was a good lesson.

Mr. Jones: Our housing problems are entirely of the Government's own making. Their obsession with home ownership, their neglect of other tenures and their assault on local authorities have compounded the problems caused by the recession, which the Government created through their economic incompetence. They have caused a dangerous imbalance of tenure in the housing market. In 1992, repossessions fell from 75,000 to 68,000. That was a welcome improvement, but it was still 68,000 human disasters. However, mortgage arrears increased and, according to the Council of Mortgage Lenders, 205,000 households were six to 12 months behind in their mortgages in the second part of 1992 and 147,000 were over one year in arrears.

Negative equity, when houses are worth less than the mortgage on them, is also spiralling, with an estimated 1·5 million households stuck in that trap. Hon. Members will

[Mr. Jones]

have seen the report in last Friday's issue of "Mortgage Weekly", of the paper that Daniel Dorling of the housing and society research group at Newcastle university presented to the European housing finance seminar at Bristol university on 4 February. Mr. Dorling said:

> "The rise of negative equity is now preventing individuals from spending, and reducing the mobility of skilled labour. It has halted the widespread use of homes as assets upon which capital can be raised for investment. It is preventing people from moving house when they need to. Freedom of movement —freedom to choose where to live—is being eroded by the inefficient operation of the supposedly free market."

He also said about the way people look at housing:

> "Many now see it neither as a worthwhile gamble nor a secure investment, despite most houses being much less expensive now than a few years ago and the overall cost of home buying being at its lowest level in real terms since 1971."

Public housing has been hit by the Government's inept housing policy. Public spending on housing has been cut by 62 per cent. since 1979 from £11·5 billion to under £6 billion. It is no wonder that fewer than 170,000 new homes are being completed a year—an all-time low. With massive repossessions and a huge homelessness problem, local authorities have to pick up the pieces, but they no longer have the ability to do so. Some 150,000 people were accepted as homeless in 1991 and 8,000 people sleep rough every night. The Government's response is to encourage further reductions in public housing stock.

The Government must allow local authorities to spend their accrued capital receipts, so that they can start building homes for the homeless. In the autumn statement, the Government tried to boost the housing market by giving money to housing associations to buy repossessed properties. This has not happened. Out of 13,169 properties purchased up to 29 January, only 5,000 have been repossessed properties. The rest have been new build. In my constituency, only three properties have been purchased. I spoke to a senior estate agent this weekend and asked him what he thought about that. He said, "Three hundred might put a bottom in the market, but three is useless."

What is needed is not piecemeal panic projects but a coherent housing strategy. We need a sector—in between renting and owner-occupation—of shared ownership, to encourage flexibility in the market. We need new co-operation between local authorities, Government and housing associations to tackle the appalling problem of homelessness. Capital receipts must be released. Most of all, we need a Government with a coherent economic policy to encourage recovery and invest in infrastructure and housing projects. Until that happens, we shall still have a massive housing problem, and an economy in slump with hundreds of thousands of building workers on the dole——

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jones: No. I am just about to finish my speech.

Building homes is the key to recovery and it is about time that the Government got on with that job.

6.13 pm

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): I had hoped to come to the debate to make common cause with the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) because I appreciate that there are Opposition Members, as there are Government Members, who are genuinely concerned about housing issues. I was looking forward to hearing some suggestions as to what we can do, in addition to the many things that the Government are already doing, to meet those needs; I was looking forward to hearing new ideas that would help to solve the problems. Having listened intently to two hours of the debate, I remain disappointed in what I have heard from the Opposition.

We never hear any solutions from the Opposition. All that we get are moans, gripes and complaints. There is never a single costing to be had. They talk about policies and the need for more public housing and more council houses, but they do not speak of the cost of such housing. The only constructive suggestion from the hon. Member for Lewisham, East (Mr. Prentice) was that we should set up a talking shop to allow various bodies to discuss what should be done. The Government are already seeking and finding solutions to meeting housing needs in 1993.

The Labour party does not know what it wants. All that it knows is that it is in favour of more but it has no idea how much more will cost. That can be demonstrated better than in any other way by taking the example of the endless calls for the release of the £5 billion worth of capital receipts. Has the Labour party explained to community charge payers the extra cost that they will have to bear when the interest on capital receipts that rolls into local authorities year after year is no longer there? There is never a word about that.

The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston dismissed quickly, in half a sentence, the massive contribution made to social housing problems by Labour-controlled local authorities. Everything is the Government's fault, he said. I am afraid that it is not as simple as that. We cannot write off millions of pounds of rent arrears that Labour-controlled authorities have clocked up. We cannot disregard the countless thousands of void properties, even those in London about which the hon. Member for Lewisham, East was concerned. Many of those empty properties are controlled by Labour local authorities. What solutions do Labour Members have? What pressure are they bringing to bear on those authorities to cause them to get their act together?

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: While the hon. Gentleman is having a go at Labour local authorities in London, will he remind himself of Government Departments that have massive numbers of empty properties in London, particularly in areas such as Hammersmith and Fulham, where both Defence and Home Office properties are lying empty, and have been for as many years as I can remember?

Mr. Streeter: Once again, the Labour party will not accept responsibility. It will not go to Labour-controlled local authorities with solutions to the problems of the homeless. They always want to throw mud at the Government when they must accept responsibility for their part in housing problems.

The truth is that 4·2 million properties are still in local authority ownership and until Labour-controlled authorities get their act together, many of the problems suffered by homeless people will continue to be the result of the actions of Labour-controlled authorities. They do not come to the debate with clean hands.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Does my hon. Friend agree, given all that is said by Opposition Members about homelessness, that if they were to come to the north-west, which the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) knows well, and to once-proud cities such as Liverpool and Manchester, they would see that we are talking not merely about hundreds of houses but about thousands of houses boarded up? Does he also agree that those houses could be used for the homeless if only the uncollected rents in those cities, together with the revenue from the sale of council properties this year, were diverted into improving them?

Mr. Streeter: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. Furthermore, if Labour authorities collected their rents and used that money to do their repairs, the lot of many council tenants would be far better. We recognise that we are talking not just about statistics. We do not want merely to rattle off the number of empty properties and the millions of pounds worth of rent arrears. We know that behind each of those situations is a human tragedy. It is a pity that Opposition Members do not also recognise that.

We have heard no solution, no new ideas and no new thoughts. No questions have been answered. It is clear that the intellectual agenda on housing is still being set by the Conservative party. After 14 years of head scratching, the Labour party has failed to produce a new agenda. It has produced no exciting new ideas. Instead, we have been told this afternoon that it wants to return to local authority domination. In other words, Labour Members want to return power to Labour-controlled authorities. It is no solution to throw more money at the problem.

Those of us who have some local authority experience know that local authority housing has inherent weaknesses and few incentives for excellence. Traditionally, there has been no competition in that sector. Similarly, there has been virtually no accountability and regulation. Those are features that the Conservative party is seeking to build into the system. It is these principles that will cause standards to rise. That is what my right hon. and hon. Friends want. It is only a pity that Opposition Members cannot agree.

Mr. Raynsford: It is fascinating to hear the hon. Gentleman talking about competition, regulation and other such factors. The Opposition believe that there is a simpler solution to the problem, and that is to build more houses. When will the hon. Gentleman talk about providing enough houses to meet the present need? My right hon. and hon. Friends know that that is what is required if the homeless are to be put into homes.

Mr. Streeter: It is disappointing to hear the hon. Gentleman banging the same drum day after day. Has not he yet heard that through public sector investment this year the Government have ensured that more than 55,000 new homes will be provided for people to rent? That is a colossal achievement. Why do not Labour Members congratulate the Government on that achievement? Instead, they continue to gripe and ask for more.

Interest rates now stand at 6 per cent. For many mortgage holders the benefit of that low rate is yet to come through the system. In my discussions with estate agents in Plymouth——

Mr. Tony Banks: Ho!

Mr. Streeter: I wonder why the hon. Member, who seems to be responsible for causing trouble, scoffs. It is important to understand that estate agents in Plymouth have a vital voice and one that should be echoed in the debate. They have told me that since Christmas there has been much activity in the housing market. It appears that first-time buyers are viewing properties and making offers. Contracts are being exchanged and the housing market is beginning to recover. It is fair to say that the recovery began before the full benefit of recent interest rate cuts started to manifest itself to many mortgage holders. We can look forward with confidence to the market recovering in the spring.

We all agree that the housing market is an essential ingredient in the economy. It is a pity that the only contribution that Labour Members can make is to talk the market down. They spend day after day and week after week talking it down. Instead, let us talk up the market. As I have said, it is recovering. There is every reason why it should be because mortgage rates are at an all-time low. Since October 1990, the repayments of the average mortgage holder have been reduced by more than £150 a month. That is a success story. People have been enabled to put money in their pockets and to go out and spend.

What about the autumn statement, which contained an extra package for social housing? That was designed to get the market moving again. It was a package of £750 million, and 20,000 properties were purchased by housing associations throughout the country to rent. Have we heard Labour Members welcome that? Have they offered the Government any congratulations? We have heard not a word. They are always sneering and never congratulating.

The Conservative party has been setting the housing agenda for the past 14 years. We have seen the right to buy, right to manage, right to repair, compulsory competitive tendering, rents to mortgages and the boost that was given to housing associations by the autumn statement. All of those initiatives have been taken at the behest of the Conservative Government. In contrast, the Labour party looks barren and sterile as it presents its old ideas.

I rarely agree with the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) but on one point—it is a serious one—I must do so. In a recent article that was written for the Fabian Society, the hon. Gentleman stated that the Labour party was "sleep-walking into oblivion." On that note of agreement, I resume my place.

6.24 pm

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): Many outside the House will not know or understand the internal lottery system which enables Back-Bench Members to win space in the parliamentary timetable to debate a topic of their choice on the Floor of the House. I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) on choosing to debate the housing crisis. In so doing, he has ensured that housing and homelessness in his constituency and throughout the country are firmly on our agenda. In his thorough approach he underlined the need to consider need, health and disability under the heading of housing. He stressed that such issues should be taken seriously and echoed on the floor of the House more regularly. I am sure that he will continue ensuring that that happens on the basis of his contribution today. We are indebted to him for the debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East (Mrs. Prentice) expressed passionate concern and a deep knowledge of housing in London. She spelled out the

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bleak prospects which face her constituents and many thousands of others in London unless the Government are jolted out of their rather complacent approach to the housing crisis.

It is almost a year since we were presented with the Tories' election promises. We heard tear-jerking threats as soundbites were issued. On 23 March, the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine)—he is now the President of the Board of Trade—said:

> "House sales under the Conservatives are picking up. All this would change on 10th April if there were a Labour Government. The recovery in the housing market would be devastated just as it gets under way."

Of course, that was not true. The market was not picking up, and the recovery is still not under way a year later. On 31 March, the Prime Minister echoed the right hon. Gentleman when he said:

> "We're going to make life easier for people buying their home and our policies will mean a stronger housing market."

We all know something of the Prime Minister's ability to turn language inside out and to turn meanings on their head. Government policies in the past 12 months have resulted in a weaker housing market.

It seems that the stark reality is obvious to everyone except Conservative Members. Only this month, the former head of Wimpeys commented:

> "It is the worst recession I have experienced in my 42 years in the construction industry."

There is a crisis in the housing market, and it has been manufactured by escalating unemployment. Last year, 68,000 families had their homes repossessed., According to the latest figures presented by the Council of Mortgage Lenders, 147,000 families are more than 12 months in mortgage arrears and are staring eviction in the face. We are already hearing of people losing their homes because of secondary mortgages. Double glazing companies are causing people to lose their homes by calling in debts of as little as £500.

Over 1 million people cannot afford to move because their homes are worth less than the prices that they paid for them. They are caught in the negative equity trap described by my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston. In response, the Prime Minister talks about cash incentives in the Budget for first-time buyers to revive the housing market. Even today, however, there are printed leaks from the Treasury informing us that there may be a 5 per cent. increase in VAT on new home sales in next month's Budget. It seems that everyone except the Government acknowledges that escalating unemployment is undermining the housing market. The fear of redundancy holds families back from extending mortgage commitments. Millions are terrified that they may be just one payslip from redundancy. Faced with that economic insecurity, they dare not risk extending their long-term financial commitments.

Escalating unemployment—the figures this week will show another rise—is the primary cause of the crisis in the housing market and the homelessness in our society. What do we need? Although the Government's position is not clear, it is evident to everyone that there is a desperate shortage of rented housing, so the response to the crisis must be the right to rent. However, under Conservative Governments the only policy offered by one Housing Minister after another—there have been many in the past 14 years—has been the discounted right to buy.

That single policy instrument has dismantled any post-war consensus on housing. That deep-seated Tory obsession with tenure has led to almost 2 million rented homes disappearing since 1987. Over the same period, there has been a fall in the number of houses built by local authorities and housing associations. The result is a massive imbalance in tenure. At 69 per cent. of the stock, home ownership is proving difficult to sustain. In other words, there is a desperate shortage of decent, affordable and secure housing to rent.

There are 1·5 million families stuck on local authority housing waiting lists. We must not forget the hidden homeless who share sofas and floors while they wait for their own space. The Institute of Housing, Shelter and the Audit Commission have spelt out the fact that each year there is a shortfall of 100,000 homes to rent. As my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) said, on the best estimates, the Government are providing only slightly more than half that number this year. Local councils have been sidelined, undermined and prevented from providing homes.

In the latest Department of the Environment annual report, published only last week, the projections for housing under the housing investment programme capital provisions show a decline of £325 million between 1992-93 and 1995-96. That is an actual cut in housing budgets, taken out of housing programmes, of £100 million a year.

Housing associations still have only 3 per cent. of Britain's housing stock, yet they have been given the task, practically on their own, of filling the enormous gap of need. Despite that, day by day they are being undermined by Government changes in the rate of grant. This year it is down from 73 per cent. to 67 per cent. and it appears that next year it will go down further to 60 per cent. and the year after to 55 per cent. What will be the result of that cut in grants? Housing associations will have to borrow more money from the private finance sector, so rents will have to rise beyond the incomes of those not receiving full housing benefit.

By those reductions in the rate of grant, the Government are ensuring that housing associations will be turned into providers of welfare housing with a vengeance. They will soon be putting signs in windows saying, "Rooms to let: DSS only—apply within." Some 70 per cent. of housing association tenants are on housing benefit, yet rents are still rising. It is tragic. The Government are also building in a work disincentive. They are saying to those on housing benefit, "You can afford to rent a housing association property, but don't get a job because that will take you out of full housing benefit, you will not be able to afford the rent and you will lose your flat."

The Government must deal with the problem of housing benefit. The latest Department of Social Security report, also published last week, shows that the amount spent on rent in the housing association and private rented sector has doubled. A real poverty trap is built into the system for those who are not on housing benefit. Their homes are at risk because they have to spend more than their incomes to meet the rent demanded. I hope that the Government will begin to deal with the problem of affordability. A report from the Housing Corporation was discreetly placed in the Library. I hope that the Government will provide a full debate on affordability because under their policies housing association houses are becoming beyond most people's means.

Homelessness has more than doubled since 1979. A record number of 65,000 families are now in temporary accommodation. They are wondering whether "temporary" actually means for the rest of their lives. I recently met a young woman called Michelle who had been moved across London, away from her family and friends, when she was taken out of bed and breakfast. She lost her daughter's creche place and she lost access to her training course. She said that she felt like an exile from her community. She wants to get out of temporary and into permanent accommodation among her family and friends so that she can rebuild her life and find a job.

The crisis in temporary accommodation is tragic. I accept that the number of people in bed and breakfast is falling, which is welcome, but the problem cannot be solved simply by putting people into temporary accommodation. They need permanent secure housing where they can build basic communities with their friends and their families.

I remind the Minister for Housing and Planning that at the launch of the rough sleepers initiative he said that people sleeping on the streets of London would disappear by February 1992. It is now February 1993. If, when we leave the House tonight, we walked the streets of London, we would still meet many homeless people. Just before Christmas, late one night, I left the House and I spoke to some homeless youngsters. I was shocked because when I asked them how old they were, those who were confident enough to answer did not say that they were in their 20s or 30s—certainly they were not, as in the past, older people broken by war or alcohol—they said that they were 16. That suggests that many of them were not 16, but younger. I was shocked that youngsters of 16 were on the streets of London.

Another factor was important. When I asked them where they last lived, most of them said that they had been in local authority care. That care runs out at 16 and those youngsters have to fend for themselves. The Government have a responsibility to deal with the problems of youngsters of 16 who come out of local authority care but are then left to fend for themselves and so end up on the streets. I shall return to that point later.

Mr. Hendry: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that when children come out of care at the age of 16, local authorities have an obligation to keep any eye on them until they are 21? In addition, 16 and 17-year-olds coming out of care are entitled to income support.

Mr. Battle: I accept and welcome the fact that the Government included that provision in the Children Act 1989. However, we raised a problem in Committee on that Bill which was not resolved by the Government and which is now manifesting itself on the streets. How does a local authority keep track of those youngsters if they move to another borough, town or city? That is causing a real problem with the operation of the Act. Local authorities cannot comb other boroughs looking for homeless youngsters.

There have been changes in the benefit rules which I believe have been the cause of some of the homelessness among young people.

Mr. David Evans (Welwyn Hatfield): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that there are 100,000 local authority dwellings empty, of which 18,000 are in London? Is it not political dogma which keeps those dwellings empty deliberately to cause hardship to the homeless?

Mr. Battle: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for taking such an interest in that matter. I urge him to investigate it in more detail and to check the facts and figures. More than half the empty properties in London have been listed as defective by the Government and are therefore included in demolition programmes. Nevertheless, those properties appear in the figures for empty properties. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not suggesting that we put homeless families into properties which are unfit to live in and due for demolition.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Battle: No, I must move on. I want to give the Minister time to reply.

In our society there are 80,000 single homeless people. We now face the introduction of care in the community, without the proper backing. The Minister should remember the line in the White Paper:

"Housing is the key to independent living."

Unless the resources to provide such housing are passed on to local authorities, we shall face increasing homelessness among the most marginalised members of our society—those who may be discharged from hospitals. It will stare us in the face from 1 April this year.

I could echo some of the local comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston. In Yorkshire, homelessness has risen by 60 per cent. in the past six years; in Leeds, there has been a 34 per cent. increase in homelessness inquiries between 1988-89 and 1991-92. Last year, there were 10,000 inquiries; 10,000 people applied for housing, and were registered as homeless. A total of 24,000 households are on waiting lists; the figure is up 30 per cent. since 1983-84.

In 1980-81, Leeds city council built 1,200 homes; in 1991-92, it could build only 18. That is a telling figure. There is not enough housing to rent. The council was not even able to replace the housing that it had lost through sales, including housing association accommodation. Although homes are now coming from housing associations in partnership with the local authority, the authority is not being allowed to use capital receipts to replace the rented housing that has been lost. It is no wonder that people are homeless. One third of the homeless people in Leeds have been in care, and those people are vulnerable.

The Government should examine, across Departments, the desperate need for supported accommodation for young people. The private market is not providing it, and housing associations have been priced out of special needs. Who will provide those homes? The Government's cool complacency reflects a chillingly barren policy, and an absence of real, co-ordinated housing action. The housing crisis is frozen in the permafrost of the economic recession which is gripping the country.

The real dereliction, as will be revealed when the English house conditions survey is published later this year, is the dereliction of duty by a Government and a Minister attempting to sustain an image of competence from day to day, floated on daily departmental press releases as one phoney piecemeal initiative after another is launched, sinks and is launched again. Two weeks ago, for instance, we received a press release telling us of the virtues

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of the "flats over shops" initiative. Last week, the annual report of the Department of the Environment told us that there would be nothing in the 1995-96 budget programme. We are told that the capital partnership initiative has a future, but the annual report provides nothing in the 1994-95 budget.

Action could be taken, however. I will put a five-point action plan to the Minister. First, more rented housing should be provided. On every working day since June 1979, 600 building workers have lost their jobs; they have continued to do so, yet there are fields full of bricks in Bedfordshire. The need is there, the skills are there, the materials are there and the resources are there; yet £5·7 billion is locked up in capital receipts. That money could be used to provide housing. The Government refuse to link jobs and housing, which flies in the face of ordinary common sense. The Government can and must provide more rented housing. What is needed is a housing need package, not a housing market package.

Secondly, I ask the Minister to extend the rough sleepers initiative beyond London. Sixty per cent. of those sleeping rough are on the streets of Brighton, Bristol and other towns and cities throughout the land. Thirdly, the Government should immediately restore income support for 16 and 17-year-olds, which was removed by the present Prime Minister in 1988. The removal of that benefit is increasingly seen as a cause of homelessness among young people.

Fourthly, the Government should publish and use the English house conditions survey, which will show that nearly 1·5 million properties are now in serious disrepair. They should use it as a renovation and renewal charter, change the failed means-tested improvement grant system and ensure that the construction industry is free of the increases in value-added tax on building repairs that we are told the Budget may contain. Such increases would drive the construction industry even further back.

Fifthly, the Government could support and publicise a real mortgage rescue scheme. I suggest that the Minister take a look at the Bradford and Bingley building society, and support fully mutual housing associations which allow families to remain in their own homes and be charged rent. The Government should support mortgage-to-rent schemes rather than rent-to-mortgage schemes.

To sum up my five points for action, I suggest more rented housing, an extension of the rough sleepers scheme, the restoration of income support for youngsters, the use of the English house conditions survey for renewal and improvement, and support for real mortgage rescue schemes. Too many people are being denied the basic right to a decent, affordable and secure home.

The current housing crisis is the most vivid symbol of the failure of the free market myth. What is needed is real choice, not just abuse of the word. Without real choice between tenures, which must include the right to rent, millions will remain locked out of decent housing that they can call a home of their own.

6.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tony Baldry): The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) has done his party a favour. He has done something that his Front Bench has not seemed willing to do since the general election: he has initiated a debate on housing.

The hon. Gentleman's initiative stands in stark contrast to the utterances of hon. Members on the Opposition Front Bench, who seem more concerned with attacking the royal family than with debating housing. I am not surprised about that, because Opposition Front-Bench Members never seem to mention housing. A recent speech by the Leader of the Opposition, supposedly outlining Labour's agenda for the next decade, completely failed to mention housing. As for the recent interview in *Tribune* with the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), who graced us with a fleeting appearance a moment ago, he told us last week that the entire interview was tape recorded by the author. He then told the House that the direct quotation of any words was correct; the only problem was that the article made no mention of housing.

Why, then, is housing off Labour's agenda? Simply because Labour has no policy. As my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) made clear in his excellent speech, little by little over the past decade Labour has come to accept, and then to endorse, our policies. That applies to the right to buy, housing action trusts and the ability of councils to transfer their stock to housing associations. All those policies were once bitterly opposed by Labour authorities; all are now embraced by them. Waltham Forest, Tower Hamlets, Hull, Birmingham and Liverpool—all those councils, Labour and Liberal, are now promoting housing action trusts in their areas. The Opposition would have denied those opportunities to thousands of tenants.

The hon. Member for Blackburn boasted to *Tribune*, "We run urban Britain." Perhaps that is another reason why Labour says nothing about housing: the nation will look at Labour's housing record, which is lousy, as tellingly illustrated by my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess). He described how ill served Basildon's housing interests were under a Labour council.

We, by contrast, have much to offer when it comes to housing. Therefore, I welcome the debate. It enables the Government to reinforce their determination that a decent home should be within the reach of every family and our determination to promote owner-occupation, to widen choice for tenants, to encourage further private investment in the rented sector and to increase the supply of decent homes for rent.

Mr. Miller: The Minister keeps criticising Labour authorities. I gave him a specific example and was very careful about the language that I used. Can the Minister spell out precisely, here and now, what my local authority of Ellesmere Port and Neston should do and where it has gone wrong?

Mr. Baldry: The hon. Gentleman might reflect upon the fact that, at the end of 1990-91, Ellesmere Port's accumulated debt in rent arrears amounted to nearly £500,000—£474,000, to be precise. I suspect that if the local authority had been more effective in collecting its rents, it would have been able to invest that money in local authority stock.

The opportunity to own a home and to pass it on is one of the most important rights that an individual has in a free society. We have extended that right. Home ownership lies at the heart of our philosophy. We want to see wealth and security being passed down from generation to generation. Surveys show that owner-occupation is the preferred tenure of every age group from every background in every part of the country. Some 4 million more householders now own their own home compared with 1979. The number of former council tenants who have bought their homes has risen to nearly 1·5 million.

Recent house price reports show that encouraging signs of stability may now be returning to the housing market. At 6 per cent., interest rates are at their lowest for 15 years. Average mortgage rates are now 7 percentage points below their peak. Indeed, average mortgage rates are now at their lowest level since March 1969. With the latest cut in mortgage rates, reductions over the past two years have saved a family with a typical mortgage £160 a month. Home purchase is now more affordable and more attractive. The ratio of mortgage payments to income is at its most advantageous level for a quarter of a century. That must be good news for buyers and builders alike.

We are committed to making the aspiration of home ownership a reality for as many households as possible. The right to buy for council tenants has become a resounding success. We are determined to continue to respond to people's aspiration to own their own home. Thousands of tenants have been able to take advantage of cash incentive payments that enable housing associations and local councils to help existing tenants to move into home ownership and free their current home for new tenants. All around the country, successful shared ownership schemes, supported by the Government, have enabled many more people to become home owners. We are determined to make it easier for those council tenants living in high cost areas or on low incomes to move gradually into home ownership without taking on too heavy a financial burden at any one time.

Our rent-to-mortgage scheme will give tenants a further route to home ownership. We care about council tenants who want to buy but who cannot afford to do so outright. We shall continue to drive for home ownership and make sure that tenants are aware of their new rights. Many tenants will consider that now is the time to take advantage of low prices, low interest rates and substantial discounts.

Of course we recognise that not everybody can or will want to buy their own home. Our aim is to ensure that a decent home is available to every family, whether it be owned, rented from a private landlord, or rented in the public sector. That means that encouraging and supporting home ownership is complemented by measures to increase availability and choice in rented housing, to target investment and support to those areas and to those people most in need and to ensure that the billions of pounds of taxpayers' money that we are investing and continue to invest in housing is put to the best possible use by improving the performance and value for money achieved by those who spend it.

Mr. Raynsford: On the Minister's point about the provision of affordable housing, he will be aware of the concern expressed about the grant rates for housing associations. He will also be aware that officials, giving evidence last Wednesday to the Select Committee, said that no decision had yet been taken about a reduction in grant rates. Bearing in mind that concern, will the Minister give the House an assurance tonight that there will not be a reduction in grant rates that would lead to great increases in rents and serious affordability problems for housing association tenants?

Mr. Baldry: I thought that the hon. Gentleman intended in his intervention to explain why it was that at the end of 1991 Greenwich had rent arrears of £13 million. He will have seen from evidence of the Housing Corporation that there is no generic affordability problem for housing associations. Last week I was in the area of the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston where concern was raised by a housing association about housing association grants and housing association rents. That same afternoon I visited a scheme in Manchester where six housing associations are providing good, affordable houses at housing association grant rates of 50 per cent. They are providing houses at rents which everybody recognises are affordable.

We are investing billions of pounds in housing. This year alone, more than £8 billion will be spent on social housing, most by local authorities but some £2·3 billion of it by the Housing Corporation, in providing new, affordable social housing through housing associations. New investment in housing received a significant boost in the autumn statement with the housing market package and the ability of local authorities to spend 100 per cent. of their capital receipts raised before the end of this year. That ability could, we believe, generate some £1·75 billion for local authorities. That is in addition to the money that will be given to them through the housing investment programme. Those figures are based on local authorities' own estimates of what they have raised and are likely to raise from capital receipts in 1992-93. All hon. Members should, therefore, ensure that their local authorities are seeking properly to maximise their capital receipts this year and putting them to good use.

The housing market package has been a great success. The Housing Corporation now estimates that the money for housing associations in England to buy new, empty and repossessed homes, announced as part of the overall £750 million housing market package, will allow the purchase of over 17,000 properties in England by the end of March. Nearly 15,000 purchases have already been approved. More than 90 per cent. of the original target of 16,000 houses has been achieved, using just over 80 per cent. of the available funds. Another 3,500 homes will be bought with the help of cash grants to existing tenants moving into ower-occupation. Taken together with the substantial fall in interest rates, the housing market package is having a positive impact on the housing market. The Housing Corporation and the housing associations involved are to be congratulated on their excellent performance in translating these substantial sums made available into new homes.

This financial year, and over the next three years, housing associations should have some £10·5 billion to invest in new social housing—£7·5 billion from the Treasury to the Housing Corporation, and £3 billion of private finance. In our manifesto we promised to provide 153,000 new affordable homes over three years to 1994-95. The Housing Corporation now estimates that it will be able substantially to improve upon that figure and to fund some 170,000 new homes over the same period.

Those new homes will go a long way towards improving matters for households accepted as homeless by local

[Mr. Baldry]

authorities and currently living in temporary accommodation. Even before the autumn statement, the number of families housed in bed and breakfast accommodation was falling. It is down now to just over 11,000. I hope that local authorities, working with the housing associations, will now be able to bring these figures down even further. For those most visibly in housing need, we have extended the rough sleepers initiative, with a further £86 million being made available to the voluntary organisations which are managing the programme.

While housing associations are the main providers of new social housing, it is also important that we continue to invest in council housing as effectively as possible. This we are doing through the housing investment programme and large-scale schemes such as estate action and housing action trusts, which help to tackle some of our more difficult estates. Up and down the country this year we are spending £330 million on 360 estate action schemes. Next year the budget of £350 million will enable another 160 new schemes to start.

Estate action schemes enable money to be invested to turn rundown housing into areas where people can again be proud to live: where appropriate, tower blocks are pulled down and new family-designed homes are built; unpopular deck access blocks are converted into popular family homes; the quality of homes is improved with, where appropriate, new roofs, new wiring and new PVC windows; and areas of sterile public space in which no one has a sense of ownership are turned into gardens. The planners call that "defensible space". To all of us, and to the people who live in the area, that means gardens. Crime is designed out. There is better security——

It being Seven o'clock, proceedings on the motion lapsed, pursuant to Standing Order No. 13 (Arrangement of public business).

Orders of the Day

Consolidated Fund (No. 2) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Question, That the Bill be now read a Second time, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 54 (Consolidated Fund Bills), and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Bankruptcy (Scotland) Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Clause 2

APPOINTMENT AND FUNCTIONS OF INTERIM TRUSTEE

Lords amendment: No. 1, in page 4, line 38, leave out from ("shall") to ("appoint") in line 40.

7.1 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart): I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 5 to 7.

Mr. Stewart: This group of amendments was tabled in another place in response to concerns expressed by involvency practitioners that the Bill as it stood could create problems for some business debtors. The practitioners feared that such debtors would be unable to secure the immediate appointment of an interim trustee to manage the business while the sequestration process was proceeding.

In the light of those concerns, amendment No. 5 restores the position to that which presently applies under the Bankruptcy (Scotland) Act 1985 and allows the court to appoint an interim trustee without delay after the presentation of a debtor's petition. While amendment No. 6 retains the opportunity for the Accountant in Bankruptcy to make an early application for a certificate of summary administration, the other amendments make consequential drafting changes.

I acknowledge that a number of amendments were tabled by the Opposition in another place. I hope that the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) will agree that the Opposition amendments were designed to achieve the same purpose as the Government amendments before the House. As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, the Opposition amendments were withdrawn in favour of the Government amendments simply because the latter were technically accurate. I pay tribute to Opposition Members in another place for tabling their amendments.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): I thank the Minister for his comments. In particular, I thank my colleagues in another place, particularly Lord Macaulay and Lord Carmichael, who were very vigilant when the legislation was last considered there.

I welcome the Minister's endorsement of the role of the Opposition in another place. However, will he explain the qualifications that the courts will consider necessary for the interim trustee? Are those qualifications consistent with the views of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland which sought, I thought successfully, to persuade the Minister to ensure that sequestration may be awarded forthwith after the presentation of a debtor's petition? No doubt the institute had in mind the role relevant to that of an interim trustee. Before we make a judgment on the package that the Minister has brought back from another place, I should be grateful if he would explain the role and qualifications of the interim trustee.

Mr. Stewart: I am happy to respond to the perfectly fair point made by the hon. Gentleman. I can confirm that the Government have discussed with the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland the arrangements for implementing the Bill. I assure the hon. Gentleman that an interim trustee, other than the Accountant in Bankruptcy himself or herself, must be an insolvency practitioner, as is the case under the Bankruptcy (Scotland) Act 1985.

We intend to introduce the provisions of the Bill so that the Accountant in Bankruptcy would be appointed the trustee in most small asset cases. The accountant would then retain a proportion of cases in-house, but allocate the remainder to insolvency practitioners on the same basis as under the 1985 Act.

Those cases would be allocated on a fixed-price basis. That would allow all concerned—the Accountant in Bankruptcy and the insolvency practitioners to whom the hon. Member for Monklands, West referred—the opportunity to gain experience under the new regime. That should permit a fairer comparison to be made between public sector and private sector provision when full market testing is undertaken.

The hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) has distinguished herself in written parliamentary questions —[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am glad to see the unanimity between the Labour party and the Scottish National party. The Scottish Liberals are not present and I do not see them rushing into the Chamber to take part in this very important debate. However, at least we have agreement—almost uniquely these days—between the Labour party and the Scottish National party. The hon. Member for Moray played a major part in our considerations during the proceedings on the Bill.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): With due deference to the Minister, and although I do not want to correct his grammar, something cannot be "almost unique". It is either unique, or it is not. I hope that that will help with future speeches.

Mr. Stewart: I have received linguistic advice from the Government Whip, but I believe that the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) is correct, and I stand corrected.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): It is good to hear that the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) is a bit better on his English than he was on his arithmetic in another place the other day.

Mr. Stewart: My hon. Friend expresses himself with his customary robustness. However, I do not intend in this debate to arouse the hon. Member for Motherwell, North excessively. However, the hon. Member for Moray played a major and constructive part in our consideration of the subject in Committee. I believe that it would be generally agreed that the Committee stage was constructive.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I am sorry that I missed the Minister's earlier exchanges with the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke). Am I to understand from the Minister's remarks that the Accountant in Bankruptcy will now almost put bankruptcy cases out to private tender? Will the top sum allocated be £600 or less?

Mr. Stewart: I am happy to respond to the hon. Lady and to confirm the exact position which follows the consultations over the summer between the Institute of Chartered Accountants, the Accountant in Bankruptcy and the Scottish Office.

[Mr. Stewart]

There will be an interim stage in 1993-94—let us take, for the sake of argument, the assumption that the Bill is implemented from the beginning of April—when experience can be gained of operating under the procedures in the Bill before proceeding to a full-blown market testing exercise. The intention is to bring in the provisions of the Bill so that the Accountant in Bankruptcy would be appointed trustee in most small asset cases. The accountant would then retain a proportion of such cases in-house, but allocate the remainder to insolvency practitioners on a fixed-price basis.

That procedure will allow all concerned to gain experience under the new regime and should permit a fairer comparison to be made between public and private sector provision when full market testing is undertaken. I am delighted that we have been joined by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), of the Liberal Democrats, in order to express his knowledge and experience of and interest in the Bankruptcy (Scotland) Bill.

I assure the hon. Member for Moray that the accountant has recently circulated his proposals to all insolvency practitioners. As I have said, I hope that we can have such arrangements in place.

Mrs. Ewing: Has the Accountant in Bankruptcy given any indication of the basis on which he will deal with market testing? Last year, the Minister told me that he was working on anticipated bankruptcies of about 20,000 per annum. Is it not the case that the Accountant in Bankruptcy is now looking at a much smaller number of annual bankruptcies on which to base his market testing?

Mr. Stewart: I am unable to give the hon. Lady an exact estimate. With her expertise, she will know that there is great uncertainty about such matters, but the number will be below the original estimate.

The hon. Member for Moray asked about fees. I can confirm the figure that she suggested. The Accountant in Bankruptcy has offered the professionally standard fee of £600 plus VAT—that is, £705 gross—to handle a summary case. Work over and above that would be paid at a set fee or an hourly rate as appropriate in accordance with the tariff set by the accountant. I hope that, with that explanation, the amendments will commend themselves to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 3

PETITIONS FOR SEQUESTRATION

Lords amendment: No. 2, in page 7, line 8, leave out from first ("a") to ("and") in line 10 and insert ("statement of assets and liabilities")

Mr. Allan Stewart: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take amendments Nos. 3 and 4, 12 to 17 and 20.

Mr. Stewart: The amendments might look substantial, but in fact they are technical. The main point of significance in them is the new definition of the statement of assets and liabilities which appears in amendment No. 20. That is the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker), with cross-party support, raised in Committee. It was a seemingly simple change but, as my hon. Friend will see, it has given rise to several amendments. The amendments should make the legislation easier to understand by debtors and advisers and therefore make the legislation easier to operate in future.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): I am delighted to be able to speak for a few minutes.

As my hon. Friend the Minister has said, amendment No. 20 relates to a matter that I raised upstairs in Committee. I congratulate my hon. Friend and the noble Lords on arriving at a form of words that achieves exactly what I failed to achieve in Committee. My hon. Friend will agree that the amendments that I spoke to in Committee were quite properly technically unsound. There was cross-party support in Committee for what I was trying to achieve. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) spoke at length in Committee. I am very happy, therefore, that the amendments should become part of the Bill.

7.15 pm

Mrs. Ewing: Several of the amendments relate to clause 3, which is a particularly significant part of the legislation. The explanatory and financial memorandum states:

> "Clause 3 amends Section 5 of the 1985 Act to extend the grounds on which a debtor may petition for his own sequestration".

The only aspect of the amendments that concerns me is that it could be interpreted that there is a reduction in access to bankruptcy. It was never the intention of my parliamentary questions nor indeed the intention of any hon. Member in Committee that there should be any restriction in access to sequestration, which all hon. Members accept is often the best way forward for an individual who faces severe financial pressures. The context of the Bill was to reduce the costs involved in sequestration. I seek an assurance from the Minister that none of the amendments restricts access to sequestration.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) for his kind comments about the proceedings in another place, where the purpose of his original amendments was met. They certainly had all-party support.

I reassure the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) on the point that she raised. The purpose of the amendments is to assist debtors and those who advise them fully to understand the scope of their obigations and the related offence provisions. No reduction in access is implied in the amendments.

Mrs. Ewing: In the past few days, it has come to my notice that the Accountant in Bankruptcy is downgrading to 3,000 the anticipated number of annual bankruptcies in Scotland from the 20,000 that the Minister referred to in Committee last year. That is a huge drop. Most Members of Parliament know that many people, particularly those in small business, face bankruptcy. I seek an assurance from the Minister that severe restrictions will not be placed on those who seek sequestration.

Mr. Stewart: I can reassure the hon. Lady. She will agree that it is difficult to estimate the volume of sequestrations which might arise if the Bill is enacted. The amendments stand against the general background of the routes by which a debtor can obtain access to sequestration. Those routes are increased by the Bill. I assure the hon. Lady that none of the amendments restricts access to sequestration.

Question put and agreed to.

Subsequent Lords amendments agreed to.

Clause 11

AMENDMENTS AND REPEALS

Lords amendment: No. 8 in page 14, line 6, leave out ("subsection") and insert ("section")

Mr. Allan Stewart: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take amendments Nos. 9 to 11 and 18 and 19.

Mr. Stewart: These drafting amendments correct various provisions in the 1985 Act. I draw the attention of the House especially to amendment No. 11, which was tabled by the Labour party in another place. The amendment makes a useful and technical change to the 1985 Act which will benefit anyone who requires to petition for the recall of a sequestration.

Mr. Tom Clarke: I too especially welcome amendment No. 11. As the Minister said, my colleagues in another place, especially Lord Macaulay, helped with the drafting of the Bill. We give our thanks to them and welcome the amendment, which improves the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Subsequent Lords amendments agreed to.

Judicial Pensions and Retirement Bill [Lords]

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

[MR. MICHAEL MORRIS *in the Chair.*]

Clause 3

THE APPROPRIATE ANNUAL RATE

7.23 pm

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): I beg to move amendment No. 21, in page 5, leave out lines 1 to 5 and insert—

> '(1) In the case of—
> (a) a person who, at the time of his retirement from qualifying judicial office is not either a circuit judge or a high court judge, and has completed in the aggregate, at least 20 years' service in such office, or
> (b) a person who at the time of his retirement from qualifying judicial office is either a circuit judge or a high court judge, and has completed, in the aggregate, at least 15 years' service in qualifying judicial office,
> the "appropriate annual rate" for the purposes of this Act is an annual rate equal to one-half his pensionable pay.'.

The purpose of the amendment is to give half pay on retirement to a circuit or High Court judge when he has served 15 years as a judge. The Government's proposal to extend the length of time which a High Court or circuit judge must serve by five years before he qualifies for his full pension is unfair, unreasonable and will cause serious problems for the working of the system.

In clause 2 of the Bill, the retirement age of judges has been reduced by five years. If, as the Government propose, the retirement age of judges is reduced in that way and the period which a judge must serve is increased from 15 to 20 years before he receives full pension, it follows that any judge who is appointed after the age of 50 will not be able to receive a full pension.

What does that mean for judges? It means that few judges will be able to receive a full pension. That will have ramifications for judges' wives—and widows—and children. Other amendments will address that matter. The effect is a reduction in pension for judges which is totally unfair. That is not the way to treat such an important and vital part of our community as the judiciary.

What effect does it have on the system? It means that those with less experience will become judges in order to serve the 20 years before qualifying for a pension and having to retire at the age of 70. Younger judges will have to be appointed, which will mean that they have had fewer years of experience at the Bar.

At present, the appointment of judgeship comes at the end of an experienced and successful period in the practitioner's life. Those who are successful at the Bar will not want to become judges. If they are earning about £200,000 a year with a successful practice at the Bar, why on earth should they take the appointment of a judgeship with a substantial reduction to about £60,000, £70,000 or £80,000 a year which will bring with it a reduction in pension? Do we want less successful practitioners to become judges—those who have not had the experience or the success at the Bar which comes from ability?

Those who have burnt themselves out after 15 years will have a reason for wanting to hang on for another five years to collect their full pension. There is such a factor as the burnt-out judge. Work at the Bar is intensive and demanding. The more successful the practitioner, the more

[Sir Ivan Lawrence]

demanding the work becomes. When one becomes a judge, one must apply one's mind with no let-up. It is relentless: day after day, one case follows another. When a practitioner at the Bar gets tired he can say, "No more work for a week or two while I take a holiday and recoup some of my strength." When one sits as a judge, effectively as a civil servant, one must maintain the days, weeks, months and hours of sitting.

There is absolutely no doubt, and it is obvious to those of us who practise at the Bar, that there are burnt-out judges—judges who should have retired some years ago but are hanging on for their pension. This measure may well cause a lot more burnt-out judges to hang on for another five years to qualify for a full pension. Do we really want extinct volcanoes gracing our benches?

There is a worrying aspect to the matter. If we do not get enough judges because successful and experienced practitioners do not want the massive drop in income and the resulting fall in their pensions and the money available to their widows, or if they do not want to be appointed at an early age before they have reached their apogee of earnings at the Bar, in the fullness of time there may well be a shortage of judges.

How will judges be recruited if there are so few coming forward due to the total lack of attractiveness of the pay, the terms of work, and the pension that they receive at the end? The answer is simple. We do what every other country in the European Community does: we appoint career judges, who will leave school and university and immediately become judges. That practice takes place elsewhere. Now that we are part of a federal super-state and all of the trading, industrial, social and other activities are standardised, there is a level playing field throughout the Community. Why should we not appoint our judges as career judges from the moment they leave university, as happens in all the other countries? I am not a conspiracy theorist. I do not suggest that, when that happens, it will be the result of a deliberate act of harmonising our system with that of our European partners, but if we cannot get enough judges because the attractions to a judge both in payment and pension are so diminished, it is inevitable that we shall have a career judiciary, which no one in the United Kingdom regards as remotely desirable.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. John M. Taylor): I wish to take up my hon. and learned Friend's point about the attraction or otherwise of the package. I must ask him to accept that the Bill is not a cost-cutting exercise. The cost of both schemes —if I may put it in the vernacular, "before" and "after" —has been actuarially assessed, on the basis of detailed calculations, at 28 per cent. of pay. The cost and attraction of the package is the same before as after.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: It sounds as though my hon. Friend has a guilty conscience. He is over-sensitive. I did not suggest that the reason for the proposal was cost cutting. I would not have been so presumptuous as to make that allegation about my hon. Friend.

Mr. John M. Taylor: My hon. and learned Friend's suggestion might have taken a different form of words, but the meaning is scarcely different. He suggested that on the far side of the changes the package was less attractive. I addressed that suggestion by saying that the package was just as expensive to the taxpayer. The total package of receipts in the hands of the pension holder is of the same value and worth after as before.

7.30 pm

Sir Ivan Lawrence: I did not make the allegation, but if I had been able to do so because I felt justified in making it there would at least have been an explanation for the appalling treatment that the Government are meting out to judges. It would have been logical to say, "We are overspending on the legal system; we must reduce the amount of money that goes into it, so let us shorten the years in which a judge sits and lengthen the time they have to serve before they receive their pension."

As I am concerned about the need to reduce the enormous expenditure on our legal system and elsewhere, I am not sure that I would not have seen some justification in that argument. I am astonished to hear that that is not the justification for the measure—that it is not a cost-cutting exercise.

One is driven to ask why on earth we are taking action in the Bill which will have the bad effects that I have suggested. It will discourage the best practitioners from becoming judges, and make those who are not the best practitioners soldier on long beyond their sell-by date. Why on earth are the Government taking that position if it is not to save money, unless it is as a result of a misunderstanding of the effect that the measure will have on the judicial system? I have some reason for thinking that other misjudgments may have been made of the judicial and legal system in recent years. Perhaps the measure is just another in a line of misjudgments about how the legal system should work.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): I declare an interest as a practising barrister. Does the hon. and learned Gentleman agree that, whichever way one looks at the package which has just been outlined to us, it does not deal with the heart of the matter, which is how do we attract the best people to become judges so that we can have the best judicial system? To go backwards does not seem to be a way of going forwards.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: It is not just going backwards—it is going a long way backwards. We are not talking about tinkering for a few months or a year. We are talking about a five-year extension in the accrual rate. Judges will have to be appointed after fewer years of service to the profession than hitherto in order to receive a full pension, so looking ahead the position will be markedly worse. It is difficult to see how any possible improvement in the legal system can be achieved as a result of the proposals on pensions in the Bill.

When I am told by my hon. Friend the Minister that the measure has not been taken for reasons of cost cutting, it becomes all the more incomprehensible. I have moved the amendment so that the matter can be properly ventilated in the Chamber and so that those who are involved in the legal profession and other professions and, indeed, the public can see how the future of our proud judiciary may be undermined to a marked extent by the proposals.

Mr. Roger Evans (Monmouth): I rise to support the amendment. My hon. Friend the Minister repeated what appears to have been the Government's position throughout the proceedings on the Bill. Their position is that the Bill is not intended to be anything other than fiscally neutral. In the present circumstances for Government expenditure, I appreciate and accept the force of that. If that is the case, so be it. My hon. Friend the Minister's difficulty, and the reason why the amendment has been moved, is that so far he has not succeeded in removing, especially from the mind of many of the judiciary, the perception that the Bill is a cost-cutting exercise.

There are above all two reasons for that perception. First, the scheme as a whole may well be neutral in terms of public expenditure but certain sections of the wide series of judicial appointments will benefit considerably from improvements under the arrangements in the Bill. However, the circuit bench and the High Court bench see not that; they see only things which point to severe detriment for future appointees to those positions. That is the importance of the increase from 15 to 20 years, which will have incalculable—although difficult to predict in detail—consequences on the character of the next generation of the judiciary.

My hon. Friend the Minister has not persuaded the judiciary because there are different types of judges among whom there are losers and gainers. I respectfully suggest that time is still left for him to persuade us all that there is fiscal neutrality. The mystery of this controversy is that the Council of Her Majesty's Circuit Judges still has not had supplied to its actuary detailed calculations in answer to questions which he has put.

Mr. John M. Taylor: There has been plenty of opportunity for members of the judiciary or their representatives to raise questions on cost. There have been exchanges of correspondence since last summer. Meetings have taken place between various parties and there have been discussions on the telephone. In response to questions put to me in Committee, I facilitated the holding of a meeting between the actuarial advisor representing the circuit judges and a senior official of the Government Actuary's department. A meeting was arranged but it was cancelled at the last minute by the judiciary's advisor. I can assume only that the advisor was satisfied with the information that he already had.

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend has the advantage over me as to the detail of the cancellation of that meeting. However, the arguments which have been put me, and which I put to the House and invite my hon. Friend the Minister to answer, are as follows. First, the assumption has been made in the actuarial calculations of the Government Actuary that under the old and new schemes judges will retire at the same time evenly throughout the relevant years. That is an implausible assumption.

Under the existing arrangements, whereby pension is linked to pay, there is a built-in incentive for judges to retire shortly after their pay has increased. In other words, there will be a distinct difference between the patterns of retirement throughout the year before and after the proposals are implemented. That has a significant consequence of about 1·1 per cent. on the figures.

The second factor which has been challenged but has not been answered is that the real rate of discount assumed by the Government Actuary is 3·5 per cent. whereas 4 per cent. or more would be realistic over the longer period.

The third and perhaps most startling of the Government Actuary's assumptions is that the age and sex composition of the population of judges under the new system—I use the bizarre technical term "population" beloved of statisticians—will not change in the next 20 years. I have no doubt that if that were the case it would create utter amazement, if not criticism, among hon. Members on both sides of the House. We appreciate that one of the factors about the present judiciary is the age at which they join the bench and the time that they were in private professional practice. With the advent of larger numbers of women at the Bar and becoming judges, it is inevitable that the composition of the judiciary—as regards both age and sex—will change during the next 20 years.

The actuary advising the Council of Her Majesty's Circuit Judges has said that for those three reasons—which the Government Actuary has never dealt with as far as I am aware—there is more slack in the measure and, in some regards at least, my hon. Friend has the opportunity to be slightly more generous. I urge him to consider the amendment and to decide what response he can make.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Taking the last point first, the actuarial adviser to judges assumes that there is some slack in the equation because the significance of the move to pensionable pay has been underestimated. He says that this hypothesis would be confirmed by evidence of a bunching of retirements after the judges' April salary increases. The information on judicial requirements, however, shows that that is not the case.

My hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Evans) expressed his arguments with his customary urgent lucidity. I urge him to accept that, for months, every effort has been made to answer all the questions and to make information available. All the information specifically requested by the judiciary or the actuarial advisers has been provided. As I said, the circuit bench actuary met the Government Actuary last October and was offered another meeting last Friday, which was secured last Tuesday. I am advised that he telephoned to decline that meeting last Thursday. It is not for me to account for that but, whatever differences may still lie between my hon. Friend and myself, the Government extended themselves comprehensively to ensure that the information was available for discussion with anyone with whom he wanted.

In answer to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence), who tabled amendment No. 21, the Government do not accept the argument that the combination of the 20-year accrual period and the new retirement age of 70 will discourage suitable candidates from accepting appointment to the bench. Under the existing arrangements, a number of candidates are appointed at an age which will not permit them to earn full pension. Others continue in full-time service after they have completed the years required to earn a full pension. The special position of judges, who come to their careers relatively late in life, is recognised in the scheme by the tax concession of retained benefits. That is a most significant privilege for the judges, but the Government do not justify their opposition to a 15-year accural period on that ground alone. There are more telling reasons why the 15-year accural period, and the amendment, should be rejected.

The amendment would shatter the uniformity of treatment of the judiciary, which it is one purpose of the Bill to create. Where the Government are seeking to establish a common accrual period for all judicial officers, the amendment would create a two-tier pension regime, in

[Mr. John M. Taylor]

which circuit judges and High Court judges alone would have to work for 15 years before earning maximum benefits, while all other judicial officers would have to work for 20 years. In doing so, it would perpetuate—perhaps even accentuate—the inequities of the existing judicial pension arrangements.

7.45 pm

At present, different judicial officers have to work for different periods to earn a full pension. There are 15, 20 and even 40-year schemes. Those differences are not based on logic; they are the product of historical decisions, the reasons for which are no longer evident. The Government seek to remove the inherent unfairness in the arrangements by establishing a uniform accrual period of 20 years for all salaried judicial officers in the United Kingdom. The amendment, however, would enshrine the present unfairness in the new arrangements.

Let me give two examples. First, what possible justification remains for circuit judges in England and Wales to work for 15 years in order to earn a full pension, while their counterparts in Scotland, the sheriffs, have to work for 20 years as they would under the amendment? If the work of circuit judges is such that they should retire after 15 years, as my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton suggests, why should the same not hold for Scottish sheriffs who perform similar duties north of the border? And what about their Northern Ireland counterparts, the county court judges? They too already have a 20-year accrual period. Is their work less demanding than that of English and Welsh circuit judges? No, it is not. So why does the amendment omit to mention them? The amendment is illogical and plainly unfair.

A second example of the unfairness of the amendment is what is it about the offices of circuit judge and High Court judge that singles them out to remain in a 15-year scheme? There are other offices which presently have 15-year accrual periods, but the amendment does not seek to preserve their positions. For instance, the amendment does not extend to others in 15-year schemes, such as the heads of division, Lords of Appeal in Ordinary or the Lords Justices of Appeal, or to the senior judiciary in Scotland or Northern Ireland. Is it suggested that the work of a Lord Justice of Appeal is that much less onerous than that of a High Court judge or that of the Lord Chief Justice much less burdensome than that of a circuit judge? If this amendment were passed, there would be cause for resentment indeed.

There is no evidence that being members of a 20-year pension scheme has led to Scottish sheriffs or Northern Ireland county court judges becoming stale in the latter years of their service. I do not accept that judges who sit for more than 15 years on the bench are thereby less fit to perform their judicial functions, or to adapt to change, than those who do not. In fact, under the present arrangments, the average length of service of a circuit judge is not 15 years but about 18, and the average length of service of a High Court judge is about 19 years. So, the suggestion that the Government will be forcing judges to work longer than 15 years, against their better judgment, does not appear to hold water. I can do no better than quote my noble and learned friend the Lord Chancellor when he said in another place:

"I do not believe there is any real basis on which 15 years can be selected as self-evidently the right time at which to ask judges to retire. If it were so, it should apply to all judges."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 27 October 1992, c. 1066.]

There is another reason why the amendment would be deeply unfair. I have spoken about it before. The occasion of this Bill was the change to the general tax law introduced by the Finance Acts of 1987 and 1989. The judicial pension schemes are now the only occupational pension schemes in the United Kingdom which have not been obliged to comply with the standards that the Inland Revenue lay down before they will grant tax relief on contributions and lump sums on retirement. One of those requirements is that occupational pension schemes must have a minimum accrual period of 20 years. If the amendment were passed, circuit judges and High Court judges would be the only members of occupational pension schemes in the kingdom to whom that rule would not apply. What justification for that can there be? I would be the first to accept that the work of circuit judges and High Court judges is of the highest importance and often extremely onerous. I cannot accept that it is uniquely so, to the exclusion of all other professions and all other judicial offices. Should not High Court and circuit judges be subject to the same general tax law as the citizens whose case they hear?

The Government's other concern with the amendment is, of course, the cost. The new pension arrangements have been designed to be as close as possible to the cost of the existing arrangements. Were we to keep the accrual period of the nearly 600 circuit and High Court Judges at 15 years, this would increase the cost of providing judicial pensions by 4 per cent. of pay.

I respectfully give the House one note of warning. If the amendment is passed, the judicial pension scheme will, as I have explained, no longer appear to meet the criteria set down by general tax law for tax approval. In such circumstances, the Government would have to consider very carefully whether it could continue to allow the judicial pension scheme to enjoy tax-approved status, and whether judges could continue to benefit from the tax privilege of retained benefits. I must ask the House, in the interests of fairness to all concerned, to reject the amendment.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: I notice that my hon. Friend has not addressed my important objection to the extension of the accrual time—the adverse effect that it would have upon the future of the judicial and legal professions—other than to mention some statistic about the length of time that judges are currently sitting. I should have liked my hon. Friend to address the concern expressed by those who understand and know best the consequences of this action —the judges themselves.

Judges represent a most reasonable section of society. They are not given to taking arms against any Government who check their privileges or the benefits that they may receive. However, they have sat down and, with great concern as well as understanding about the future of the system, highlighted the inevitable failures which will result from the Government's proposals.

My hon. Friend said that if the amendment were accepted it would lead to a 4 per cent. increase in costs. That may well be so; I am not in a position to dispute it. He said that it may lead to some kind of reconsideration of the tax status currently enjoyed by judges. I do not challenge that. My hon. Friend also said that uniformity of treatment was necessary and referred to the creation of a two-tier system. Such a system already exists; all that my hon. Friend is advocating is its continuation. That argument cannot be considered satisfactory by any fair-minded, objective person.

I see the logic behind my hon. Friend's argument and I accept that there may be a perceived unfairness about any distinction which now exists between the accrual time of 15 years and 20 years. That unfairness should not be removed by creating a greater unfairness, with the likely consequences that I have suggested, particularly when those consequences are as harmful to the future of our judicial system as the judges and those who have thought about the matter seem to think.

It may be that, to be fair, my hon. Friend and the Government should reduce the time served for the approval of full pension for the Lord Chief Justice, judges of the Court of Appeal, sheriffs and judges in Northern Ireland. Perhaps the Government should look forward to a time when they can proceed with such fairness. However, that argument is not an answer to the case that I have made in support of the amendment. It cannot be right that we should introduce a far greater unfairness, which will seriously harm the future of the legal profession and the legal system.

I note the less than full attendance in the House and I realise that when we come to discuss matters of pay, income and terms of service of lawyers or the judiciary it is an occasion for intense boredom and lack of interest by others in our society who think that lawyers earn enough, gain enough, do not contribute enough and should be hanged. Therefore, it would be impracticable and unrealistic for me to press the amendment to a Division, particularly since we have heard no word of support from those on the Opposition Benches. In those circumstances, I shall not press the amendment to a vote. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 5

SURVIVING SPOUSE'S PENSION

Sir Ivan Lawrence: I beg to move amendment No. 22, in page 7, line 14, leave out 'one-half' and insert 'two-thirds'.

The amendment deals with a matter that is more serious than that addressed in the previous amendment, because it will have an immediate effect upon the widows and, perhaps in due course, the children of judges who die in harness.

Under the Government's proposals, widows will be hurt greatly. To prevent that hurt from occurring, the amendment would increase from one half to two thirds the sum of money which accrues at the death of a judge.

Under the new scheme, pensions are to be calculated on the basis of pensionable pay rather than on the basis of pay currently received. Pensionable pay is the amount of pay received in the past year—last year's pay. Under the present scheme, a judge who has reached retirement age can usually wait until the next pay increase on 1 April and retire on the basis of that increase, which is next year's pay.

The Government produced a set of figures for the debate in another place which compared the benefits payable under the old and new schemes. In my submission, those figures are unintentionally misleading because the calculations were made for 31 March—the only day in the year when the two figures are the same. If the figures are calculated for 30 September 1992 or 1 April 1993, the results are quite different.

Under the new scheme, on 30 September 1992 the sum of £62,549 would accrue, but £64,064 would accrue under the old scheme. Under the old and new schemes, as at 31 March, the sum accrued would be the same, £64,064. Under the new scheme, on 1 April 1993 the sum of £64,069 would accrue, but £65,912 would accrue under the old scheme. In the first case, the judge and his wife will lose £1,133 a year, and when the judge dies his widow will lose £567 a year. In the second case, the judge and his wife will lose £933 and his widow will lose £467.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Is my hon. and learned Friend referring to someone who is currently the holder of a judicial appointment and is looking beyond to the effect of the proposed changes? Such a person does not have to enter the new scheme. If he so wishes, he may keep to his existing arrangements.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: I do not challenge my hon. Friend's point, but what about future appointees? If they compare what they will get under the present scheme with what they would get under the new scheme, there is a marked difference in the sums payable not just to a judge, but to his widow. The new system is based on last year's pay rather than on the pay currently receivable. Under that system everyone loses—the judges, the widow and, in due course, the children. The Government, of course, make savings.

In answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Evans), my hon. Friend the Minister said that the Bill was financially neutral and that the Government made no gains from it. That matter has been intensely disputed by the actuary for the judges and the Government's actuaries. A request has been made for figures and meetings, and there have been telephone conversations. I do not know whether the last such meeting scheduled for this weekend was cancelled for any reason, but I know that, until recently, the judges' actuary did not consider that he had been given the figures for which the Government were asked when the Bill was being considered in their Lordships' House. There has obviously been a misunderstanding. If the figures were as the judges' actuary calculated, there would be some leeway within the system to make the increase to protect the widows in the way suggested.

8 pm

One feature of the new legislation is that many judges will be unable or unwilling to complete their 20 years to qualify for a full pension. Under the old scheme, after 10 years the pension is three quarters earned while under the new scheme it will be only half earned. If we take a salary of £64,064, the full pension will be £32,032 for a judge, and £16,016 for his widow, which is not a large sum in current circumstances—certainly not when compared with the sort of earnings and pensions that can be gained in the private sector. If that figure is to be reduced by a quarter, the judge and his wife on his retirement will lose £8,000, and when the judge dies his widow will lose £4,000. The cumulative loss to the widow is enormous. It depends on the date of retirement, but unless the judge has been foolish enough to retire on 31 March, the figure of £8,000 will increase because of the difference between actual pay and pensionable pay.

There are some cases where the new legislation will work to the widow's benefit—for instance, if her husband dies early in service—but there will not be a large number of such cases. In nearly every case, the judges' pension will be less under the new scheme, so the widow should be given compensation by means of a pension that is two-thirds of one half, not half of one half.

The new scheme provides for the lump sum to be two and a quarter times the pension based on the lower figure for pensionable pay, rather than twice the pension based on current pay. That is inadequate compensation for the lost pension. Independent actuaries have informed the judges that it compares badly with the amount given in the private sector. Under a typical private pension scheme for senior employees, the spouse's pension could well be two-thirds, not one half. Even if it were set at a half, the pension would have been at a higher maximum rate than 50 per cent. of the salary. In any scheme which introduces changes such as those proposed by the Government, there are likely to be gainers as well as losers, but it is impossible to believe that there will be many gainers under the Government's proposals, and the widows will be among the losers.

When the subject of the arrangements between the actuaries arose, the actuary for the judges, Mr. Wynne-Griffiths, suggested to the Government's actuaries that there should be some flexibility and some leeway in the system to enable the Government to make a concession to the widows. That was denied at an early stage and then, after the Government actuaries had considered the matter further, they conceded that there was some leeway. Perfectly properly, as one would expect from honourable people—and no doubt on the initiative of the Government, who are totally honourable, if misguided, in such matters—it was agreed that the sum of money seen to be available after a closer consideration of the statistics would enable the Government to give more help to the children. Now, my hon. Friend the Minister says that the package is fiscally neutral. He said that last time, but it was not. How can we be sure that he is any more correct this time than he was last time?

In the past few days, Mr. Wynne-Griffiths has been able to discuss the matter again with the Government's actuaries. It seems that there has been no detailed calculation to prove financial neutrality. All that has happened is that the Government's actuaries have made some computer predictions and Mr. Wynne-Griffiths has produced a further report. I shall not labour the details of that report, which has been sent to my hon. Friend the Minister and will no doubt be studied, if it has not been already, by the Government's actuaries, who will behave with as much honour as they have done in the past. No doubt, when the Government find that they have made an error, they will behave with the same degree of honour as they did over the concession for children.

I am told that amendment No. 22, which we hope will restore the widows to their former position by raising from one half to two-thirds the amount of the widows' pension, would produce about 0·8 per cent. to 1 per cent. of salary. I believe that there would be sufficient leeway in the system to afford the change that I am proposing without breaching the principle of financial neutrality.

It has been said that it has taken the judges' actuary quite some time to obtain the information, but now that the information has been vouchsafed and it is possible to work on the figures, we can see that the injustice to widows which would result from the proposals in the Bill can be corrected. We are talking not about the pension—my hon. Friend has dealt with that matter, which I was unable to press to a Division—but about how the pension will affect the widow. Of the wives of practitioners at the Bar and of judges, most of those whom I have known have been neglected by their husbands, who have been totally preoccupied with their work and service to the community for many years of their life.

If I am right—I have it on the best advice that I am—that a closer analysis of the statistics between the actuaries reveals a sufficient leeway, it follows that, to make the Bill truly fiscally financially neutral, it will be possible to increase the widows' pension. Will my hon. Friend the Minister give an undertaking that he will take a closer look at the subject to see whether the widows can be helped as a result of the new analysis of the figures?

Mr. Roger Evans: This is the one area where the Minister can make a concession in a way that will be appreciated.

We have talked about fiscal neutrality. Usually, when public expenditure proposals are discussed in these terms, we can work out what we are paying and what the proposals are and say that they balance, so they are neutral. This, however, is not such a simple case. It is not a straightforward public expenditure proposal.

We are discussing two potential arrangements for the future: one under existing premises, and a new system under new premises. It is not for us or for the Minister to decide, in that context, what is fiscally neutral. It is a matter of expert actuarial advice; we need the professional expertise to determine what is likely to happen. That sort of professional prediction is not so nice or accurate as not to allow, within the broad contention that this is fiscally neutral, this concession. It is not so expensive as to alter or detract from the essential proposition, which inevitably contains a degree of built-in inaccuracy; it is only an estimate.

Furthermore, the Minister did not answer on the previous amendment the three actuarial criticisms of the calculations, each one of which is worth a great deal more, I am advised, than the sum we are discussing here.

I support what my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) has said, and I urge the Minister to undertake to investigate this actuarial aspect further to see whether he can make some concession on this limited aspect.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Once again, I thank my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) and my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Evans) for their skilful presentation of a case on which they have worked with considerable care.

At the risk of saying it three times, I must repeat that all the information requested by the judiciary or its actuarial advisers has been provided. The circuit bench's actuary had a meeting with the Government Actuary last October. If there were queries about the cost, surely that was the time to raise them—or if not, then at last Friday's meeting, when the gentleman by the name of Mr. Wynne-Griffiths cried off. None of us seems to know why, but I am sure that he did.

I am reluctant to say this but I must: the paper prepared by Mr. Wynne-Griffiths contained a number of factual inaccuracies. For instance, the detailed calculations have not been made; it contains flawed logic in its actuarial approach—for instance, that a change in the financial assumptions would have a significant effect in releasing a margin for further benefit improvements. The judiciary's actuarial adviser also assumed that there was a bunching of retirements in April under the present arrangements. The information on retirements shows that that is not so.

Mr. Wynne-Griffiths' paper also contained an apparent error in the actuarial costings. For example, the cost of improving the spouse's benefit from a half to two thirds appears to have underestimated the true cost by a margin of 50 per cent. The actuarial adviser to the circuit judges has acknowledged that he has not made any detailed calculations, but the Government Actuary has assessed the cost at just over 2 per cent. of pay.

Given the number of errors and flaws in Mr. Wynne-Griffiths' paper, the Government do not place too much reliance on the validity of the circuit judges' actuarial advisers. In short, the paper fails to impress.

8.15 pm

As for the selected date, I should point out to the House —it was also pointed out to Mr. Wynne-Griffiths—that the comparative tables that we have provided are not, as he suggested, misleading. The footnotes make quite clear the assumptions on which they are based, and the covering letter from the Lord Chancellor specifically drew attention to them. Some date for comparison had to be chosen, and 31 March was chosen precisely because it is the only date when the starting point for the remuneration part of the pension calculation under the various schemes is the same.

The point of introducing the concept of pensionable pay is not to make savings for the Treasury but, as is accepted elsewhere, to iron out an injustice. As I have already said, there is no evidence of any bunching of retirements on or around 1 April.

My hon. and learned Friend and my hon. Friend have assumed that we have created some headroom in the system. If there were any headroom, I can assure them that it would have been amply absorbed by the nine changes under the scheme which involve an increase in value to the beneficiaries. Lump sum retirement benefits are increased from twice to two and a quarter times pension. Lump sum death benefit in service is increased from once to twice pay. Service enhancements applying to death in service or on ill health retirement are introduced, to reckon one-half of potential service to age 65. As the pension comparison tables show, that is better at most durations than the position under current schemes.

Maximum pension age is reduced to 70 and opportunities to retire on pension aged 65, or with actuarially reduced pension from the age of 60, are introduced. Contributions from members of the higher judiciary are reduced from 4 per cent. of pay to 3 per cent. of pay. No deductions from lump sum benefits in respect of outstanding contributions for spouses' benefits are to be made. There will be an integrated pension scheme for the whole judiciary, with no loss of benefit expectations on promotion. The list continues with the improvement of eligibility for children's benefits and the lump sum death benefit after retirement improved to a balance of five times pension.

I did not embark on this litany inadvertently. I thought that this Report stage of an extremely important Bill was a crucial moment to put some of these matters on record. Although not many hon. Members are in the Chamber now, this debate will have, if not a wide, then a learned readership tomorrow morning, and the Government are entitled to put the basis of their case on record even if that involves slightly delaying the House.

I should like strongly to rebut the idea that the Government are seeking to do judges or their spouses out of part of their pensions. No husband or wife of a serving judge will lose out as a result of the Bill, because membership of the new pension arrangements is entirely voluntary. No serving judge will be forced to join the scheme.

The spouse's pension is half the deceased scheme member's pension under both the existing and the new arrangements; the Bill, therefore, makes no change to the method by which the surviving spouse's pension is to be calculated, save to provide for its enhancement in the event of a judge's death in service. Many Members will have seen the tables prepared by the Government Actuary's department comparing the level of benefits which can be obtained from the existing and proposed arrangements. These demonstrate that there are circumstances when one arrangement provides a higher level of benefit than the other arrangement, and vice versa. This should come as no surprise to anyone; it is the inevitable result of making changes to a pension scheme while keeping the overall cost the same. No savings whatever are expected to be made by the Exchequer as a result of these changes.

It has always been the Government's intention that the changes to the judicial pension arrangements should have no effect on their overall cost. If we are to keep to this aim, then this amendment could be accepted only if corresponding reductions were made to the level of benefits elsewhere in the scheme to offset the increased cost of providing spouses' pensions. The cost of this amendment would be slightly over 2 per cent. of the judicial payroll, so the adjustments to other benefit levels would be severe. I do not believe that my hon. and learned Friend and my hon. Friend would win much support from members of the judiciary who will become members of this scheme if they forced us to travel that road.

We should be considering the value of the surviving spouse's pension to the surviving spouse, and how it compares with that provided by other schemes. It has been argued that a spouse's pension of two thirds of the scheme member's pension is common in the private sector. I am informed by the Government Actuary's department that that is not true. It is most unusual for any pension scheme to provide a spouse's pension at that level. The typical private sector occupational pension scheme provides a spouse's pension of about only 17 per cent. of a member's pensionable pay after 20 years' service, compared with 25 per cent. of pensionable pay provided by the new judicial pension arrangements after the same period of service. That, incidentally, is identical to the level of spouse's pension, expressed as a percentage of pensionable pay, payable to the widow or widower of an hon. Member after the same period of service. I am mildly surprised that it should be implied that benefits that the House considers good enough for the spouses of Members are less than sufficient for the spouse of a deceased judge.

When one considers other public service pension schemes, one finds that the attractiveness of the benefits offered by the new judicial pension arrangements becomes more apparent. The usual benefit payable to the surviving spouse of a member of a typical public service pension scheme after 20 years is only 12·5 per cent. of pensionable pay—half the value of the Members' and judges' scheme. This disparity is justified by the unusual career patterns of the judiciary and Members of Parliament, and the Government believe that that treatment is generous enough.

The new judicial pension arrangements provide for a fair and attractive level of surviving spouse's pension, and I must ask the House to reject the amendment.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: I am sorry that under our system Mr. Wynne-Griffiths, a senior partner in a well-established and successful firm of actuaries, is not able to defend himself here from the critical comments of my hon. Friend the Minister.

I am not able to go into the details of conversations, letters and telephone calls between the Government's actuaries and the actuary acting on behalf of the judges, but when it was said that the Bill was financially neutral Mr. Wynne-Griffiths corrected that assertion, having presented his own figures without—I do not go into the reasons—being able to see all the conclusions on which the Government based their statistics. He drew to the Government's attention the fact that the Bill was not financially neutral and that there was some leeway. Having considered the point, the Government's actuaries agreed that Mr. Wynne-Griffiths was right. A small concession was given to children, for which the judges are extremely grateful. I understand that that resulted from Mr. Wynne-Griffiths's skill, knowledge and wisdom, and if my hon. Friend the Minister is not able to give credit where it is due I am sorry.

I am sorry, too, that my hon. Friend the Minister did not feel that it was appropriate to say, "We are in the world of mystery of the actuary". I suppose that actuaries are much like economists. About 360 economists wrote to say that some aspect of Government economic policy was wrong, but they did not apologise when it was discovered that they were all wrong. I suppose that, like economists, actuaries are capable of error in the conclusions that they draw from statistics. They are probably no different from anybody else, and I hope that they are not. I hope that they are human and that they understand these matters.

It is not for my hon. Friend the Minister or me—we are not actuaries and we do not understand their world—to join the detailed argument, but I have quoted some alarming figures showing how much a widow may lose. I hoped that my hon. Friend might find it—I hesitate to say in his heart, as Ministers are not supposed to have hearts—within his generous personality and capability to say, "We shall look at these figures again. We shall arrange a meeting between Mr. Wynne-Griffiths, the actuaries and the Government Actuary and if, after a closer look, it appears that what was unthinkable last time but which proved to be so and what is unthinkable now turns out so, we shall, because we wish to do no harm to widows, see whether an improvement can be made in the provision for widows."

Mr. John M. Taylor: I should like to say, for the sake of the record, that the improvements made to benefits and designs, to which my hon. and learned Friend referred, were made by the Government in response not, I am afraid, to arguments advanced by the gentleman whose name has been referred to more than once this evening but to representations in the other place.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: I am instructed that those improvements were possible only because leeway was discovered in the financial arrangements. That was discovered not by politicians or lawyers but by actuaries on the prompting of Mr. Wynne-Griffiths. All I am saying is that if there is a conflict between the actuaries it should be thoroughly considered to ensure that a widow, or perhaps a substantial number of widows, does not suffer loss because of the Government's proposals for equalising the law of pensions for judges.

Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister, once he has read this interesting debate, will think again before their Lordships consider our amendments, which I shall not oppose, to see whether widows can be helped. I am sure that it is the wish of the entire House that they should be helped. I see no response from my hon. Friend the Minister, and in the absence, again, of support from the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) and the serried ranks of Opposition Members, who I would have thought, on a matter of widows if not judges, would have had some reason for saying, "Yes, we support the case that you are advancing", I face up to reality and realise that this is not a matter to be pressed to a vote. One is never too surprised at things that happen in this place. I hope that the biggest surprise will be when my hon. Friend the Minister causes some change to be considered for the future. Having said that, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 10

ADDITIONAL BENEFITS FROM VOLUNTARY CONTRIBUTIONS

Amendments made: No. 1, in page 13, line 36, at end insert

'or, in relation to Northern Ireland, Article 2(2) of the Social Security (Northern Ireland) Order 1975;'.

No. 2, in page 13, line 38, at end insert

'or, in relation to Northern Ireland, Article 2(2) of the Social Security Pensions (Northern Ireland) Order 1986;'.—*[Mr. John M. Taylor.]*

Clause 26

RETIREMENT DATE FOR HOLDERS OF CERTAIN JUDICIAL OFFICES ETC

8.30 pm

Amendments made: No. 3, in page 24, line 41, after 'order' insert '(a)'.

No. 4, in page 24, line 42, at end insert

'; or

(b) amend subsection (8) above by adding offices to those for the time being specified in that subsection.'.—*[Mr. John M. Taylor.]*

Schedule 2

TRANSFER OF ACCRUED BENEFITS

Amendment made: No. 5 in page 32, line 40, at end insert—

' "occupational pension scheme" has the meaning given by section 66(1) of the Social Security Pensions Act 1975 or, in relation to Northern Ireland, Article 2(2) of the Social Security Pensions (Northern Ireland) Order 1975;

"personal pension scheme" has the meaning given by section 84(1) of the Social Security Act 1986 or, in relation to Northern Ireland, Article 2(2) of the Social Security (Northern Ireland) Order 1986;'.—*[Mr. John M. Taylor.]*

Schedule 3

CORRESPONDING MINOR AMENDMENTS TO OTHER PENSIONS ENACTMENTS

Amendments made: No. 6, in page 41, line 14, at end insert

'or, in relation to Northern Ireland, Article 2(2) of the Social Security Pensions (Northern Ireland) Order 1975;'.

No. 7, in page 41, line 16, at end insert

'or, in relation to Northern Ireland, Article 2(2) of the Social Security (Northern Ireland) Order 1986;'.—*[Mr. John M. Taylor.]*

Schedule 4

PENSIONS FOR SENIOR PUBLIC INVESTIGATIVE OFFICERS

Amendments made: No. 8, in page 49, line 29, leave out 'and'.

No. 9, in page 49, line 32, at end insert

'and

(d) for the purpose of determining, in the event of his death, the rate of any surviving spouse's or children's pension payable under sections 5 to 8 of that Act in respect of his service as Comptroller, as if references in those sections to the annual rate of the deceased's judicial pension were references—

(i) where a pension had commenced to be paid to him by virtue of subsection (5) above, to the appropriate annual rate of that pension; or

(ii) where no such pension had commenced to be paid to him, to the rate that would have been the appropriate annual rate of the pension payable to him by virtue of subsection (5)(b) above, had he not died, but been disabled by permanent infirmity for the performance of the duties of his office on and after the date of death;'.

No. 10, in page 49, line 35, leave out from 'sections' to end of line 36.

No. 11, in page 52, line 31, leave out 'and'.

No. 12 in page 52, line 34, at end insert

'and

(d) for the purpose of determining, in the event of his death, the rate of any surviving spouse's or children's pension payable under sections 5 to 8 of that Act in respect of his service as Commissioner, as if references in those sections to the annual rate of the deceased's judicial pension were references—

(i) where a pension had commenced to be paid to him by virtue of sub-paragraph (1) above, to the appropriate annual rate of that pension; or

(ii) where no such pension had commenced to be paid to him, to the rate that would have been the appropriate annual rate of the pension payable to him by virtue of sub-paragraph (1)(b) above, had he not died, but been disabled by permanent infirmity for the performance of the duties of his office on and after the date of death;'.

No. 13, in page 52, line 37, leave out from 'sections' to '13' in line 38.

No. 14, in page 56, line 43, leave out 'and'.

No. 15, in page 56, line 46, at end insert

'and

(d) for the purpose of determining, in the event of his death, the rate of any surviving spouse's or children's pension payable under sections 5 to 8 of that Act in respect of his service as Comptroller and Auditor General, as if references in those sections to the annual rate of the deceased's judicial pension were references—

(i) where a pension had commenced to be paid to him by virtue of paragraph (4), to the appropriate annual rate of that pension; or

(ii) where no such pension had commenced to be paid to him, to the rate that would have been the appropriate annual rate of the pension payable to him by virtue of paragraph (4)(b), had he not died, but been disabled by permanent infirmity for the performance of the duties of his office on and after the date of death;'.

No. 16, in page 56, line 49, leave out from 'sections' to '13' in line 50.

No. 17, in page 59, line 40, leave out 'and'.

No. 18, in page 59, line 43, at end insert

'and

(d) for the purpose of determining, in the event of his death, the rate of any surviving spouse's or children's pension payable under sections 5 to 8 of that Act in respect of his service as Commissioner, as if references in those sections to the annual rate of the deceased's judicial pension were references—

(i) where a pension had commenced to be paid to him by virtue of sub-paragraph (1), to the appropriate annual rate of that pension; or

(ii) where no such pension had commenced to be paid to him, to the rate that would have been the appropriate annual rate of the pension payable to him by virtue of sub-paragraph (1)(b), had he not died, but been disabled by permanent infirmity for the performance of the duties of his office on and after the date of death;'.

No. 19, in page 59, line 46, leave out from 'sections' to '13' in line 47.—*[Mr. John M. Taylor.]*

Schedule 8

MINOR AND CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendment made: No. 20, in page 91, line 31, leave out from 'words' to end of line 33 and insert

"'qualifying judicial office, within the meaning of the Judicial Pensions and Retirement Act 1993.".'.—*[Mr. John M. Taylor.]*

Order for Third Reading read.

8.30 pm

Mr. John M. Taylor: I beg to move, That the Bill now be read the Third time.

I do not wish to speak at any great length at this point in the proceedings, but would like to comment on one or two matters before we bring our consideration of the Bill to a close.

The occasion for the Bill was the change in the tax treatment of pension schemes introduced by the Finance Acts of 1987 and 1989. That legislation provided the means by which the Revenue applied common standards to all modern occupational pension schemes. Those standards were not applied to the judicial pension schemes. However, there was a thorough-going review of those schemes and consultation with the judiciary on the design of improved pension arrangements. The Bill is the product of that review and consultation. Its provisions

[Mr. John M. Taylor]

apply the same standards to judicial pension arrangements as the Revenue applies to all other public service and private sector occupational pension schemes. It brings judicial pension arrangements more into line with modern tax law.

The Government have also taken this opportunity to make a number of other significant changes to the judicial pension arrangements. In place of a plethora of judicial pension schemes with different accrual periods, contribution rates and benefit levels, they have created a unified scheme embracing all salaried judicial officers in the United Kingdom. As well as being inherently fairer than the existing position, this will remove the barriers which the current arrangements place in the way of judges moving between the different levels of the judiciary on promotion. Following representations, the Bill was amended by the Government in several important respects in the other place further to improve the level of benefits it provides. The judicial pension arrangements provided by the Bill now constitute an attractive package which compares favourably with other public service and private sector occupational pension schemes.

The Bill also makes provision, following consultation, for setting a new general retirement age of 70 for all judicial officers first appointed after the Bill comes into force. That uniform arrangement will replace the present variety of retirement ages. The choice of the age of 70 instead of another age has not been without its critics. The right retirement age for the judiciary is clearly a matter of judgment. It is the Government's view, however, that 70 is the appropriate age; it takes account both of the need for experience and maturity of judgment and the fact that the burdens of office can be onerous.

I think that it is right at this stage of the Bill to say a quick word about commencement. If the Bill is given a Third Reading, completes its final stage in the other place and goes on to receive Royal Assent, there will still be a considerable amount of work to be done in the form of regulations—many of an actuarial nature—before it can be fully implemented. It is my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor's present intention that both the pensions and retirement provisions of the Bill be commenced simultaneously. However, in view of the work I have just mentioned, it is unlikely that the Bill can be brought into force much before the end of 1993.

Finally, I would like to thank all those on both sides of the House who have contributed to our debates on this Bill. It has provided an opportunity for hon. and right hon. Members to raise a wide range of issues relating to the judiciary, many of which have proved of great interest. I commend the Bill to the House.

8.34 pm

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): Having given such detailed and lengthy consideration—for which we are indebted to the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence)—to the special interests of the judges, it is right that we should spend at least some time considering what is perhaps the most important interest of all in judicial and legal services, the public and consumer interest. I shall address myself to those matters.

The Government have missed an opportunity. We hoped that they would go much further than they did and that the House would consider the subject of judicial services. The quality of those services remains high and the intellect of those who work in them is, in the main, without parallel in the jurisdiction of the EEC and further still. We could have examined how judicial services might be improved and enhanced in the interests of the consumer. We hoped that we would address the issue of a younger judiciary and the means by which we could encourage the appointment, at an earlier age, of suitably qualified practitioners, be they barristers, solicitors or academics drawn from either branch, and how we might so arrange pensions to enable that to happen.

The Government missed the opportunity but at the same time increased the required length of service to qualify for a judicial pension and reduced the age of retirement to 70. They failed to incorporate into the Bill any positive measures to encourage the appointment of younger people to the bench. They failed to respond to the desirability of reducing the retirement age still further and making it, as both the Bar and the Law Society and a broad cross-section of consumer interests have suggested, 65 rather than 70. We regret the missed opportunity.

In Committee, we tried to persuade the Government of the wisdom of our case to reduce the retirement age. They failed to be persuaded, and the Bill is flawed. It will remain flawed as a recipe for a judiciary in tune with the times and capable of meeting their challenges. The important issue must be addressed, together with another issue touched on by the hon. and learned Member for Burton, but then drawn away from as if one had spoken of an unpleasant heresy, and that is the notion that it might just be possible to conceive of a judiciary in which there were opportunities for the development of a career. I have in mind a judicial service in which it might be possible to appoint practitioners in their late thirties, or in their forties, to the junior ranks of the judiciary, and then see them advance up the scale to the highest judicial offices. The Bill recognises the importance and possibility of the portability of pensions, and that is to be supported and commended, but it does nothing to recognise and encourage the desirability of appointing practitioners to the bench at a younger age and providing a career structure that will enable them to advance within it.

I do not see why we should accept as holy writ the notion propounded by the hon. and learned Member for Burton that someone at the Bar is automatically qualified for the judiciary when he or she is earning about £200,000 a year. He seemed to suggest that a practitioner should be earning that sort of sum before he or she could be considered qualified for judicial appointment. The hon. and learned Gentleman clearly practises in a different world from that occupied by myself and other humble practitioners. The notion that only when a practitioner earns £200,000 a year is he or she qualified to make the supreme sacrifice of entering the judiciary is palpably absurd. It does not bear examination.

I wish to do nothing at this late stage of our consideration of the Bill to excite the hon. and learned Gentleman. I hope in due course to be able to make much more common cause with him on the issue of legal aid.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: If there is a difference between my earnings at the bar and those of the hon. Gentleman, it is because I have been at it, as it were, a bit longer than he. I have no doubt that in due course he will earn the highest amounts possible under the legal aid system. I can assure him that they will not come to anything like £200,000 a year. I quoted that figure as an example of what some of the best practitioners—the most experienced and successful—earn in some branches of the law.

The hon. Gentleman might agree with me that many of those who are appointed to the circuit beench have not been privileged to earn £200,000 a year. Their earnings before appointment have been substantially lower. They have been unable to accumulate a pension outside the judiciary that would enable them to make a substantial enough contribution to make becoming a judge worth while.

Mr. Boateng: Quite so. I am sure that the hon. and learned Gentleman read the reports of our Committee proceedings. I made that point about earnings then.

It would be dangerous for those who take an interest in our proceedings outside the House and who are not lawyers to gain the impression that only practitioners who earn the sort of sum that the hon. and learned Gentleman has seen fit to quote would be qualified for entry to the judiciary. A progressive approach to judicial appointments must be one that seeks to encourage the broadest possible cross-section of practitioners, people with different skills and experience but suitably qualified. There must be the broadest ranges of ages and gender. In that regard, we cannot afford any complacency.

At a time when there is considerable public interest in the judiciary and legal services generally, it is right that there should be a public debate about the composition of the judiciary, how training might be enhanced and how appointments might be made more transparent. We examined those issues in Committee. We pressed—we shall continue to do so—the value of a lay element. It is a matter of deep regret to Opposition Members that in Committee——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. A debate on Third Reading must be confined to what is in the Bill. It is not the time to talk about what is not in it or what should be in it.

Mr. Boateng: Quite so, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I invite the attention of the House to clause 11.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones): Must the hon. Gentleman?

Mr. Boateng: The right hon. Gentleman has every reason to be tired, given the events of recent months. I have in mind especially his recent exposure to lawyers over international treaty organisations. I well understand why he is reluctant to embark upon a detailed study of the Bill. I must, however, tax him just a little and add to the woes that befall him.

When we consider the clauses that relate to the entitlement to a pension of holders of judicial office, it is interesting to reflect on their impact on the opportunities and entitlements of women who, against the odds, achieve judicial office. There is still an imbalance against women in the appointment of and to the judiciary. The relevant clauses will still further disadvantage women who rise to judicial appointments unless there is a policy that positively seeks out women entrants. I have in mind a policy that encourages practitioners to enter the judiciary at an earlier age, and one that will have more women members. Such a judiciary would be better qualified to command the wholehearted confidence of the public. I say that from the point of view of the Lord Chancellor's Department and of those responsible for appointing judges.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will want to know that the Lord Chancellor has stated his policy on judicial appointments in these terms—that while it must be the best who are appointed, none the less he wants more women and representatives of ethnic minorities to be appointed. Optimistically, as more women and people from ethnic minorities are recruited into the legal profession, it will not be long before they are at an age in the recruiting grounds when they can be promoted. I think that the hon. Gentleman will welcome that, as I do.

Mr. Boateng: It is always encouraging to hear such sentiments being expressed by the Minister, echoing what I know to be the Lord Chancellor's sincerely held belief, to which he has sought ably to give effect during recent years. However, there is no room for complacency, which is why we have been concerned to ensure that that matter is taken on board.

It is possible and desirable to have a more ethnic and gender-varied bench which in every way represents the community that it serves not only through talent and intellectual achievement, but through race and gender make-up. It is eminently desirable that we take that into account during our consideration of the Bill.

We doubt that the Bill would have come before the House in its present form had it been the subject of consultation with and input from a far broader range of interests. That is why it is so important to take account of consumer interests. Time and again we have spoken about the deficiencies in policy making within the Lord Chancellor's Department—the shapers of the Bill—when there is no involvement, as of right, for the consumers of legal services. The judiciary provides a valuable public service. Although standards of integrity and intellect are of the highest, we shall continue to press for judicial services that are more shaped by lay involvement through appointments, that are enhanced by training opportunities linked to a career structure, and that are underpinned by pension arrangements of the sort outlined in the Bill. At the same time, we want a judiciary that is more diverse and whose members retire earlier than at present.

We will not divide the House on Third Reading. We want to extend our thanks to the Minister and those hon. Members on both sides of the House who served on the Committee. We also thank the Chairman and the Officers of the House. We owe them a debt of thanks for a course of deliberation that has been enlightening and entertaining and whose ultimate conclusion, while by no means perfect, is livable with.

8.54 pm

Sir Ivan Lawrence: Unusually, I agree with a great deal of what the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) said. There is obviously a high degree of cross-party unity on the Bill. The fact that we have concentrated on the Bill's drawbacks should not hide from the public the fact that, in general, the Bill has been widely welcomed for its important provisions, which will improve the system.

It is only right to point out—it may not have been apparent from anything said this evening—that some very distinguished and eminent people have opposed certain

[Sir Ivan Lawrence]

elements of the Bill. The Lord Chief Justice made his maiden speech opposing elements of the Bill. A former Lord Chancellor, some Law Lords and a former Master of the Rolls all made speeches opposing certain elements of the Bill. It has not been widely welcomed in all its features.

The circuit judges have done a great deal to advance the argument for widows' and other pensions, although they were not alone in that. When we stand back and look at the current position it is obvious that the major vice of the Bill is, as was said in another place, the combination of reducing the retiring age for judges and increasing the accrual rate for earning a pension.

The Bill was summed up in the other place by, I think, the Lord Chief Justice—although it may have been one of the other judges—as something that would produce serious problems of recruitment, judicial staleness and injustice, and not a Bill that should command, in all its aspects, universal support—not only among lawyers but among all who consider the logical and reasonable criticisms that have been levelled against it.

It is obvious that young people in their early years of practice at the Bar, who are trying to pay off a mortgage and who have substantial expenses if they are educating their children, cannot build up private pensions that are adequate to supplement the pension that a judge will earn at the end of his long period of accrual. There are distinctive features of practice at the Bar and on the bench that are not wholly comparable with life outside. For someone who becomes a judge, it is a whole new profession begun in late middle age. That is the real anomaly about the judiciary, not the fact that the accrual rates vary from one sort of judge to another.

I do not believe that the Government have given enough attention to the judiciary's concern about the future of the judicial profession, and about how much more difficult it will be in the new, hectic litigious world to find judges of calibre and to attract them. If they are of great calibre and are attracted, the calibre of the Bar will be depleted; if they are of calibre and lose their calibre, they will be encouraged to stay on past their sell-by date—their date of efficiency—to qualify for a pension.

Let me make a point that I did not make in my earlier speech, when I was trying to speak as briefly as possible in order not to weary the House. I was stunned by both the comments of the hon. Member for Brent, South and those of my hon. Friend the Minister about women. How on earth can we pretend that we are creating a system in which women will find it more attractive to be judges, while ensuring that, by the time they get on to the bench and have served a period as judge, they will not be able to earn a full pension unless they stay on for much longer than they need or ought to? In the early stages of their lives, such women may have raised families. They may have been out of Bar practice for years, while others will have been accruing private pensions to be added to the pensions that they will receive as judges.

What on earth will be the temptation for those women to follow the judicial path later in life, knowing that they will be so much worse off finanically at the end? It is all very well having pious ideas about how, in the future, there will be more women barristers—if they can find chambers and stay at the Bar, and if they have not been channelled into some other occupation, such as the Crown prosecution service or the solicitors' profession, because it is no longer particularly attractive to stay at the Bar—if they are then given a disincentive to follow a judicial career because their incomes will be reduced from the moment that they take a pension.

Actuaries may look at their figures; Governments, with the help of the Treasury, may examine their financial disbursements. Ultimately, however, we must have a judicial system that contains the best people. We want a judicial system with women—and women will not be encouraged to become judges as a result of proposals such as this.

I wish the Bill godspeed, but I wish that my hon. Friend and the Lord Chancellor had given more serious consideration to the criticisms levelled against it by the most senior judges in the land. They were not talking nonsense. I hope that, when we look back on the legislation in a few years' time, we shall have no cause to regret the decisions that my hon. Friend and the Government have made—quite stubbornly—to proceed with their original plan.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (Standing Committees on European Community documents),

RISK PREVENTION OFFICERS IN THE TRANSPORT INDUSTRY

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 8642/92, relating to risk prevention officers in the transport industry; notes that the proposed draft Directive conflicts with existing national and international legislation in the field of health and safety at work; and endorses the Government's intention to seek substantial amendments to the wording of the draft Directive with the aim of maintaining existing health and safety levels.—*[Mr. Robert G. Hughes.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (Standing Committees on European Community documents),

RESTRUCTURING OF THE SPANISH STEEL INDUSTRY

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 9766/92, relating to the restructuring of the Spanish integrated steel company Corporación de la Siderurgia Integral (CSI), and 10341/92, relating to the restructuring of the Spanish steel company Sidenor; and supports the Government's view that the Spanish proposals are inappropriate given the scale and timing of the capacity reductions proposed, the amount of state aid involved and the problems of over-capacity and depressed prices facing the Community steel industry.—*[Mr. Robert G. Hughes.]*

Question agreed to.

Drancy Concentration Camp

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Robert G. Hughes.]*

9.2 pm

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): I thank the Minister of State for being present. I think that he, like me, will be relieved that the debate is starting an hour earlier than the scheduled time for its commencement; he is probably also relieved to know that neither the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth)—who hopes to speak in the debate—nor I intend to detain the House until its possible rising time of 10.30 pm.

It is worth reflecting that, even if the powers of Back Benchers are limited, we at least have the opportunity to be bloody minded and persistent in pursuing issues when we believe that a grave injustice, or even a miscarriage of justice, has been perpetrated. For close on 50 years, the issue that I raise tonight has eaten away at the men whose cases I shall cite. Although they are in no way bitter, they have never accepted, and will never accept, decisions that have compounded their burning sense of injustice and grievance.

Appropriately, the debate comes as we prepare to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the battle of the Atlantic, and the deaths of some 39,000 merchant seamen, whose sacrifice in the service of this nation has so often been overlooked. The debate also presents an opportunity for Ministers to conclude, properly and honourably, what I regard as unfinished business.

It was the late Airey Neave, so cruelly assassinated on the day after I was elected to the House in 1979, who on 15 July 1963 raised the treatment of merchant seamen on the Adjournment of the House. He said that the Foreign Office had been dilatory in dealing with these cases. His complaint was that, having raised the issue in 1956, it had taken until July 1963 to get adequate responses out of the Foreign Office. He said:

> "I know he is undertaking delicate and difficult negotiations,"—

he was talking about the then Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs—

> "but I should like to know how he is getting on with them, because I feel that this really is a deserving case, and one in which people really have received very inadequate treatment from the Foreign Office and who deserve indemnity or compensation for the indignities which they suffered. This is not entirely a question of money. It is also a question of loss of prestige and dignity as a result of being placed in these concentration camps."

Those are sentiments that my constituents whose cases I am raising tonight share, but for them it is not simply a question of money. It is a question of dignity and prestige. During that debate Airey Neave said:

> "A number of prisoners-of-war—merchant seamen and others—were moved to concentration camps quite illegally, and it is my view—and, I believe, the view of the Foreign Office—that they should be compensated for what they have suffered."—*[Official Report,* 15 July 1963; Vol. 681, c. 297-99.]

During that debate in the 1960s, Airey Neave protested vigorously at that 20-year delay in establishing a compensation fund for victims of Nazi persecution.

It was to take another 12 months before the then Foreign Secretary, R. A. Butler, told the House on 9 June 1964 that a £1 million compensation fund had been established. In answer to the Member of Parliament for Huyton—the hon. Member for Knowsley, North now represents much of what was then the constituency of Lord Wilson—he said:

> "The term 'Nazi persecution' is taken to cover any area in which Nazi persecution took place."

In that debate, many hon. Members queried the sum of money made available as inadequate. They said that it was unlikely that it would be sufficient to meet the likely claims. The Foreign Secretary demurred but agreed that

> "Reopening the matter is for the House".—*[Official Report,* 9 July 1964; Vol. 696, c. 244-46.]

On 15 June 1964 he added that

> "Claims arising out of contravention of the Geneva Convention as such are not included, and remain for consideration only in the context of a final peace settlement."—*[Official Report,* 15 June 1964; Vol. 696, c. *123*.]

Any hopes of that happening were dashed, as was explained to me in a letter from the Minister of State on 4 June 1992. He said:

> "The Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany, signed at Moscow on 12 September 1990, by the four Wartime Allies and Germany, definitively settled matters arising out the Second World War. There will be no separate peace treaty. I am afraid we see no possibility of a case such as Mr. Roberts' now forming the basis of a successful claim for compensation. Servicemen were, and are, entitled to disability pensions for any illness or disability they suffered as a result of serving with the Forces, and many receive such pensions. It would appear Mr. Roberts' claim for compensation as a victim of Nazi persecution was considered in 1964 and the request turned down, presumably on the grounds that Drancy was not a concentration camp."

As that quotation from the Minister of State's letter reveals, one of those who applied for compensation under the scheme which R. A. Butler revealed to the House in 1964 was Mr. Ted Roberts of Aigburth, Liverpool. His compatriots, Mr. Arthur Thomas, also a constituent of mine, of Edge Hill, Liverpool, and Mr. Thomas Roscoe of Allerton, Liverpool, were never even informed of their right to reply, although both Mr. Thomas and Mr. Roscoe have been given small disability entitlements, due to the adverse effects on their health, which doctors confirm are directly attributable to the privations that they suffered during captivity. I know that it is the intention of the hon. Member for Knowsley, North—if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker—also to raise the case of Stanley Cruces, one of his constituents, who was in the same position as Mr. Roscoe and Mr. Thomas in not knowing of his right to make an application for compensation.

However, Mr. Ted Roberts did apply for compensation and he was refused because, he was told at the time, Drancy was not regarded as a concentration camp. It would be useful for the House to hear directly from Mr. Roberts with whom I have shared the correspondence that I have received and I am grateful to the Minister of State for the trouble that he has taken in respect of the replies that he has sent to me. He certainly cannot be regarded as dilatory in replying to correspondence that I have raised with him over the past several months.

In a letter to me, Mr. Roberts stated:

> "Mr. Garel-Jones should realise that we—the merchant seamen—had been up to five months at sea as German prisoners, the conditions were appalling—lack of water, food, air and light. We were lousy with sores, exhausted and knowing that our very existence could end suddenly, not having a chance to fight the enemy, but entombed in quarters that could be described as a steel coffin that could be pierced by a shell or torpedo, engulfed in fire or flooded with water at any time. In this torrid atmosphere, we had no books or any kind of recreation, anticipating in a state of utter despair the manner of our final exit. I can understand the fear and the

[Mr. David Alton]

hopelessness of the Jews, Russians, Poles and others in camps such as those in Poland particularly. The difference between us was that we did survive, to land on terra firma.

We were dumped without ceremony in Drancy in late December 1940. We had air, we saw the sun, we had water (of doubtful purity), but we had no contact with the Red Cross. We never received, nor were we allowed, to send letters to anyone, including parents. The Geneva Convention was not upheld. We were not prisoners of war, but civilian internees. In this camp we were simply scavengers living somehow from day to day, wondering about the next bite, like dogs with a bone. We hid or carried our life sustenance in our pockets."

Mr. Roberts continues:

"Drancy was an unfinished housing complex, no windows were installed and floors were of concrete. Our quarters were on the upper floors. We had straw mattresses on the concrete, few clothes and one thin blanket. On one of the floors above we came across some old French army coats which relieved the cold somewhat. The toilets were in the middle of the square. Behind the toilet seats excrement was piled high to the roof.

We left Drancy for Sandbostel. We travelled in cattle trucks; food was very short and water was not available. Our latrine bucket was filled once (at Aachen) during our three day journey. Five months in Drancy! Five months at sea, which was worst of all, and then Sandbostel to watch the dying, the dead, the arrogance and the cruelty of our keepers —barracks alive with bugs. Typhus broke out in the Russian section where the French kitchens were. We collected our soap in the Russian sector and the British walked through this sector daily to work near the Russians digging peat. We arrived at Milag Nord, 20 km away, in early 1942. This was a recognised camp."

In 1965, Mr. Roberts saw his then Member of Parliament, Mr. Richard Bingham, the then Member for Garston, who received a reply from the then Foreign Office Minister, Walter Padley, who repeated that Drancy was not a concentration camp. He said:

"the question of compensation for internment could be raised only in the context of an eventual Peace Treaty with a united Germany."

Reunification in 1990 and the continued failure to address their burning sense of grievance brought Mr. Roberts, Mr. Thomas and Mr. Roscoe to see me last summer. In several exchanges of letters since then, Ministers have doggedly refused to reopen the files or to agree to an independent arbiter to examine the case. Therefore, I tabled a series of questions and sought leave to raise them here tonight.

Initially, Ministers refused to accept that Drancy had ever been a concentration camp, saying that it was just a transit camp. It is worth recalling that Belsen was simply described as an infirmary. In setting out tonight a personal and full account of what Mr. Roberts and others experienced at Drancy, I hope that it will lay to rest once and for all the idea that Drancy was anything other than the worst kind of camp that the SS ran.

I wrote to the German Government and received a very interesting reply. Despite all that the British Government had said in maintaining that Drancy was not at any time a concentration camp, in reply to me on 13 August 1992, Helmut Wegner, the Minister Plenipotentiary at the German embassy in London, wrote to me stating that his Government confirmed that in the "Bundegesetzblatt"—the official gazette—Drancy is listed in the published list of concentration camps. The Israeli Government, at the Yad Yashem memorial in Jerusalem, which I visited at the end of last year—the memorial to holocaust victims—also list Drancy as a concentration camp. In 1952, President de Gaulle unveiled a plaque commemorating the victims of the Drancy concentration camp.

The Foreign Office, in disputing the classification of Drancy, also says that it consulted the Weiner office library which specialises in the subject of the holocaust and that it claimed that the Weiner library did not classify Drancy as a concentration camp. However, I contacted the library and it denied that. It said that it most certainly did classify it as a concentration camp. Her Majesty's Government alone have never accepted the classification of Drancy as a concentration camp.

By the autumn of last year, the line of argument had begun to change, with Ministers stating that, even if Drancy had been a camp, my constituents had been there several weeks too early. Although that might be the case with Mr. Roberts and with Mr. Thomas, it certainly does not appear to be the case with Mr. Roscoe, who was detained there at a later period. By the winter, in a letter of 22 December last, the Minister of State was adamant that

"severe hardship did not ipso facto qualify. The only tribunal competent to examine such claims was set up between 1964-66, the one which considered Mr. Roberts' case. It no longer exists; the lists are closed, the money is gone. Cases cannot be re-considered, nor new cases admitted at this late stage."

But surely it is a matter not of late stages but of honour. If there has been an injustice, Ministers have a duty to reconsider that matter at whatever stage it may come. Whatever Drancy's status, the guidance notes issued to claimants said that those detained in concentration camps

"or in any institution where the conditions were comparable with those in a concentration camp"

would qualify.

All the theological arguments about how many angels there might be on the top of a pin are pretty irrelevant when it comes to whether Drancy was a concentration camp during the period when my constituents were there, even though the accounts that I have given the House tonight and the accounts that I have sent to Ministers certainly seem to dispute the advice that Ministers now give and that their predecessors gave. They were victims of Nazi persecution and they clearly languished in the most terrible conditions imaginable.

Let me conclude by reminding the House of precisely what happened to those men. Two of them were in their teens and one was in his early 20s when they were taken to Drancy. Mr. Roberts and Mr. Thomas were blown out of the sea in July 1940. They were kept for five months, confined below decks on a German raider ship and on a prison ship, the Rio Grande. They were never allowed on deck. They were kept virtually naked. Their bodies were covererd in sores as they suffered acute hardship and privation. They were then taken in cattle trucks to Drancy with Jewish prisoners destined for the gas chambers. They were given little food, water was polluted, work was arduous and beatings of prisoners were regular. They were then moved to Sandbostel in Germany, where the daily ration of one small loaf was shared between six men and where the death rate was exceptionally high—again, equally terrible conditions.

It is worth drawing to the attention of the Minister of State an obituary of Cary Younghusband in *The Daily Telegraph* on 5 December 1992. The obituary stated that he

> **"died aged 68, won a Military Cross near the notorious Nazi concentration camp of Sandbostel in April 1945. Although the camp guards had fled, experienced and fanatical units of the Waffen SS were deployed in strength along the bank of the River Oster, barring the way with infantry and anti-tank guns."**

Again, that demonstrates that, at every stage of their captivity, those men suffered the most terrible gruelling conditions imaginable.

Only in 1942, when they were taken to Meelag Nord, were they given the full protection of the Geneva convention, although, even here, the prisoners went through the terrifying ordeal of being rounded up and threatened with execution. In those far off days, it is easy to say that the events were all too long ago. That does not remove our responsibility to recognise the suffering and sacrifice of men who served their country with bravery and distinction.

The Minister has the power to appoint a judge to re-examine such cases. I hope that the Minister will use that power shortly before commemorating the contribution which merchant seamen made to the battle of the Atlantic. My hon. Friend the Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) has drawn my attention to the fact that the matter was raised in the House on 5 February 1968. The Sachsenhausen case having been referred to the ombudsman after the then Foreign Secretary, George Brown, refused a similar case, the ombudsman found in favour of those claimants.

If the Minister feels unable at least to appoint an independent arbiter to re-examine the injustice which these men believe they have endured and suffered, I intend to refer the matter to the Parliamentary Commissioner for investigation.

9.22 pm

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): I congratulate the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), first, on his good fortune in having this debate tonight, secondly—we do not always agree on everything—on the diligence with which he has pursued this issue for longer than I have and, thirdly, on the way in which he has presented the case to the House and to the Minister.

I came to the issue somewhat later than the hon. Member for Mossley Hill when my constituent, Mr. Cruces, came to see me in the middle of November 1992. Originally, I wrote a letter to the Secretary of State for Defence which wound up on the desk of the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the right hon. Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones). I quote briefly from the letter, dated 17 November 1992:

> **"Mr. Cruces served as a merchant seaman during World War II and was a prisoner of war from 7th July 1940 to May 1945, following the sinking of his vessel, the S.S. Delambre. He was originally imprisoned at a concentration camp at Drancy in France and later at Stalag XB.**
>
> **During this period, Mr. Cruces was forced to carry out 'slave labour', suffered continual privations, hardship, cruelty and illness, including, at one stage, typhoid. At his liberation in 1945, he weighed only six stone in weight and it was only after 12 months of recuperation that his health was sufficiently restored to enable him to return to his occupation."**

The letter then describes the Granada television programme to which the hon. Member for Mossley Hill referred and the issue of the £1 million fund which was set up in 1964.

When Mr. Cruces came to see me he recalled the events of all those years ago with a great deal of strain and upset. It was clear to me that it was not an ordinary gripe against the Government; it was a deeply held feeling, not that he wanted some money out of it but that his experience and that of his comrades had not been properly recognised.

We should be aware that the issue for those people is not money, although money will possibly be the reflection of how society cares about what happened to them. It is the emotional and physical stress that Mr. Cruces went through. Even to this day he finds it difficult to describe exactly what happened to him and the results of it. We should never underestimate the effect which such events have on people like Mr. Cruces and the debt that we all owe them. I shall refer to that later.

The Minister replied to me in a letter dated 9 December. He said:

> **"The Government, however, pressed the German Government to compensate victims of Nazi persecution who had been held in concentration camps. In 1964 the two governments agreed that Germany would pay Britain a £1 million fund, which was disbursed to those who were held in a concentration camp or 'comparable place for the purpose of inflicting deliberate and organised suffering torture and death in furtherance of Nazi ideology'. The qualifying criteria were tightly drawn to ensure maximum benefit would be paid to those who suffered most. Many prisoners who were held in unpleasant or harsh conditions in detention camps, including Drancy, were turned down when cases were considered."**

My argument is that, on the basis of the information available, that paragraph of the Minister's letter is manifestly an unfair reflection of what went on in that camp during that period. I shall quote two sources, one of which is the result of work carried out by the hon. Member for Mossley Hill.

Mr. Roberts, to whom the hon. Member for Mossley Hill referred, is quoted heavily in an article which appeared last year in the Liverpool *Daily Post*. It said:

> **"There, Mr. Roberts was interned under the regime of the fanatical Nazi guards for more than two years, before being transferred to another camp where—for the first time—he was afforded the protection of the Geneva Convention. At Drancy, prisoners were given little food and had to work long hours to avoid beatings from guards."**

So clearly that was the experience which Mr. Roberts and my constituent suffered.

Yet as recently as August 1992, the Minister of State, Foreign Office said in a letter to the hon. Member for Mossley Hill:

> **"All concur that Drancy was not a recognised concentration camp during the Second World War, but an assembly/transit camp whence prisoners were transferred to work and concentration camps."**

He went on to cite the sources which supported those findings. The hon. Member for Mossley Hill has demonstrated adequately that, whatever definition is used, the conditions which prevailed at Drancy were almost entirely comparable with those at a concentration camp.

A book has been written by Jeremy Josephs about the period entitled, "Swastika over Paris. The Fate of the French Jews". It describes not the fate of prisoners of war, but the conditions at Drancy. Chapter 8 is headed "Drancy: The Anteroom of Death". It opens:

> **"For many the internment camp of Drancy was not the anteroom of death but the very room of death itself . . . The diet was a soup composed of cabbage supplied by the local markets, with virtually no nutritional value. Internees were soon afflicted with lice and skin disease. Inside, vermin roamed freely. At night, screams could be heard reverberating around the walls of the buildings. Dysentery and diarrhoea were common. Many of the more fragile internees began to succumb to the strain."**

It goes on to quote from a letter.

On page 105 the book says:

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> "By July 2, 1943 Brunner was ready to take control of Drancy. On that day the SS man with the perpetual half-smile arrived armed with a small team of four permanent assistants, fellow Austrians belonging to the Sicherheitsdienst, the Security Service. Together they would introduce an unprecedented reign of terror and tyranny, making life at the camp still more intolerable. Brunner had already decided that to carry out Eichmann's brief properly, full and effective personal control of Drancy was essential. The entire French administration was relieved of its functions. Only the gendarmerie were accorded continued trust in being allowed to guard the exterior of the camp and to retain the right to escort deportees to the trains."

That was written about the fate of the French Jews who were detained in Drancy. Our constituents found themselves in the same circumstances during that period.

Earlier tonight I came across the section of *Hansard* of 9 June 1964 that the hon. Member for Mossley Hill quoted.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones): Could the hon. Member kindly remind me of the dates his constituent was at Drancy?

Mr. Howarth: I shall do so before I conclude.

From my reading of columns 243 and 244 of *Hansard* on 9 June 1964, it is clear that the House intended on that occasion for there to be some flexibility and that if issues were not resolved by the tribunal which was set up there would be future opportunities to deal with them. Sadly, many years later, the commitments made then still need to be honoured by the House, and more specifically by the Government.

The Minister asked me to remind him of the dates. Mr. Cruces was a prisoner of war from the day his vessel was sunk on 7 July 1940 until May 1945. For much of that time he was in Drancy, although I am not clear about the exact dates. The only payment that he received was £340 from the shipping line, which was subject to income tax.

The noble Lord Wilson of Rievaulx, my predecessor, was one of the contributors to the debate in 1964. It seems to me that obligations arise from that discussion which ought now to be honoured. Until the recent Granada television programme, Mr. Cruces was unaware that he may well have been eligible for some compensation. However that was advertised, the message clearly did not reach Mr. Cruces. Unlike Mr. Roberts, he did not even make an application. I know that the fund is closed, but frankly that raises issues which ought to concern the House.

Mr. Alton: The hon. Gentleman has mentioned an important question. When the House debated the matter, a clear undertaking was given that, even if the funds were inadequate, that would not debar people from applying subsequently. There are recorded cases of people being able to apply even after the funds were closed, and of Ministers being prepared to reply compassionately in those exceptional circumstances.

Mr. Howarth: I am grateful to the hon. Member for strengthening my argument. I do not want to detain the House. The hon. Member for Mossley Hill has said much of what needs to be said and I have added briefly to his remarks on behalf of my constituent.

I did some brief mathematics on the Minister's age before the debate. He, the hon. Member for Mossley Hill and I were either not yet born or very young when the events that we have described occurred, but that should not lessen our commitment. We are able to stand in this House, in a free and democratic society, because people like my constituent, the constituents of the hon. Member for Mossley Hill and others made sacrifices as merchant seamen or members of the armed services. We still owe them a debt of honour, which has certainly not been satisfied in the cases that we have described.

I give the Minister notice that if he cannot satisfy us in our belief that justice has not been done, I shall support the hon. Member for Mossley Hill in raising the matter with the Parliamentary Commissioner. The cases should be dealt with honourably and in a way that will make those people feel that their sacrifices have finally been recognised by this country. That is long overdue—in some cases, it may be too late—but compensation is not the important thing for the people who have survived, although it may help them in their old age: what is important is recognition of what they sacrificed for this country, at a time when such sacrifices were absolutely essential.

9.34 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones): I congratulate the hon. Members for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) and for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) on the way in which they have raised this important and delicate matter. The hon. Member for Mossley Hill and I have corresponded and spoken about it, and I shall try to sketch the historical background to the case. The hon. Member referred to the bloody-mindedness and persistence of hon. Members, and that is a quality that all hon. Members should be willing to show on behalf of their constituents when they think that that is right.

The hon. Member for Knowsley, North was right to remind the House that we are able to debate such matters in the House thanks to the sacrifices made by the men and women in our armed services, the Merchant Navy and civilians during the second world war.

I should like to outline the historical background to these cases. The story begins with the last war, in which many millions of British and allied soldiers, sailors and airmen fought not only to relax but eventually to break the grip of Hitler's tyranny over western Europe. I am a little older than the two hon. Members who have spoken and at least I have a dim memory of the war. I agree with them that it is important that none of us should forget the bravery and distinction of our merchant fleet and our merchant seamen. A number of them, as serving officers, and indeed other men in the three armed services, were captured.

Hundreds of thousands of British prisoners were held by the Germans during the war. Their experiences varied widely. Most prisoners of war were treated correctly according to the Geneva convention, although their detention was unpleasant and painful, even for those who were treated within the terms of that convention. Some were treated with varying degrees of brutality, in some cases amounting to war crimes. A few suffered truly horrifying abuses in the concentration camps.

In seeking to categorise the suffering of the many hundreds of thousands who were held during the war, I am not seeking to minimise in any way the suffering even of those who came within the lowest category of pain. The hon. Member for Knowsley, North has described to the House how, even after many years, his constituent finds it difficult even to address this issue. I hope that the House will not feel that in making such categories I am seeking to minimise the suffering of the constituents of whom the hon. Members have spoken.

Once our people had returned after the war, we had to decide in the United Kingdom how to respond to their experiences. As a starting point, prisoners were not entitled to any special compensation—though their pay continued—for being locked up or, within limits, put to work. Such treatment was correct under the Geneva convention. Prisoners who suffered disability, however, because of their treatment became eligible for disability pensions. Those who alleged mistreatment had their allegations investigated and if they could be made to stick, the perpetrators were tried as war criminals before the allied war crimes courts, but no compensation was paid.

The Government, however, pressed the German Government to compensate British victims of Nazi persecution, recognising that foreign nationals who had suffered the horrors of detention in places like Dachau, Belsen and Ravensbruck—to mention a few—should receive no less special consideration than Germans themselves. For German citizens, such provision had been embodied in German law from an early stage under allied supervision; and it seemed to us unjustly discriminatory that it should remain exclusively so. That had never been part of the original allied intention. In the end, in 1964, and after many years of negotiation, the two Governments were able to agree that Federal Germany should pay the sum of £1 million in full and final settlement of the claims of United Kingdom citizens in that category. Similar agreements were reached with all German-occupied countries of western Europe at about that time. The British Government had discretion in deciding how the money should be distributed and, within the prescribed limits of the agreement, in setting the governing criteria. The Foreign Office was charged with responsibility for administering the fund and bringing it to public attention.

As the agreement offered the only opportunity to obtain compensation for those who deserved it, the Government of the day did everything that they could to encourage applications. I say that as I believe that the constituents of the hon. Member for Knowsley, North and two constituents of the hon. Member for Mossley Hill did not make applications during that period. It is important to set out the efforts that the Government of the day took.

The agreement was given wide publicity. A one-year period for the registration of claims—24 July 1964 to 31 July 1965—was announced by notices in all the national and leading provincial newspapers. Publicity was also given by many specialised journals and interested organisations. Circulars were sent to all Foreign Office, Commonwealth Relations Office and colonial posts overseas requesting them to obtain publicity. In addition, application forms were sent direct to all who had communicated with the Foreign Office. Later, reminders were sent to individuals and in February 1965 further notices were inserted in the press. There were frequent advertisements on radio and television. Posters were displayed at all 2,700 post offices, Ministry of Pensions and National Insurance offices and in all local government offices down to rural councils. Later still, again to try to make sure that everyone who might have a claim was given an opportunity to lodge one, the registration period was extended to February 1966 and there was yet more publicity.

Mr. George Howarth: I hope that the Minister will accept that a central part of our case is that, at that time, Drancy would not have been considered eligible for payment out of that fund. A strong part of our case is that it has since come to light that Drancy was in exactly the same category as places that were, at the time, considered appropriate.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I shall come to the question whether Drancy is or is not—was or was not—a concentration camp——

Mr. Howarth: It will have a bearing on the case.

Mr. Garel-Jones: It might have a bearing on it—I shall come to that later. It will not have escaped the notice of the House that one constituent of the hon. Member for Mossley Hill applied in the due period.

In the end the lists closed and the tribunal formed to distribute the funds got down to work. It set very tightly drawn criteria to ensure that those who suffered most would get the maximum benefit. I remind the House that the total sum negotiated with Federal Germany was £1 million. Because of our wish to ensure that the money was distributed in the fairest possible way, the criteria were tightly drawn so that those who had suffered most would receive the most compensation.

To quote from the criteria applied by the tribunal, in order to qualify a claimant had to have been incarcerated in a concentration camp or

> "comparable place for the purpose of inflicting deliberate and organised suffering, torture and death in furtherance of Nazi ideology".

It was found that 1,015 claimants met this criteria and their claims succeeded; 3,046 other claims were turned down on various grounds, including the grounds that their place of imprisonment had not been a concentration camp or a "comparable place" meeting the rest of the terms that I quoted a moment ago. The tribunal decided that the camp at Drancy did not fit this criteria.

So if Drancy was not a concentration camp, what was it? As far as we can judge now, reading the accounts and history published since the war, Drancy was an unpleasant place to be. We have heard graphic accounts of that this evening. People were taken to Drancy after their capture, held for varying periods and shipped off to other camps, mostly German concentration camps. Few returned, but so far as we can tell, Drancy was a transit camp. Conditions were harsh, but there were no gas chambers and inmates were not worked to death as forced labour. Some 70,000 detainees passed through the camp in the three years between August 1941 and 1944. Of these, all but a few thousand were Jews. Most were French, but more than 20,000 were of other nationalities, mainly Polish. Their destination was usually the same—Auschwitz.

Drancy was for most of the time under French administrative authority, but for a period it was not, at least for practical purposes. That was when the notorious Alois Brunner took over as the SS camp commandant from mid-1943 to mid-1944, when the camp was liberated. He dismissed the French guards and ran the camp with the help of a handful of SS officers. Brunner's aim was to

[Mr. Garel-Jones]

expedite the Auschwitz transports. Conditions deteriorated during this period. They may even have been comparable to those in a concentration camp. But that is not at issue here.

I should like to make this quite clear. In delivering the judgment on Drancy, to which I earlier referred, the tribunal had before it not the history of Drancy to consider, but a case—that of Mr. Roberts—of detention there in early 1941. That was over two years before the advent of Brunner, for instance; and the camp was then very different from what it later became. Drancy served as a place of ad hoc internment, from late 1940 to the summer of 1941, of mainly alien nationals, including for a few months British civilian internees, under the protective aegis of the Geneva conventions.

I should like to say a brief word about the definition of a concentration camp. The hon. Member for Mossley Hill made the perfectly fair point that for the German Government, probably for most Jewish organisations and according to the camp's commemorative plaque, Drancy is reckoned to have been a concentration camp from its date of official origin. The leading international authority, however, the international tracing service run by the Red Cross, does not include Drancy as a recognised concentration camp, and that is generally thought to be a good example to follow.

The possible explanation of Germany's different definition of a concentration camp is that detention in a concentration camp has never been a matter of legal significance in Germany. In the United Kingdom, it automatically triggered a valid claim to compensation, which is why the definition has a legal significance in the United Kingdom that it does not have in Germany. It is perfectly understandable that any camp in Federal Germany where harsh treatment had been meted out might, in a looser sense, be referred to as a concentration camp. Although some authorities say that Drancy later became a concentration camp when the notorious SS officer took over, I think that I am right in saying that the hon. Member for Mossley Hill is alone in claiming that it was a concentration camp when it was used for the detention of our merchant seamen in early 1941.

Mr. Alton: I think that the Minister is falling into the trap of semantics. He will accept, as I suggested earlier, that the German Government have a different definition of a concentration camp from that which the Government decided on. That was not the issue that determined whether compensation would be payable. I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the 1968 decision, which was reached long after the tribunal had been closed, when the Parliamentary Commissioner was called in to the Session house and, despite the views of Ministers, found in favour of claimants. Mr. George Brown said:

> "However, all the Ministers who have looked at this quite separately have come to one conclusion and the Parliamentary Commissioner has come to another."—*Official Report*, 5 February 1968; Vol. 758, c.115]

The same information that was given to Ministers for tonight's debate was being given to the Ministers who replied in 1968, when the Parliamentary Commissioner found in favour of claimants.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I accept, and I am glad that the hon. Gentleman does too, that the definition of a concentration camp is not a materially central issue. Nevertheless, we, unlike Germany, have been careful to define a concentration camp because it has a legal implication here. It is probably fair to say that in Federal Germany it was able to place a looser meaning on the word because it had no legal significance. In the United Kingdom, because it triggered automatic compensation, it was important to define a concentration camp. By that definition, we would not agree that Drancy was a concentration camp.

Mr. Alton: I am grateful for that clarification because it is right that hon. Members should get this point right in their minds before proceeding. In a letter dated 4 June, the Minister told me that Drancy "was not"—and "not" was underlined—"a concentration camp". He accepted tonight that, even by his definition, later on in the life of that camp —when at least we know that Mr. Roscoe, for example, was still detained, and weeks after other prisoners were removed—the definition changed. Is he not now at least accepting that?

Mr. Garel-Jones: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman intervened because I have obviously not been clear enough. We do not accept that Drancy was a concentration camp—full stop. We accept that, with the arrival of SS officer Brunner, conditions at Drancy deteriorated, but, under the legal definition that we apply in the United Kingdom, we do not accept that Drancy was a concentration camp. However, the hon. Gentleman has accepted that that is not the central issue. I would not wish the definition to be misunderstod, either by the House or by the hon. Gentleman's constituents, or for it to be felt that we were being cheeseparing. We have a definition because it automatically triggers compensation. Therefore, it is important that it is not a loose and general description, but one that is closely defined.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to the ex gratia payment made by Her Majesty's Government to a number of RAF service men held at Sachsenhausen, following a vigorous campaign by the late Airey Neave. There were special considerations in that case, not least that those service men were held at a concentration camp but happened to have been held, for some reason about which I am not advised, just outside the camp perimeter. In that case, the Government made a judgment, and an ex gratia payment was made.

The hon. Members for Mossley Hill and for Knowsley, North have, in the proper traditions of the House, vented the feeling of—abandonment was what I sensed from what they were saying—their constituents. Let me make it clear that I doubt whether any hon. Member would not wish to place on record the debt that we all owe to a group of people who have sometimes been ignored—the Merchant Navy and merchant seamen—and the sacrifices and sufferings that they made for us during the second world war.

I have tried to explain to the hon. Member for Mossley Hill, and I have repeated it again tonight, that, in spite of our respect for their contributions to the war effort and the sympathy that we feel for the hardships that they endured, there is no reason to believe that they were treated with injustice by the British Government. The scheme under which the money was distributed closed in 1966. It is now nearly 30 years after the decision in question and some 50 years after the events. I am sorry not to be able to give hon. Members a more forthcoming reply. It is not easy to reject such a strongly felt claim by three constituents who represent a group to which, as hon. Members have reminded us, we all owe a great debt. I am afraid I have to say that it is not now possible for new claims to be raised or, where necessary, for old claims to be considered.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes to Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 16 February 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

EMPLOYMENT

Job Clubs

1. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations she has received in connection with the function of job clubs; and if she will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): Job clubs have been a great success. I have received many representations asking that we provide more places and we shall.

Mr. Sumberg: I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's answer, but does not it sit uneasily with the fact the professional and executive job club in my constituency has recently closed? Is she aware that the alternatives provided are very unsatisfactory? Could she examine the situation and find out whether we can make some improvement?

Mrs. Shephard: I am aware of my hon. Friend's concern about our new arrangements to replace the Prestwich executive job club. I was glad that he and his constituents found it so helpful and I am sure that he will welcome the fact that, in view of our plan to provide an extra 75,000 places from April, we shall certainly take the opportunity to review arrangements in Prestwich.

Ms. Eagle: How useful can job clubs be, when unemployment in Wallasey is now 5,964 and at the last count there were only 75 vacancies?

Mrs. Shephard: Perhaps I could explain to the hon. Lady that the job clubs' record is first class. Nearly 50 per cent. of people who leave them go into work and a further 15 per cent. go into training, self-employment or full-time further education. Two thirds of unemployed people leave the register within six months. The 1·5 million opportunities that we have made available help all unemployed people to improve their prospects of finding work at what is undoubtedly a difficult time.

Mr. Evennett: Is my right hon. Friend aware that our job club at the college of technology in Erith is very popular and is widely used by the local community? Does she agree that we should encourage more such clubs, because they give unemployed people tremendous opportunities for companionship and advice and to get into real employment in the near future?

Mrs. Shephard: As I said, job clubs are effective in helping unemployed people to find work. I am glad to say that, from April, very nearly 300,000 places will be provided.

Youth Training

2. **Mr. Nigel Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps she is taking to improve the training opportunities for the young unemployed; and if she will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I shall be extending the use of credits, which will give more and more young people greater opportunities to gain the skills that they and employers need for the 1990s.

Mr. Jones: I am grateful for that answer. Does the Minister share the concern of many of my constituents, who think that rising youth unemployment is one of the main reasons for the rocketing crime figures? Why do not the Government increase substantially the amount of money that they spend on youth unemployment, in a week when employment figures throughout Britain will reach 3 million?

Mrs. Shephard: Due to the larger numbers of young people staying on at school we have a large amount of resources to spend on youth training. All training and enterprise councils have the resources to meet the guarantee and I have left them in no doubt that that is what they are expected to do.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that it is the Government's stated policy and intention that every young person over the age of 16 should be in either education or full-time training, unless they have a job? Will she do what she can to improve the way in which information is gathered for statistics involving young people who are seeking jobs or who are in training? Finally, will she confirm that, under the Government, about 250,000 young people are undergoing training, compared with only 7,000 under the Labour Government in 1979?

Mrs. Shephard: About 291,000 young people are training under youth training and currently, of those, more than three quarters find jobs or go on to further education. There was a problem with the exchange of information between careers services, training providers and TECs in the summer, which was why I announced then the improved arrangements. I am continuing to monitor them closely.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Is the Secretary of State aware that if we were to use the same definition for the young unemployed as the Conservative party uses for the Young Conservatives, everyone who is out of work would be included in that category?

On a serious note, there are now more than 900,000 people aged between 16 and 24 who are out of work. That is not the lost generation, but the abandoned generation. It has been abandoned by a Government who have no policies and no compassion. The Secretary of State recently rightly talked about the abolition of the 21-hour rule. Will she ensure that every young person between 16 and 24 has the right to go into either full-time education and training or part-time education and training and still draw benefit?

Mrs. Shephard: As the hon. Gentleman knows, unemployment is not an option for young people aged between 16 and 17. They either remain in full-time education—there has been a welcome 25 per cent. increase in the numbers going into further education—find a job, or take up a guaranteed youth training place. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will also welcome the fact that large numbers of 18 to 21-year-olds are going into higher education and provision has been made for them. On the issue of benefit eligibility, I can only repeat what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said at Question Time a couple of weeks ago—that a wide range of options is being considered to help unemployed people to use their time productively. I shall make an announcement in a few weeks' time.

Mr. Lester: When my right hon. Friend is considering that wide range of options, will she blow the dust off the original community programme that we had in 1980? It was a successful programme as a follow-on to training, particularly for young poeple, and it had a good record of placing people in jobs. We should not rewrite the book when we already have a good book on the shelf.

Mrs. Shephard: I know of my hon. Friend's great interest in the matter. A large number of elements of the old community programme have been retained in employment action. My hon. Friend is right to draw to the attention of the House the excellence of many features of that programme, which is one of the options that we are currently considering.

Labour Statistics

3. **Mr. Etherington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are currently unemployed in the north of England.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): In December 1992, on the seasonally adjusted basis, there were 168,500 unemployed claimants in the northern region.

Mr. Etherington: One of the few areas of expansion that the Government have achieved since 1979 has been unemployment and my constituency has had more than its fair share of that commodity. Last week a Minister said that the way to rebuild the economy in this country was to ensure that we had a well-trained and well-educated work force. In view of that, does the Minister agree that the last thing that we require is a tax on knowledge? If he agrees, will he speak to his colleagues and ensure that no value added tax is placed on books, periodicals and newspapers?

Mr. McLoughlin: I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would say that, in July 1986, unemployment in his constituency was 10,991 and that it is now 6,812—a reduction of 38 per cent. I should have thought that even he might welcome that, but perhaps I was hoping for far too much. The question of which issues will be included in the Budget is one for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. Bates: Is my hon. Friend aware of the significant inward investment that has been made in the north-east? Is he aware of the £2·7 billion of inward investment and the 35,000 jobs that it has either created or safeguarded? Does he agree that that has been achieved because organisations such as the Northern Development Company, Tyne and Wear development corporation and the Teesside development corporation—all Government sponsored—have gone round the world promoting the considerable benefits of locating in the north-east, not perpetually running down the north-east, as the Labour party does?

Mr. McLoughlin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He is right to draw attention to inward investment, which has been very important to the north-east and the northern region. Inward investment is indeed welcome and has certainly not been described by the Government as "alien" —as it was described not so long ago by the Trades Union Congress. My hon. Friend is right: inward investment has provided many jobs and is very welcome.

Mr. Dobson: Will the Minister confirm that there are now 200,000 fewer jobs in the northern region than there were in 1979? Will he take the advice of all who watch him and his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on television and listen to them on the radio? Will they cut the cackle, stop waffling and actually create some jobs?

Mr. McLoughlin: If anyone has been responsible for waffle, it is Opposition Members rather than us.

The simple truth is that, in the northern region—which the question concerns—220,000 people were unemployed in July 1986. Today, the figure is 168,000. I should have thought that even the hon. Gentleman would welcome a reduction of 24 per cent.

Mr. John Greenway: May I remind my hon. Friend that any geographical description of the north of England must include Yorkshire and Humberside? Does he agree that, in Yorkshire and the rest of the northern region, entrepreneurs and others who wish to set up businesses will find a good quality of life, local authorities that are prepared to help them with planning and a willing work force second to none in the United Kingdom?

Mr. McLoughlin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am sure that he is absolutely right.

Wages

4. **Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the average weekly wage for *(a)* men and *(b)* women.

The Minister of State, Department of Employment (Mr. Michael Forsyth): The figures are £346·70 and £247·10. respectively.

Mr. Chisholm: That is appalling as it stands, but will the Minister tell us whether it includes workers below the national insurance threshold? Will he also tell us—given that a major factor in the gender gap is the concentration of women in low-paid employment—why the Government are deliberately widening that gap by abolishing wages councils? Is not it time that they did something to help low-paid women by extending the power and scope of wages councils, strengthening the Equal Pay Act 1970 and providing more child care facilities to which such women can have access?

Mr. Forsyth: I note the hon. Gentleman's opposition to the abolition of wages councils. I am not sure that he was a leading opponent of their abolition when the Labour Government abolished 11 of them.

The hon. Gentleman might like to know that average female earnings rose by 48 per cent. in real terms between 1979 and 1992. That is three times the rate of growth under Labour.

Mr. Bill Walker: Will my hon. Friend confirm that it is important to be price-competitive when recession and unemployment are increasing everywhere? We certainly do not want to price ourselves out of jobs—especially in my hon. Friend's constituency and mine, where the tourist industry is a big employer.

Mr. Forsyth: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. He is right to point out that wages councils destroy jobs. If we were to adopt the Opposition's policy and opt for some form of minimum wage, instead of having the highest proportion of the female work force in employment, we might find ourselves in the same position as Spain, where nearly a quarter of the female population is out of work. Spain is one of the two countries in Europe with a statutory national minimum wage.

Ms. Quin: Will the Minister confirm that the gap between men's and women's wages is far less in the sectors covered by wages councils than it is in other sectors? Is not that a strong argument for retaining wages councils, rather than abolishing them?

Will the Minister also comment on the scandalous position of young workers who were taken out of wages councils by the Government and whose wages are now very low? My local job centre, for instance, is advertising a job for an apprentice hairdresser aged between 16 and 20. The pay is £35·60 for a 38-hour week—in other words, 93p an hour. Can the Government describe that as a decent wage for a week's work?

Mr. Forsyth: It was precisely that attitude which was responsible for the destruction of so many apprenticeships in this country. It seems that the hon. Lady would like to have people with no jobs and no apprenticeships in return for having a national minimum wage. I should be much more impressed by the hon. Lady and the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), who is so vocal on the Opposition Front Bench about the abolition of wages councils, if they were to tell the House that after this House has abolished wages councils a future Labour Government would bring them back. The hon. Lady has consistently refused to do so because she recognises that wages councils are an anachronism which cover a mere 10 per cent. of the work force.

Social Chapter

5. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what current proposals the European Commission has to introduce, under other treaty provisions, measures within the scope of the social chapter.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: It is for the European Commission to decide what proposals it brings forward under the treaty or under the Maastricht agreement of Eleven on social policy.

Mr. Butler: May I reassure the excellent employers of Milton Keynes that the Secretary of State's fight against the working hours directive will continue and that no parts of the social chapter will be brought in under the guise of health and safety directives without a continued fight from the Government? Does my hon. Friend agree, as the employers in my constituency do, that Britain is, as Jacques Delors says, a paradise for foreign investment as a result of this Government's policies?

Mr. Forsyth: It is certainly true that Britain gets something like 40 per cent. of the inward investment coming into the European Community. My hon. Friend is right to point to the job-destroying effects of the social chapter measures. I was struck by the fact that the non-wage costs of employing Hoover workers in Dijon is five times the cost of employing the same workers in Cambuslang.

Mr. Galbraith: Does the Minister agree that the problem is not just about the legislation that is about to come from Europe? It is about the legislation which we already have but which has not yet been implemented by the Government—in particular, the acquired rights directive. Will the Minister confirm that the acquired rights directive applies to compulsory competitive tendering, that it has always applied to compulsory competitive tendering and that those individuals who have been disadvantaged by the Government's not applying it in the past can now seek compensation? When will the Government publicise those facts so that workers can obtain their democratic rights?

Mr. Forsyth: The question whether the acquired rights directive applies will depend upon each contract and the circumstances pertaining to it. If an undertaking has been transferred, the terms of the acquired rights directive will apply. For the hon. Gentleman to describe British workers as being denied rights because Britain refuses to have any part of the social chapter is nonsense. The fact is that British workers have the right to determine the terms and conditions of their employment alongside their employers. By transferring the right to decide that outside Britain, British workers are losing rights, not having their rights enhanced.

Mr. Rowe: Will my hon. Friend confirm that whatever the European Commission happens to bring forward, it is the Council of Ministers which makes the final decision on what should be accepted? Does my hon. Friend agree that if only we could make progress towards ratification of the Maastricht treaty, we could set about altering the institutions of the European Community and bringing them more into line with what the British Government would prefer?

Mr. Forsyth: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the fact that these matters are ultimately decided by the Council of Ministers, although the point to which I think he drew attention was that matters were being brought forward under health and safety provisions which were determined on a majority vote—like working time, which would be damaging to jobs in this country. The Government will continue to fight those measures because we wish to have no part in making the European Community or Britain less competitive and putting more people on the dole as a result.

Official Entertainment

6. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much was spent on official entertainment in her Department in the last financial year.

Mr. McLoughlin: In 1991-92, the amounts spent by the Employment Department, ACAS, the Health and Safety Executive, the Health and Safety Commission the Employment Service and the Office of Manpower Economics were £43,281, £6,927, £13,635, £23,500 and £7,858 respectively. This represents three thousandths of 1 per cent. of the Department's budget.

Mr. Banks: The Minister is not going to get away so easily with that answer. I can well understand a modest amount being spent on entertainment, but for his Department to spend that sort of money in 1992-93 and the year before when unemployment has risen every month is an absurdity. What is this year's budget to be spent on—champagne to celebrate unemployment reaching 3 million on Thursday, on pâte de foie gras being stuffed down the throats of employers because Britain is being turned into a sweatshop, or shall we be drinking highballs to celebrate the opt-out from the social charter? The Government have no right to spend taxpayers' money on wassailing in the Department of Employment while the unemployed have nothing to celebrate.

Mr. McLoughlin: It seems that the only people who will be drinking champagne to celebrate 3 million people being unemployed are the Opposition. They have offered no constructive messages and have opposed every training scheme that we have introduced. We shall accept no strictures from the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), as the one thing that I have been unable to find out is the amount of money spent on entertainment by the Greater London council.

Mr. Dickens: Does my hon. Friend agree that the amount of money spent on entertaining which he announced this afternoon is petty cash compared with the Department's budget? If that money enables our officers and Ministers to tell people that we have low inflation, low taxation, low interest rates and sensible trade union legislation which will attract jobs into this country, is not it just petty cash and was not it stupid to ask that question?

Mr. McLoughlin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I assure him that any money spent by the Department on such matters is very closely monitored.

Commercial Vehicle Industry

7. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of people employed in the commercial vehicle industry at the end of 1992.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: There are no separate estimates for the commercial vehicle industry.

Mr. Hoyle: Is the Secretary of State aware that the numbers in the industry will be diminished if the Government do not assist Leyland DAF? Will she ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to get off his backside, stop his inactivity and begin to intervene on behalf of the leading truck maker, as the Belgian and Dutch Governments are doing?

Mrs. Shephard: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade made it clear in the House that the receivers believe that at least part of the United Kingdom operations can be saved as a commercially viable business without state handouts. He also made it clear that we cannot repeat the open-ended taxpayers' commitments of the British Leyland years. He also said that if proposals are made to the Government for help with specific projects, we are prepared to consider them on their own merits, provided, of course, that they are within EC rules and the usual criteria under the industrial development legislation.

Mr. Dover: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that it is her Department, through the redundancy fund, which has paid the money to the ex-workers of Leyland DAF? Therefore, have not the Government already helped the commercial vehicle workers?

Mrs. Shephard: We made rapid arrangements to pay statutory redundancy payments. It is also true that Employment Service and training and enterprise council staff are ready to go to plants deal with claims and offer advice.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: Does the Secretary of State agree that redundancy payments from her Department are the last kind of assistance that British workers want from the Government? Does she realise that three and a half jobs for every direct job are at risk as a result of the Leyland DAF crisis? Does she accept that there is a serious discrepancy between what the President of the Board of Trade said about approaches that have been made and what is being said by representatives of the company? Will she make representations for more active involvement by the DTI to save the jobs involved?

Mrs. Shephard: I made clear my Department's intention to give every possible assistance to workers affected in that way, and I repeat that the receivers believe that at least part of the United Kingdom operations can be saved. Staff and Ministers of the Department of Trade and Industry have stood ready to give help if required and I can do no more than repeat what I just said to the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth).

Mr. Madel: Does my right hon. Friend agree that European Governments should redouble their efforts to deal with the problem of over-capacity in the commercial vehicle industry in Europe? To that end, should not particular help be given to long-serving truck workers who lost their jobs in 1992?

Mrs. Shephard: I know that my hon. Friend has a constituency interest in the matter. He is right to pinpoint as the problem the over-capacity of truck production. Nevertheless, the Government hope that some help can be given and that something can be salvaged from the current problems of Leyland DAF?

Labour Statistics

8. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proposals she has for reducing unemployment in west Cumbria.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Employment Service and training and enterprise councils deliver a wide range of employment, enterprise and training programmes to help unemployed people in west Cumbria, as elsewhere.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Has the Minister noted the framing of my question, No. 8 on the Order Paper, which asks what proposals the Secretary of State has for reducing unemployment in west Cumbria? May I have an answer to my question? What proposals do the Government have for reducing unemployment in an area where there is no prospect of new industry coming in? Young people in my constituency, who asked me to table the question about their future prospects, want an answer. What proposals do the Government have?

Mr. McLoughlin: The Government have consistently made it clear that it is our intention to provide the right economic climate so that job and employment opportunities will be available to people. Bearing in mind all the Government's investment in west Cumbria—the Trident programme and the development of Sellafield—it is strange that the hon. Gentleman should have the cheek to ask such a question.

Protective Headgear

10. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations she has received calling for action to ensure that Sikhs living in the United Kingdom and throughout the EC are exempted for religious reasons from requirements to wear protective headgear in appropriate workplaces.

Mr. McLoughlin: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received a number of representations on the matter. I have met various hon. Members to discuss the matter, including my hon. Friends the Members for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks) and for Slough (Mr. Watts) and the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz).

Mr. Madden: Why are the Minister and his Secretary of State so reluctant to stand up for the religious beliefs of Sikhs in the United Kingdom and throughout the EC? Why has the Minister's Department failed to consult the Home Office on the race relations aspects of the matter? When will he seek some convenient legal advice from the Attorney-General in order to find a way in which to exempt Sikhs from the daft requirement to remove their turbans in order to wear protective head gear?

Mr. McLoughlin: While the directive was being negotiated, the United Kingdom issued a unilateral minute stating that the provisions of article 6 of the directive

> "are not intended to result in requirements which are incompatible with the beliefs and practices of religious groups in member states."

That was our position, but it was rejected by the other member states.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend believe that more or fewer Sikhs would be at work if we were to introduce a national minimum wage and sign the social chapter? Do those who advocate that course of action not want the unemployment of more Sikhs?

Mr. McLoughlin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend who is, of course, right. Such practices, which the Opposition would have imposed on the United Kingdom, would severely restrict employment opportunities generally throughout the United Kingdom.

Mr. Khabra: I endorse the views expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden). I have raised the question with the Leader of the House in early-day motion 1251 in my name and those of hon. Friends. I come from the same community. I know that the directive will be an attack on the Sikh religion. This Government can ignore the EC directive. They have done so in the past whenever it suited them. I am sure that this Government—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. There are occasions when the House has to be a little tolerant. This happens to be one of them. I am sure that the hon. Member will now put a direct question, having made his comment.

Mr. Khabra: I ask the Minister to ignore the EC directive, since the Government can disregard and ignore the views of the House on a matter important to the nations concerned, such as the Maastricht treaty. They could ignore this directive and grant a concession to the Sikhs as they granted a concession to the Sikhs in the construction industry.

Mr. McLoughlin: I do understand the point that the hon. Gentleman is making on this. At the meetings I have held with leaders of the Sikh community, with hon. Friends and a Labour hon. Member, these points have been put to me. We tried to secure a derogation from the directive and that failed in 1989. There is no reason to suppose that a new approach would be more successful, especially as the directive has now come into force. I recognise the point that the hon. Member makes and I know that my right hon. Friend the Lord President of the Council replied to his question after the statement on business.

Mr. Watts: None the less, can further approaches be made to the Commission to seek a derogation from the offensive provisions of this directive?

Mr. McLoughlin: I am grateful for the question, but we did try to get a derogation at the time of the negotiations in 1989. That failed, but I am willing to consider very strong representations that have been made to me by my hon. Friends and by Labour hon. Members, but I cannot say that that will be successful, at the end of the day.

Labour Statistics

11. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will give the latest figures for adult male unemployment in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* the valleys programme area and *(d)* Neath.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The unadjusted rates are 14·2 per cent., 14·2 per cent., 19·6 per cent. and 13 per cent. respectively.

Mr. Hain: The Secretary of State has confirmed that one in five adult males is unemployed in the south Wales valleys area, That is a disgraceful figure. When added to the one in five who are economically inactive, that means that four in 10 people are seeking work or wish to work in the south Wales valleys area. When will the Secretary of State stop mouthing fine words and coming up with seminars and gimmicks, and when will she do her job of creating employment in this country by carrying out a programme of investment—not gimmicks, schemes and other words of sympathy?

Mrs. Shephard: I share the hon. Gentleman's concern for all people facing unemployment, but he surely welcomes the fact that unemployment in Neath, his constituency, has fallen in the past 12 months. He must be delighted, too, that unemployment is lower in Wales than in some regions of England and that that is due in no small part to a highly successful programme of inward investment which last year brought 17,000 jobs to Wales with capital expenditure of more than £1 billion. The hon. Gentleman asks about action; that is action, but it has been welcomed by him and his comrades in the TUC as alien action.

Mr. Richards: Is my right hon. Friend aware that Wales has attracted inward investment by more than 1,000 companies since 1981 creating tens of thousands of jobs? Does she agree that if the Labour party were to have its way with the social chapter that inward investment would dry up?

Mrs. Shephard: There is no question about it. Indeed, if Opposition Members were to have their way with many of the other lunatic policies that they wish to pursue—for example, punitive taxation of successful companies, levies and burdens on business, support for the social chapter and for the national minimum wage—it would discourage inward investment and hence the creation of jobs.

Mr. Dobson: Can the right hon. Lady confirm that the figures that she has just given for the United Kingdom show that we now lose no fewer than 15 million working days every week because of unemployment? Does she agree that it is the economics of the madhouse for Britain to attempt to do without the products, goods and services of the people that her Government have thrown out of work? Is it not time that, instead of just expressing her concern and coming up with fiddled figures, she did something about getting people in this country back to work? They want real jobs, and when they are at work they want to be paid well enough to be able to bring up their families.

Mrs. Shephard: Earlier the hon. Gentleman exhorted us to cut the cackle, which is pretty rich coming from someone who has raised blustering to an art form. He is quite right when he says that what people want is real jobs, and real jobs can come only from the pursuit of low inflation, low interest rates and low burdens on businesses —exactly the reverse of all the policies pursued and supported by Opposition Members.

Mr. Jenkin: May I emphasise to my right hon. Friend that we recall how we created jobs in the 1980s by maintaining a low taxation, low interest rate and high incentive economy? I draw her attention to the unemployment record in France, which has been linked by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development directly to the application of minimum wage legislation, which demonstrably destroys jobs.

Mrs. Shephard: It is indeed the case that the experience of France in terms of job creation was in direct contrast to our own during the 1980s, when our supply-side measures were described as impressive by the OECD.

12. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is her latest estimate of unemployment among persons aged under 21 years.

Mr. McLoughlin: Claimant unemployment figures by age are produced quarterly and for specific age bands only. On the unadjusted basis, there were 243,928 claimant unemployed people aged under 20 in the United Kingdom in October 1992.

Mr. Wigley: Is the Minister aware of the disastrously high level of youth unemployment in many parts of Wales and elsewhere? Is he aware that for those leaving youth training schemes the unemployment level in Wales has increased from 15·9 per cent. in 1990 to over 26 per cent? Is this not a totally unacceptable level? In these circumstances, why on earth do the Government cut back the money available to the training and enterprise councils, as they have with the West Wales TEC, where they have cut back £800,000, when the money is desperately needed to give training opportunities to young people?

Mr. McLoughlin: What the hon. Gentleman is saying is that 74 per cent. of those who go on youth training schemes manage to find jobs when they finish their course. I should have thought that he would welcome that. My right hon. Friend has made it perfectly clear that we stand by the guarantee to all people in that age bracket, and if for any reason any TEC cannot meet that guarantee, we are willing to consider whether extra resources can be made available to it.

Mr. Riddick: Does my hon. Friend accept that we on the Conservative Benches fully understand the terrible difficulties that unemployment brings for individuals and their families? Does my hon. Friend agree that a system of workfare, particularly for young people, is worthy of consideration? Not only would it ensure that certain useful environmentally friendly jobs were carried out; it would also give those young people an opportunity to have contact with the world of work.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who will acknowledge the change that we have made already whereby young people will not have the opportunity of claiming benefit without going through training or further education. With regard to workfare, I can only say that we are looking at a number of schemes that have been put to us.

Mr. Barry Jones: Does the Minister know that some of our biggest companies are closing their apprentice training schools? Does he know that this is particularly the case in steel, textiles and aerospace? What will the Government do about this serious development, which will prove to be the route to industrial suicide unless they do something about it?

Mr. McLoughlin: My right hon. Friend mentioned the damage that had been done to the apprenticeship scheme, and the way in which many trade unions tried to pursue larger wage increases. We are determined to ensure there is proper training and look forward to a change and to reversing the policy of the Opposition so that they start supporting training schemes we have taken forward.

Mr. Tredinnick: Does my hon. Friend agree that as far as workfare is concerned, there are already schemes in place that assist those who are unemployed and that it would be better to look at a scheme such as this as an additional resource for the unemployed? Might not there be competition for such a scheme because of the additional resources that will be provided?

Mr. McLoughlin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. A number of schemes are available, such as employment action, which has been very successful and useful in the community.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 16 February.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Worthington: In 1979, just over 1 million people were unemployed. At the same time, just over 7 million people were employed in manufacturing industry—seven people in manufacturing jobs for every single person unemployed. Now, measuring unemployment in the same way, there are 4·25 million unemployed. On Thursday this week—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has been in the House for some time. He knows that he must put a direct question.

Mr. Worthington: In the past 14 years, 3 million manufacturing jobs have been destroyed. Did the Prime Minister intend to do that, or was it someone else's fault?

The Prime Minister: Let me say to the hon. Gentleman that

> "the threat of recession and the reality of rising unemployment is spreading throughout the European continent"

—not my words but those of the Leader of the Opposition. I would find the hon. Gentleman's concern more convincing if he had one decent economic policy to tackle unemployment, but he has not.

Mr. Wells: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Nissan factory in Sunderland has been declared by its Japanese owners to be the most efficient factory in the world? Is he further aware that should this House be foolish enough to include the socialist charter in the Maastricht treaty, Japanese inward investment would be seriously discouraged?

The Prime Minister: I was not aware of the specific point made by my hon. Friend, but I was aware that Nissan is exporting cars from Sunderland back to Japan. I offer my congratulations to the management and work force on that achievement. There is no doubt that the social chapter and similar policies would damage the prospect of such success stories in future. That is why we opposed it at Maastricht and why we oppose it now.

Mr. John Smith: Does the Prime Minister accept that the House should be able to decide whether Britain should accept or reject the social chapter of the Maastricht treaty?

The Prime Minister: It is for this House to decide by its vote on Third Reading whether to approve the European Communities (Amendment) Bill and enable the Government to ratify the treaty. There is no question of our ratifying the treaty except through the normal parliamentary procedures. Individual amendments to the Bill will be debated in Committee in the usual way as for others.

Mr. John Smith: Bearing in mind that the Government announced their latest interpretation of the law only yesterday, and as other amendments apart from amendment No. 27 have been ruled out of order, is not it a curious coincidence that the prospect of political defeat causes a revision of the legal opinion? Why are the Government so anxious to prevent the House from deciding this issue?

The Prime Minister: There are two sorts of amendments that we have to deal with in the Bill. There are those that would render our law incompatible with the treaty and which must be defeated, and others that are undesirable but which would not prevent us from ratifying the treaty. The Committee will come to those, issue by issue.

Mr. John Smith: Has the Prime Minister no sense of shame? Today, he was described in *The Times* as being like a

> "spiv business man employing a sharp lawyer".

—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Smith: Why is the Prime Minister so determined to use every slippery manoeuvre to avoid Parliament deciding this issue? Is he not engaged in an outright abuse of our unwritten constitution?

Mr. Skinner: Vote against Third Reading and we'll show them. *[Interruption.]*

The Prime Minister: Occasionally, it might be a novelty to see the hon. Gentleman in the same Lobby as his right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). Sharp lawyers in glass houses should not throw stones in the way in which the right hon. and learned Gentleman has. The Government are explaining to the House what the true effect of an incompetent Opposition amendment would be.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East claims repeatedly to support the Maastricht treaty, but he and his hon. Friends tabled an amendment which was intended to lead to amendments to the treaty, a new intergovernmental conference and new ratification procedures in the member states. Opposition Members were prepared to put at risk the future not just of the Bill but of the entire treaty. That is the right hon. and learned Gentleman who accuses us of sharp practice when he claims to support the Bill.

Mr. Booth: Would the Prime Minister express the feelings of the whole House by praising the fine British achievement in the Antarctic by Sir Ranulph Fiennes and Dr. Stroud? Does he consider that that is an example of volunteering for a good cause which he was advocating earlier this year?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to offer my congratulations and those of the House to Sir Ranulph. It shows that if one keeps going one will get to one's objective.

Q2. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 16 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Smyth: Could the Prime Minister, in his meeting with President Clinton, assure him of our good wishes but at the same time urge him to resist moves to appoint a peace envoy for Northern Ireland since those who advocate it are partisan in their opinion?

Does the Prime Minister accept that the best way to promote peace in Northern Ireland is the continued curtailment of funds and support for terrorism with an intensive education course for United States citizens, especially those of Irish republican sympathies, to enable them to understand that Northern Ireland is not a colony but part of the United Kingdom by choice of its citizens?

The Prime Minister: There has been a considerable effort by the United States Government and a number of leading American politicians to curb the flow of funds from the United States and to co-operate with us in bringing terrorist criminals to justice. I welcome that very much.

I hope and expect the new American Administration to continue to support the political dialogue established over the past two years. I believe that it offers the best hope of reconciliation and is fully consistent with Northern Ireland's position, as the hon. Member said, as a part of the United Kingdom.

Q3. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 16 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Paice: My right hon. Friend will recall that the last time that inflation was 1·7 per cent. he was just 25 years old and I was even younger. He will also recall that the then Labour Chancellor stated that inflation was the mother and father of unemployment. Is it not the case that with low inflation, low interest rates, low taxation and high productivity, Britain is best placed to recover from the recession ahead of all the other countries in Europe?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend except in one respect; I believe that I was 24 at the time and not 25. But the fall in inflation in January was excellent news in terms of both the retail prices index and the underlying rate of inflation. It provides the best possible basis for recovery in output and employment. We now have the lowest inflation rate for a quarter of a century and a rate below that of our colleagues in the Community and below the G7 averages. We have the lowest interest rates in the Community. We have mortgage rates at their lowest since 1956 and external surveys show that the United Kingdom will be among the fastest growing economies in Europe both this year and next year.

United Nations

Q4. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Prime Minister when he next expects to pay an official visit to the United Nations.

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to visit the United Nations headquarters in New York in the near future.

Mr. Cryer: Does the Prime Minister accept that the Government's support of the United Nations is highly selective and that there is absolutely no case for the Government continuing to breach the United Nations nuclear non-proliferation treaty by the manufacture and deployment of Trident nuclear weapons of mass destruction?

Mr. Gallie: What about Rosyth?

Mr. Cryer Does the Prime Minister endorse and support——

Mr. Gallie: What about Rosyth?

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman had better contain himself.

Mr. Cryer: Does the Prime Minister endorse and support the 150 members of the United Nations who have by treaty and declaration refused to manufacture and deploy nuclear weapons? If he supports those 150 nations and their moral superiority, why does he not follow them? Does he support them, yes or no?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) drew attention to some of the inconsistencies in the hon. Gentleman's question. The replacement of Polaris in the mid-1990s is essential for Britain to maintain an effective and credible deterrent into the next century. There is nothing in the non-proliferation treaty to prevent a nuclear weapons state from maintaining the credibility and effectiveness of a minimum deterrent in this way. That is the position in law and it is our position in policy.

Engagements

Q5. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 16 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Cryer: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In view of that unsatisfactory and misleading answer, I reserve the right to raise the matter on the Adjournment.

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman may raise the matter again, but he had better withdraw the word "misleading".

Mr. Cryer *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. I assure the hon. Gentleman that I heard the word. I am sure that he will rephrase it for me.

Mr. Cryer: I will withdraw the word "misleading" and say that he was economical with the truth.

Madam Speaker: Mr. Patrick Thompson.

Mr. Thompson: Is my right hon. Friend aware of representations from the police and local crime prevention panels, including the panel in Norwich, about the increased number of serious crimes committed by young people, some out on bail? Some individuals commit literally hundreds of offences. Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that the Government are determined to tackle that horrendous problem?

The Prime Minister: I will offer that assurance to my hon. Friend. There is a small hard core of persistent young offenders who are responsible for a disproportionate amount of crime, most notably property crime, especially car theft. In the past society has sometimes perhaps been too quick to understand and too slow to condemn. I doubt whether that helps the young people concerned. It is time to crack down on those young offenders. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary will shortly make proposals to do just that.

Q6. **Dr. Reid:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 16 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Dr. Reid: With reference to the Prime Minister's earlier answer on the question of Maastricht, may I inform him that this morning I had the pleasure of showing round the House of Commons a group of pupils from Brannock high school in my constituency? Having spoken of 1,000 years of Parliament and several hundred years of parliamentary sovereignty, I was asked a simple question by one of the pupils: "But what good is Parliament if the Prime Minister can ignore it when he chooses?" How would the Prime Minister have responded to that question?

The Prime Minister: He would have said, "I can't, and I don't."

Mr. Hawkins: Will my right hon. Friend accept the congratulations of literally thousands of my constituents who work at British Aerospace on the Tornado line for the work that he did in personally securing the contract? Will he further accept that my constituents know that they have him and the Conservative party to thank for securing their future in the defence industry and the future of their families? Unlike the Labour party, which whinges and whines, my right hon. Friend goes out and gets jobs for Britain.

The Prime Minister: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for that endorsement. The Tornado is undoubtedly a fine aircraft and I hope that we shall be able to export many more.

National Health Service (London)

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement about our proposals for improving the national health service in London. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Hon. Members who are leaving the Chamber should do so quietly and quickly. We are about to hear an important statement.

Mrs. Bottomley: I begin by expressing my sincere thanks to Sir Bernard Tomlinson, whose report has been instrumental in carrying the debate forward.

Following the publication of the Tomlinson report, we undertook an extensive period of informal consultation with the institutions and professional groups involved. I pay warm tribute to my hon. Friend the Minister for Health for the thorough way in which he held those discussions.

London and the rest of the country are poorly served by the present pattern of health services in the capital. Despite the fact that we spend some 20 per cent. more per head in London than elsewhere, services are often ill matched to the day-to-day needs of those who live and work there. London has 43 major acute hospitals, twice as many consultants per head as elsewhere, and, for example, 14 centres of specialist cardiac services and 13 in neurosurgery.

Despite the panoply of provision, patients use accident and emergency departments rather than going to a GP; patients cannot be discharged from hospital because there are inadequate services outside hospital to care for them; primary health care services in the rest of the country are often well ahead of the care that is available inside London. This is an unacceptable imbalance. It has to be redressed. The issues are well known. They are well documented and well understood. They have been the subject of at least 20 reports in the last 100 years. For a variety of reasons, successive Governments have declined to grasp the nettle. Today we are making a decisive break with that tradition.

Patients from outside London prefer to be treated locally. This process will accelerate, and not decline, in the future. Modern medicine means also that we can treat more patients with fewer beds. Many more services can be provided outside hospital, as the pioneering advances of the GP fund holders have shown. London should be in the vanguard of change.

Our response is rooted in the principles of our health service reforms. We start from the unshakeable belief that in London, as elsewhere, it is the patient who must come first. How and where services are provided should be determined first and foremost by what suits patients.

To provide a patient-focused, modern health service in London requires a radical programme of change. The work will be carried forward by the London implementation group, reporting to me and working with the existing health agencies in the capital. It will start now, work quickly and keep to a strict timetable.

The first step must be a substantial improvement in primary care in London. That means the development of higher quality, more accessible health services at local level —provided through GPs, nurses and other professionals in the community.

I am today establishing a London initiative zone covering the most deprived parts of the city where services can be most improved. I will be providing £170 million of capital investment over the next six years for improvements in the LIZ area. Much of that money will be used to provide new and improved premises for GPs and their teams where needed, and to provide new primary care centres.

Next year alone, we will invest over £40 million additional funds in primary and community health services. In addition, a further £10 million will be specifically targeted to ease waiting time problems for inner London residents.

We will strengthen the training of family doctors, nurses and other professional staff. We will bring experienced GPs into the capital, perhaps on short-term appointments.

We will be looking at new ways of providing services —by employing some GPs directly, by reviewing relevant aspects of the GP contract, such as the system of deprivation payments, by developing the GP fund holding initiative in London, which has brought so many benefits to patients elsewhere, and by much else besides.

We expect the social services to play their full part in ensuring effective integration of local health and social services. They must make use of the opportunities provided by our community care reforms and the significantly increased resources available through the special transitional grant.

We also want to make the best use of the special skills and talents of the voluntary sector. I can announce today that I am making a further £7·5 million available over the next three years to build up the role and work of the voluntary organisations.

To focus minds on innovation and experiment, we will provide a further £1 million to initiate a London primary health care challenge fund. We look to others also to contribute to the fund. It will make money available, on a competitive bidding basis, to fund experimental schemes, especially those which aim to bring local and hospital care together and those involving the voluntary, independent or social services sectors.

Putting those ideas into place involves a shift from care in acute hospitals to primary care. This, in turn, means building up services outside hospital, with fewer hospital beds and fewer sites where acute hospital care is delivered.

We need to reduce the excessive duplication of specialist services. I am announcing today six simultaneous reviews of those services to help us determine where best to concentrate specialist services to provide high quality cost-effective care. Each review will be taken forward urgently under the joint leadership of a distinguished clinician and a senior NHS manager of a purchasing authority. They will report by the end of May.

Accident and emergency services will mainly be provided from fully-equipped departments which have good access to back-up specialist services. In addition, we envisage an increasingly important role for minor injuries clinics.

But there is also a case for some rationalisation of accident and emergency services. In particular, the regions are setting in hand consultation on the closure of the A and

E at Charing Cross when the new Chelsea-Westminster is available, and on the closure of full-scale A and E at St. Bartholomew's.

We are determined that the London ambulance service should continue to make progress, to deliver a much-improved service for the considerable sums of money invested in it.

The new Chelsea-Westminster hospital is one of the most modern and advanced hospitals in Europe. This £200 million development is further proof of the Government's commitment to the national health service in London. Its completion marks the beginning of a new and better pattern of services in this sector of London.

A great deal of work has been done, in addition to the Tomlinson report. On the basis of the information before me, I have decided that there is no financial case for relocating the Royal Brompton and Royal Marsden hospitals to the Charing Cross hospital. This decision has clear implications for the future of that hospital. I have asked that detailed proposals for its future to be drawn up by the autumn. The London implementation group will also consider where best to relocate the maternity services currently provided at Queen Charlotte's hospital.

We cannot sustain extensive overlap or duplication in this part of London. In the long run, the best way forward may be an integrated health sciences centre, based at the Royal Brompton and the Royal Marsden, their respective institutes, and the Chelsea and Westminster hospital, with links to Imperial College. We will pursue that idea with those organisations.

In south-east London, consultation is under way on the proposal to merge the management of Guy's and St. Thomas's. If a Guy's/St. Thomas's trust is established, we will ask the new trust board to bring forward proposals, within six months, for consolidating the hospital services.

We also propose that the University College and Middlesex hospitals should continue to work up a proposal for rationalisation as quickly as possible. This would be considered with other priorities and subject to statutory consultation in respect of service changes. A development considerably smaller than the current hospitals combined seems likely.

In the east of London, significant changes are needed to provide a better pattern of services for the local population. People in Hackney and the surrounding area will be best served by developing the Homerton hospital to meet their needs. To make that possible, the Homerton will be established as a separate directly managed unit, with a view to it offering its patients the benefits of trust status from April 1994. We will consider urgently the proposal to build a further phase of the Homerton.

We believe it will be in the best interests of local people if some of the acute services currently at St. Bartholomew's at Smithfield are relocated to the Homerton. The hospital at Smithfield cannot continue as it is. That fact is well recognised, not least by the management and clinicians at St. Barthlomew's. Its precise future must depend crucially on the outcome of the speciality reviews and on whether or not purchasers wish to send their patients to it. In view of this, I have decided that the Barts NHS trust should not come into operation on 1 April and the shadow trust is therefore to be dissolved.

There are, in our judgment, three options for the future of St. Bartholomew's. The first is closure of the hospital site at Smithfield, with its specialist services relocating elsewhere. The second is joint management of St. Bartholomew's and the Royal London hospital. The new management would be responsible for determining whether, in light of the demand for its services, the combined hospital can continue operating from two major acute sites. The third is retention of Smithfield as a much smaller specialist hospital.

I have set in hand an urgent appraisal of each of those options, to be concluded by the autumn. The proposal which emerges will, of course, be subject to statutory consultation. Under any of the options, the services provided at Smithfield, and the number of beds, would be substantially reduced. I propose to consult separately on whether to replace its full scale A and E department with a 12-hour weekday minor injuries clinic.

The Government will also consult on proposals for the merged management of Northwick Park and St. Mark's and, subject to a sound business case being made, the relocation of St. Mark's to Northwick Park.

On medical education, Professor Tomlinson's proposals for mergers of London's free-standing medical schools with the major colleges of the University of London have been widely supported. They are in line with the university's long-standing policy.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education has welcomed Sir Bernard's broad conclusions on education and research. He has asked the Higher Education Funding Council for England to take them forward, working with those involved, to ensure that health and education changes march in step. The funding council will consider the issues raised in the Tomlinson report about student numbers in London.

Our proposals will have significant implications for NHS manpower in London. We will make sure that their skills are kept within the NHS, by redeployment and retraining wherever possible. I intend to establish a clearing house to help those staff who cannot find alternative employment through the normal arrangements.

The Tomlinson report made clear that the root cause of London's problems is not a lack of resources. Indeed, hon. Members from outside the capital often point to the consequences for their constituents of the fact that 20 per cent. of NHS resources are spent in London on 15 per cent. of the population.

A top priority must be to make the NHS in London more efficient and effective. At the moment, we provide bridging funding to London hospitals to help them survive the loss of income they face from the fact that money is following the patients elsewhere. That is not a sensible long-term use of funds. It is unfair to London and unfair to the rest of the country. We will tackle those inefficiencies. Over a period of time that will mean more money for better services outside London.

I have not the time to describe every proposal now. Full details are contained in a document "Making London Better", published today, copies of which are available in the Vote Office.

No change is no option. Sir Bernard Tomlinson spoke of a "spiral of decline" if we do not act now. The programme of improvement must be balanced. Rationalisation of hospital services must be paced alongside the complementary build-up of services outside hospital.

London deserves a first-class primary health care service, fit for the 21st century. London deserves a better-balanced hospital service, targeted on patient needs.

[Mrs. Bottomley]

London deserves the radical overhaul which, for years, many have promised but none has delivered. Under our proposals, that is what London will get.

We have accepted the need for radical change. We will deliver it. My programme offers the opportunity to cure London's ills and to make London better. I commend it to the House.

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): I pay tribute to my colleagues, who made a series of 39 visits and met more than 2,000 people when examining Sir Bernard Tomlinson's proposals.

Opposition Members find the statement deeply disappointing. It is a damp squib, with a long fuse attached to a powder keg—a powder keg of cuts, closures and capitulation to Treasury demands for cash to pay for the Government's economic incompetence.

The statement is an admission of failure: the failure to match the challenge and opportunities for the future health care of the capital; the failure of the Government's health care changes, with their commercialisation and the internal market, which have made an existing problem into a crisis; and the Secretary of State's failure to win sufficient resources to do the job properly.

Does the Secretary of State not agree that she is a latter-day grand old Duke of York, who promises much and delivers nothing? The statement is the worst of all worlds. It allows existing hospitals to wither on the vine, but does not find the resources to put the necessary health care in place; it talks about merger and unites St. Thomas's and Guy's, under the chairmanship of an ex-Conservative Minister, with a direction to close one of those hospitals.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that this afternoon she has effectively announced the closure of St. Bartholomew's hospital? In her three proposed consultation plans, she spelt out that St. Bart's could not stay open as it is, and that it would not stay open under the plans put forward to her Minister of State. If it stays on the existing site, the accident and emergency unit will be a daytime unit only.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that in the document that she mentioned at the end of her statement she gives the game away? She says:

> "Our proposals will have significant implications for NHS manpower in London."

What does the phrase "significant implications" mean? Does not the document give the game away when it suggests that a cautionary estimate shows that 2,500 beds will close over the next five years? Who will pay for the redundancies, the manpower losses and the retraining? From where will the money come and why was that not mentioned in this afternoon's statement? Where is the Treasury—behind the scenes, determining the hand of the Secretary of State for Health?

What have we had this afternoon? Will the Secretary of State confirm that in the document to which she referred, euphemistically called "Making London Better"—the title makes me choke on my words as, far from being called "Making London Better", it should have been entitled "Making Matters Worse"—paragraph 9 states:

> "The operation of the NHS internal market will determine the precise patterns of health care in London in the future; just as it is a major influence for good elsewhere."?

Is the Secretary of State telling us the truth this afternoon or is it a fact that Charing Cross hospital, the Royal National Throat, Nose and Ear hospital and, as I have already said, Barts, will close—and with Charing Cross, the medical school will close? Will there not be a major cutback in medical training in London? Is not her announcement this afternoon a totally inadequate response to the challenge facing London's health care and the rest of the nation?

Can the Secretary of State justify coming to the House this afternoon and pronouncing that increased general practitioner fund holding will help inner London, where there are three times the number of GPs working single-handedly from lock-up practices that need an immediate injection of cash? How can she tell the House this afternoon that less than £30 million a year over six years is an adequate response to the £400 million that the four inner London family health service authorities estimate to be the minimum to bring those GP premises up to an acceptable standard?

Can the Secretary of State really say that the £1 million challenge fund announced this afternoon will compensate for the complete annihilation of the inner city programme, the removal of the city challenge scheme, and the capping and closure of community care provision that will be made necessary by the Government settlement for local government from April? How can beds be freed to allow more patients to be treated if community care is neglected and the voluntary sector has to put up with £2 million a year to take on the task that local government in London should be allowed to fulfil?

Today is indeed a bad day for London, but it is also a bad day for the rest of Britain as the statement provides no answers for the investment needed in primary health care. It provides no answers to the needs of Londoners who wish to see in place proper accident and emergency facilities to deal with daytime and nighttime needs to ensure that the challenge of which the Secretary of State spoke on 29 October can be met.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that the figures and financing spelt out in Sir Bernard Tomlinson's report have already proved to be inadequate? Although the Secretary of State has announced this afternoon that the Royal Marsden and Brompton hospitals are to have a temporary reprieve because Ernst and Young found that it would cost £62 million to close them, her ancillary document states that, over the next five years, they will be "absorbed". That is another euphemism for "closed in due course".

This afternoon's exercise is one of duplicity. It allows hospitals to wither on the vine while covering the Government's back in a crisis of unemployment in facing the difficulties over the mining industry and the diktats of the Wakeham committee, which instructed the Secretary of State to cover up the closures, cutbacks and redundancies that are predicted.

Will the Secretary of State tell us how much is being clawed back from the rest of Britain's health service to pay for cuts, closures, redundancies and redeployments? How much will be clawed back from regional health service budgets over the next few years? Will we see a repetition of what happened to the Westminster and Chelsea hospital, which eventually cost £300,000 per bed? How much will be clawed back to close health services in London rather than improving them, and to put at risk projects and health care provision in the rest of the country?

Will the Secretary of State confirm that, far from protecting the rest of Britain by closing hospitals, beds and community facilities in London, she is putting at risk projects that hon. Members on both sides of the House would like to see in their regions? Is not the document a capitulation to the Treasury rather than a health document ensuring the care of Londoners in the years to come?

Mrs. Bottomley: That was an enormously disappointing response. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) has himself said in the past that the status quo was no longer an option. It is no longer an option. In the past 100 years, 20 reports have been produced urging radical change, and that is what we intend to bring about.

I should be surprised if the hon. Gentleman's constituents in Sheffield did not point out to him that, if London contains 15 per cent. of the population, there is no long-term justice in its having 20 per cent. of the expenditure. The hon. Gentleman has again shown himself in his true colours, as an Opposition health spokesman sponsored by the National Union of Public Employees. Jobs are always put before patients.

We are going to see through firm action. The hon. Gentleman indulged in the traditional Labour pursuit of plucking a figure out of the air and then doubling it. Tomlinson recommended primary health care capital investment of £140 million; I have made available £170 million, as well as £10 million for the waiting list initiative and £7·5 million over three years for voluntary organisations. We are determined to see an improvement in primary care.

I have already referred to the generous funding for implementation of "Care in the Community". We must ensure that progress is made. We all recognise that some loved and respected London institutions will have to make difficult decisions; but it is not possible for 43 hospitals with 250 beds to remain unscathed at a time when, all over the home counties, new, high-quality hospitals are opening and providing excellent, cost-effective care.

We are not prepared to fudge this issue; we are not prepared to duck it. Any serious commentator, professional or politician will see the comments of the hon. Member for Brightside for what they are—a populist, knee-jerk, unreconstructed, destructive reaction.

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on her statement, and on the courage that she has displayed in grasping the nettle represented by this highly sensitive and emotive issue. As she knows, many ex-Londoners in my Hertfordshire constituency have been aggrieved for many years by the fact that too many resources have been taken by the London hospitals, while too few have gone to serve the local communities in Hertfordshire and the surrounding home county areas. How will my right hon. Friend's proposals address the problem so that I can assure my constituents that they will receive proper health care in their local areas?

Mrs. Bottomley: I can give my hon. Friend exactly that assurance. Once again, she has made an informed and authoritative contribution. Many health providers in constituencies such as hers are developing first-rate health services, and no longer wish their patients to go to London.

In the past, going to London was a free good, but an internal market means that the local health authority must pay, and pay the high prices of London. The fixed overhead costs of the London hospitals will become ever greater as health authorities in constituencies such as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) make the understandable and sensible decision to treat patients locally. We estimate that, next year alone, £50 million worth of contracts will no longer go to London. We have to have managed change in London. We also need urgent change in London so that we can ensure a fairer distribution of health service resources across the country.

Ms. Liz Lynne (Rochdale): I welcome the fact that the Secretary of State has announced that she does not intend to close hospitals wholesale. At least she has partially taken advice and intends to go out to consultation. I do not believe, however, that the £170 million to which she referred for primary health care will be enough. Will the Secretary of State make a commitment today that the £170 million will at least be ring fenced or earmarked for primary health care? Will she also make a commitment that she will not backtrack, as she did with the alcohol and drug misuse budget? Will she make a further firm commitment that before any hospitals are closed primary health care will be in place?

I welcome the fact that £10 million has been given towards cutting down waiting lists in London, but I should like to find out exactly when waiting lists in London will be cleared with that money. Nevertheless, I am grateful that that money has been provided.

Mrs. Bottomley: I thank the hon. Lady. I can give her an assurance that the £170 million for investing in primary health care in London will be used only for that purpose within the London initiative zone. I remind her that Sir Bernard Tomlinson's estimate was £140 million. We are making £170 million available.

I find the hon. Lady's comparison with the drug and alcohol ring-fenced money rather strange. Apart from the fact that we ring-fenced the drug and alcohol money, we ring-fenced the whole of the community care money—£565 million, an increase of a third over what was available through social security. That will lead to £30 million more in London next year and £130 million more for community care in London by 1996.

In the discussions on the waiting time proposals, I know that the hon. Lady made the point that more should happen about waiting times in London. The sum of £10 million will be spent in London. Good progress has already been made in the past year. The number of those waiting for more than a year in London has fallen by 61 per cent. in the past year, and the overall lists have fallen by 8 per cent.

Mr. Matthew Carrington (Fulham): My right hon. Friend will know that the decision to close Charing Cross hospital will be met with horror in west London, where the facilities of that hospital are greatly needed in a very deprived part of the metropolis. Can my right hon. Friend explain why she has decided to pre-empt the specialty review in London by deciding to keep the Royal Brompton and the Royal Marsden hospitals independent and not to move them to the Charing Cross site, ahead of a full review of the cancer and chest specialties in London?

Mrs. Bottomley: I well understand my hon. Friend's support for his own local hospital and his concern about my statement. After studying further information during our discussions on the Tomlinson report and further appraisals that we were able to undertake, we took the

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view that it was not a cost-effective option to move the Royal Brompton and the Royal Marsden hospitals to the Charing Cross site. However, my hon. Friend is right: we are establishing forthwith specialty reviews. They will be chaired by a clinician from outside London in each of the six key areas. We hope that the Royal Brompton and the Royal Marsden hospitals will come together as a trust, sharing costs and seeking considerable savings. They will be subject to those specialty reviews, as will all the other specialist centres in London.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): Is the Secretary of State aware that the statement that there are too many hospital beds in London will be greeted with ribald laughter in a large part of the capital, where long waiting lists are still growing? May I ask her, since she did not, in my recollection, mention the Queen Elizabeth Hospital for Children, whether good sense has prevailed in that case and that it will be left alone to carry on serving the people in my part of London in the way that it has done in the past?

Mrs. Bottomley: I am surprised by the right hon. Gentleman's comment, since informed commentators, professionals and many politicians on all sides have recognised that there is a need to tackle the over-provision of beds in London. That over-provision can be tackled only as the primary care services develop. I should have thought that the right hon. Gentleman would agree that there was a misuse of hospital beds in London because of inadequate primary care services. In addition, the implementation of community care must be closely tied in with further steps on hospitals.

As for the Queen Elizabeth hospital in Hackney, which I have visited a number of times, it will join with the Homerton hospital to continue to provide a good quality local service. We certainly hope that the research, staff and ties of loyalty with Great Ormond Street will continue, but when the right hon. Gentleman studies the Tomlinson report, he will see that it makes a powerful argument for ensuring that single specialty hospitals are drawn in to the local community that they serve so that they can benefit from the range of skills at the local district general hospital, as with the London Chest hospital joining the London hospital.

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): Does my right hon. Friend recall a leader article in *The Guardian* last October or November which said that only a political ostrich could fail to take note of the fact that more money per head was spent from the health budget on London than on anywhere else but that it provided a worse service? Will she confirm that most of the London hospitals were set up nearly 100 years ago and that not only treatment but the use of day beds, instead of keeping people in hospital, has changed out of all recognition since the time when the London hospital scene was first established? Will she, therefore, take the opportunity to tell the political ostriches and dinosaurs on the Opposition Benches—they seem to be about half and half—the truth about the matter?

Mrs. Bottomley: I well remember that editorial in *The Guardian*. I also remember a similar report in *Nursing Standard* which said that the professional organisations which have for years been arguing for a radical shift in resources from hospitals to primary care cannot now condemn a report which is founded on that principle.

My hon. Friend is, as ever, exactly right. The provision of health care in London is based in the past. We are determined to plan for the future. Florence Nightingale said that St. Thomas's should move out to Blackheath, and 20 reports in 100 years have urged action on us. We are determined to see exactly that action.

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): Why does the Secretary of State talk to the House as though she thought that St. Bartholomew's and the Homerton hospital were separate hospitals? As she is the Secretary of State for Health, she must know that it is the same institution run by the same people, with the same doctors and consultants. She proposes to destroy both hospitals. Does she not understand that her announcement has shown her to be a medically ignorant political chancer who deserves the undying contempt of us all because she is putting at risk 100,000 people in south Hackney, 100,000 in Islington and 300,000 in the City? What is the virtue in that?

Mrs. Bottomley: I am sorry to have inflamed the hon. Gentleman. I am used to reading his castigation of his own party's spokesman on the matter of health reform in London.

I have announced that we wish Homerton hospital to proceed with proposals for its phase 2 development. We envisage a central position for Homerton in serving the local population and in working with joint management with the Queen Elizabeth hospital in Hackney because we well recognise the needs of that part of London.

St. Bartholomew's will have to face the economic facts of life and the reality of health care today. It has the choice of closing, setting up as a small specialist unit or joining the London hospital. In my view, it is a choice between sentiment and excellence. It will need to consider urgently the way it wishes to proceed. I am concerned to serve local people, and the Homerton hospital is the place that will best do that.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): As perhaps the only former London health authority chairman in the House, I welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement. I have been the chairman of an outer London district and now represent a constituency beyond that. Both have been deprived of resources because of the over-resourcing of inner London. My constituents and those for whom I was responsible as a health authority chairman will welcome her statement. However, may I ask for her assurance that the resources necessary to ensure that people living in outer London and beyond can be treated in their own district general hospital will be provided from the savings made from London? Without those savings people will still be inclined to go to inner London for their treatment. Will she also ensure that, if some consultants will no longer have jobs in inner London, they will be steered to outer London and beyond for their new jobs?

Mrs. Bottomley: Once again, my hon. Friend, who has great knowledge of these matters, speaks on behalf of many others in the House. We estimate that next year contracts to the tune of £50 million will no longer come to

London because many, like my hon. Friend, wish patients to be treated more cost effectively in their local communities.

We wish to ensure that, as a result of the specialty reviews, those units which find no future for themselves in London, and particularly their consultants, should certainly have the opportunity to find a productive role in the home counties and elsewhere in the country.

Ms. Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): Does the Secretary of State know that on 29 January there was a seven-hour waiting time at the accident and emergency department of the Royal London hospital, Whitechapel, two days before the accident and emergency department at Mile End was closed for good against the wishes of the population? She now proposes that the accident and emergency department at Barts should go for a burton and that its workload should also go to the Royal London hospital.

Is the Secretary of State aware that the Queen Elizabeth Hospital for Children serves children in Tower Hamlets, which has the fastest growing birth rate in the country, and that if that is merged with Homerton, those children will go to the Royal London hospital, further increasing the workload there and, presumably, the waiting time? I do not know what waiting time is considered acceptable in the document so cynically entitled "Making London Better", but the waiting time and the workload at the Royal London are becoming unacceptable.

What sense is there in destroying the marvellous work done at Great Ormond Street by taking away its research department? What sense is there in merging the London Chest hospital with the Royal London so that within five years it will be moved from its salubrious green site in Bethnal Green and rebuilt on what is a dirty, dusty and polluted site for chest patients on Whitechapel road? What nonsense is all this?

Madam Speaker: Before the Secretary of State answers, I plead with right hon. and hon. Members on the Front and Back Benches to put short questions and make speedy answers. Many hon. Members want to participate and I cannot allow questions to continue for much longer.

Mrs. Bottomley: I well understand many of the points of misinformation in the hon. Lady's question. She will be able to study the document and will in many ways be reassured when she understands the arguments behind many of the decisions.

It is appropriate for specialist hospitals to be under the organisation of a local general hospital in order to provide a broader-based health care for those in need of acute services. The hon. Lady's constituents, who may go to the Queen Elizabeth hospital with their children, will be treated at the Homerton, perhaps as a maternity or a surgical case, and we envisage the management joining the Chest hospital there. I have not announced that those hospitals will move into the buildings of the hospitals under whose management they will come.

On waiting times, the hon. Lady may not have heard me point out that in London in the past year the number of those waiting for more than a year has fallen by 61 per cent., which is a considerable achievement. The overall list has fallen by 8 per cent.

With regard to the hon. Lady's last point on pressure on accident and emergency, I have visited the accident and emergency department at the Royal London. She will be aware of the tremendous unpredictability of demands on accident and emergency services, but all are agreed that one of the dilemmas in London is the inappropriate use of accident and emergency services by people who would normally go to a GP or a community nurse. The right way forward is by developing effective alternatives that local people trust.

Sir John Wheeler (Westminster, North): It takes great courage and conviction to do what is right in the health service for people in London, and my right hon. Friend has achieved that today. Does she agree that the most important part of these changes is the development of the primary health care service, particularly in London? Will she add further to her statement on how she sees the flow of funding and the development of that service leading to the objectives that she has outlined today?

Mrs. Bottomley: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. It is exactly by effective and fast development of primary care that we shall achieve change. The London initiative zone offers the opportunity to pioneer and innovate and to find new ways to make sure that we have the primary care that meets the needs of Londoners.

It is well understood that London has a greater number of homeless people, of people from ethnic minorities, of people with drug addiction problems and of people not registered with GPs. GPs have difficulties on premises; there are more single-handed GPs and there are more older GPs. It is by finding new ways and new procedures for tackling those problems that we shall make progress. We shall set up a primary care forum, to be chaired by the chairman of the London implementation group, to take forward change swiftly. We anticipate spending £40 million extra on primary care services in the first year alone.

Ms. Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): Does the Secretary of State not agree with me that it is a bit of a farce to talk about consultation on the amalgamation of trusts between St. Thomas's and Guy's when the chair has already been appointed and the whole thing has obviously been sewn up? Would she clarify what she means in her statement by saying that those two hospitals are consolidating? Does she mean that one of them will close, whatever is said, and will she say what will happen to those people who depend on the accident and emergency service at St. Thomas's if that accident and emergency service should ever close?

Mrs. Bottomley: At present there is statutory consultation under way on the proposal for Guy's and St. Thomas's to join together as an NHS trust. We are then asking them to go out to consultation on an independent appraisal on site options. Radical change has to go forward in London. This cannot be achieved without difficult decisions being made and on the basis of the independent appraisal. We shall certainly want them to follow through the recommendations of that appraisal, but it will be within their responsibilities and for their decisions as an NHS trust.

The hon. Lady well knows that within her constituency there is the development of initiatives such as the West Lambeth community care centre. She well knows that that is the right way to provide a modern health service for her constituents. It is not possible for her to seek development of initiatives such as the West Lambeth community care centre, as well as having, within a short distance,

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500 hospital consultants at Guy's, St. Thomas's and King's. It is that sort of imbalance that makes hon. Members from outside London urge swift action.

Dr. Charles Goodson-Wickes (Wimbledon): My right hon. Friend will recognise that her announcement today will be the cause of qualified rejoicing at Bart's, but I hope that, on reflection, the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore), who has been robust in his defence of Bart's, will recognise that we now have two viable alternatives to the disastrous Tomlinson recommendation to close Bart's and sell the site. May I urge my right hon. Friend to ensure that the consultation process is speedy and vigorous and, this time, is based on properly-based data?

Mrs. Bottomley: I can give my hon. Friend precisely that assurance. I think that St. Bartholomew's has now begun to face the economic realities. It will not be possible to persuade health authorities to send patients to hospitals that do not provide a cost-effective service. That is the reality of the NHS reforms that we have established. It will have to choose between whether it takes forward its ideas of becoming a small specialty hospital or decides to combine with the Royal London. There are strong arguments that, if it sees the future as being a centre of excellence, it will be by following the example of very many others and saying that it wants to pool the skills, resources and expertise of their teams. These decisions need to be taken swiftly, because we wish to avoid the spiral of decline outlined by Sir Bernard Tomlinson. The specialty reviews are to complete their work within three months, and the further proposals are to be ready within six months.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice (Lewisham, East): The Secretary of State has said today that she is to initiate a new London primary health care challenge. She also said that she was looking to others to contribute to the fund. Is she prepared to tell us who those others might be? Are they to be the banks, or are they to be McDonald's and the other hamburger joints? Or are they to be the patients themselves? Having contributed to that fund, who is to decide the competitive basis on which the bids will be won? How many people in the local community will have a say in what happens at the local hospital?

Mrs. Bottomley: I am very surprised to hear the hon. Lady's prejudice against McDonald's. If McDonald's wishes to make a contribution to the primary care challenge fund, we shall certainly welcome it. We wish to have a great number of innovative ideas about where we can find premises. The real challenge for primary health care in London is the issue of premises. We certainly will explore the idea of family doctor premises becoming established in a wide range of places, and—who knows? —McDonald's may well be an option.

I thank the hon. Lady for her suggestion. But, of course, it is a travesty of the amount of money that I have announced: £170 million over six years for capital development; £40 million in the first year; £7·5 million for voluntary organisations; as well as the £1 million for the challenge fund.

Dame Angela Rumbold (Mitcham and Morden): My right hon. Friend will know that I served on one of the previous investigations into the London health service, so I am more than well aware of the difficult decisions that she and her Ministers have to take in considering the London issue. I congratulate her on the very skilful way in which she has solved the problems. I believe that the answers that she has outlined to the House this afternoon will certainly provide much better services for London in the long term, and better services for hospitals outside London. I also thank her on behalf of my constituents, many of whom work in the Royal Marsden at Sutton, because they will be very relieved to understand that their jobs are secure for the time being. May I ask her, however, what she envisages for the specialty reviews? A little more clarity on those would be helpful.

Mrs. Bottomley: We shall be establishing forthwith specialty reviews in the six key areas of cancer services, cardiac services, neuro-sciences, renal services and paediatric services, to be chaired by an expert from outside London and with a manager from within London. They will report within three months. There will be further consultation on those reports afterwards.

I thank my right hon. Friend for her generous remarks. We have to see change; we have to see change to a tight timetable. At the same time, we have to go through the proper procedures of consultation. I am very appreciative of the way in which most people in the service, most commentators and most professionals have well understood the need for change. No change is no option. We need now to carry it forward.

Ms. Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Is the Secretary of State aware that it will come as a surprise to my constituents to discover that London is over-funded, in the light of rising waiting lists, cancelled operations, the mentally ill wandering our streets and a constant diminution of the services for geriatrics?

Why is the right hon. Lady so concerned about saving money in the London area? The Royal Free medical school in my constituency can train a doctor for between £10,000 and £12,000 a year, as can the other London teaching hospitals, yet the universities of Oxford and Cambridge can only train for £18,000 a year. Is she perhaps not concentrating her sights in the wrong area?

Mrs. Bottomley: I am surprised that the hon. Lady for ever denigrates the achievements of the Royal Free hospital, because it is providing more high quality care to more patients. I have already informed the House that waiting lists are coming down. There is a 61 per cent. fall in the number of patients waiting for more than a year, and an 8 per cent. fall overall——

Ms. Jackson: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order. I have to take points of order at the end of the statement, as the hon. Lady knows— *[Interruption.]* Order. An argument about policy is not a point of order for the Chair.

Mrs. Bottomley: The hon. Lady is right to say that we need to develop better services for the mentally ill who, above all, need primary care services. They need more community psychiatric nurses, so that many of the changes that we propose will be nurse-led. Nursing will be the crucial professional group. London has twice as many consultants per head of the population as outside areas.

There is a distorted budget in London, focusing on inappropriate priorities. We wish to introduce changes to allow people to achieve exactly those objectives.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Does my right hon. Friend realise that the House knows that she has an extremely difficult task? Does she know that I was under surgery only last Thursday for a leg and vein operation and, due to the brilliance of a young houseman at the Charing Cross hospital, Dr. Backhouse, who spotted a growth on my chest that has since proved to be cancerous, the professor of surgery there, Mr. Greenhalgh, has removed it all so that I have been given a clean bill of health—with much relief to the Chief Whip, I am told?

Will not Charing Cross be given the opportunity, with the use of the internal market, to see whether Riverside health authority and North Thames health authority and surrounding areas can provide the necessary psychiatric and community care in west London which would then allow this immensely successful hospital to survive?

Mrs. Bottomley: I am delighted to see my right hon. Friend with us—I am probably as delighted as the Whips are—and I share his tremendous commendation of the doctors, nurses and others who work in the national health service. We in Britain can have confidence that we have a national health service available to all and, of course, we wish that to continue. However, a few people believe it is possible to provide a cost-effective service in future without addressing the problems in London. We will consider closely all the options at the Charing Cross and the region and try to plan for the future.

As my right hon. Friend rightly says, there are a number of beds for geriatric and mentally-ill patients for whom provision will have to be made. We cannot take forward our proposals by fudging every issue. We will take decisions in the interests of the national health service in London and elsewhere. I believe that all those who work in those great institutions know full well that change has to come. They wish decisions to be made and uncertainties to be brought to an end.

Ms. Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): As one of the Members of Parliament representing Hackney, my concern throughout has been the level and quality of health care available to people living in Hackney. On behalf of those people, I must give one cheer to the announcement that stage 2 of the Homerton might be built, but I must stress how vital it is to health care in Hackney.

Will the Secretary of State say whether the £170 million being made available over six years is new money?

Finally, on redundancies, Conservative Members are quick to sneer when we talk about hospital workers, but let me remind them that thousands of hospital workers whose jobs are threatened are women, relatively low-paid workers, and often single wage earners in areas of high unemployment. Often, they are black women who came to the United Kingdom in the 1950s and 1960s and who have given their lives to the British health service. Opposition Members should give a little more respect to, and be a little more concerned about, the issue of redundancies.

Mrs. Bottomley: I am pleased that the hon. Lady applauds the further plans for Homerton. We recognise that there is a need for further investment to serve that part of London. I am referring to the extra £170 million for primary care, apart from all the other announcements which I have made today.

I well appreciate the point which the hon. Lady makes about staff. When we first published the Tomlinson report we sent a newsletter to all staff in London. I am now sending another letter to all those who work within the service. Of course, uncertainty is difficult for them: they need to know the full facts as soon as possible.

We are setting up a clearing house to ensure that, across London, we look carefully at redeployment, retraining and the way in which we can most sensitively and helpfully handle the human resource question. Each year, there is a turnover of about 20 per cent. in nurses in London. I hope that it will be possible to keep the redundancies to a minimum.

Mr. David Mellor (Putney): May I thank my right hon. Friend for what she said, and especially for acceding to the representations of a number of us that the Royal Brompton and the Royal Marsden should be allowed to continue their excellent work where they are? I am sure that there will be enormous relief about that.

I invite my right hon. Friend to recall that it was the London health consortium, under the last Labour Government, which first proposed that there should be a cut of 2,000 acute beds in London. Since then, the national health service has been transformed by the creation of hospitals of excellence throughout the nation. That makes this restructuring of London's health services—however painful—long overdue and necessary. I assure my right hon. Friend that she will have the support of all Conservative London Members if she proceeds as sensibly down that course as she has given evidence of doing this afternoon.

Mrs. Bottomley: I thank my right hon. Friend for so eloquently and effectively putting precisely the argument: we have to go forward with these changes. I thank him for his comments about the Royal Brompton and the Royal Marsden. We are persuaded that, together with Chelsea and Westminster and the associated institutes, there is scope for the development of a Chelsea health sciences centre. As special health authorities come into the market, we will protect the research component, but it is important that they play their full part and look for the savings and efficiencies which all other members of the health service family are exploring.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Will the Secretary of State guarantee to the people of south-east London in general and the users of Guy's hospital in particular that, as a result of her announcement today, the time between referral to a hospital and treatment will be shorter and a bed will be available when they need it, but that the retention of health care both at Guy's and St. Thomas', as a result of her carefully worded announcement, is still an option for the trust to consider and a possibility at the end of any review period which a new trust will start in a few months' time?

Mrs. Bottomley: I can certainly guarantee that, if not as a result of the announcement immediately, certainly the development of our plans for London's health service is intended precisely to provide better health care for London and Londoners.

[Mrs. Bottomley]

Often there has been a predominance of specialist services at the expense of routine local services which local people need, whether from the primary health care team or, when appropriate, the hospital. The hon. Gentleman will know that only a short distance from his constituency, at King's College hospital, 40 per cent. of the patients attending there would normally go to a GP or a nurse. We must achieve a better balance within London and across the country.

On the proposals for Guy's and St. Thomas's, it really is a matter for the trust once it is established, if I agree to it, subject to consultation. Of course, I must preserve the legal niceties when the trusts go forward for their site appraisals.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the drop in waiting lists is tremendously welcome? Surely what matters to patients is not only the number of beds but the effective use to which they are put?

Mrs. Bottomley: How right my hon. Friend is. I agree with him.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): May I invite the Secretary of State to stop playing ducks and drakes with London and the rest of the country when boasting of good quality health care? Is she now aware that the Tomlinson report is seriously flawed in much of its analysis of the provision of beds in London and the use of accident and emergency departments because of the incidence of poverty and homelessness in London? Does she not recognise that increasingly inadequate primary care resources will probably lead to an increased demand for hospital places? Does she not think that it is necessary to halt the hospital closure programme and instead examine seriously the health needs of Londoners as a whole, including improvements in the primary and community care facilities, which receive only a small amount of money from her proposals?

Mrs. Bottomley: I do not accept what the hon. Gentleman says. I am Secretary of State for the national health service. At present there is one hospital doctor or GP to every 500 people in London. The national average is one to every 1,100. There are twice as many consultants in London. All the figures are out of balance. In my view, the Tomlinson report, following as it did the King's Fund report, in which representatives of all political parties were involved, makes a powerful case which any responsible Secretary of State would want to see taken forward.

Sir Rhodes Boyson (Brent, North): I should like to ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State two questions. First, people in my constituency and throughout London are proud of the specialist hospitals in London, which are renowned not only in London but throughout Britain and the world. Is she aware of the depth of feeling about that in London? Secondly, my right hon. Friend said that 2,500 hospital beds in London would be taken away. Although I warmly welcome the £10 million to cut waiting lists, I have to battle every day to get people into hospital. Is my right hon. Friend aware that the people in London will be slightly cynical about the idea that there is a quick way into hospitals in London?

Mrs. Bottomley: My right hon. Friend is right when he says that there is great respect for the specialist hospitals. However, the issue is not necessarily the buildings but the skills of those who work there. I sometimes think that my job is supposed to be an arm of the Department of National Heritage. I do not see it in that way. There are strong cases for ensuring that specialist skills are part of a wider team with a wider range of skills, expertise and back-up facilities. That is the thrust of the Tomlinson report.

My right hon. Friend referred to the difficulty of his constituents in getting a hospital bed. That is pertinent to the lack of primary care in London and the use of accident and emergency departments where otherwise people would use a GP. It was estimated by one of the teaching hospitals that up to 15 per cent. of the beds were occupied by people who elsewhere would have been cared for in the community. Of course, we must get primary care right, but the combination of rationalisation of specialist services, contracts leaving London and the development of primary care will make such changes absolutely essential.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I understand the difficulties of the Secretary of State when she makes decisions about London, but let me put it on record that it is not a case of the rest of the nation against London. I have had representations from constituents in Northern Ireland specifically about the Royal National Throat, Nose and Ear, the Royal Marsden and St. Bartholomew's hospitals.

I should like the Secretary of State to consider another aspect. How will the students who are being trained obtain sufficient experience and hands-on treatment in the medical schools of London if we scatter the hospitals and research facilities for the nation?

Mrs. Bottomley: To start with the hon. Gentleman's final point, he is probably well aware that many of the London teaching hospitals have difficulty in putting enough cases through for the medical students to see. That is the dilemma. The rationalisation of the medical schools and the associated hospitals is given high priority by the Higher Education Funding Council. We want to see curriculum changes in undergraduate education. We need better primary care facilities in London to enable students to learn.

The first part of the hon. Gentleman's remarks is totally in line with our proposals. I understand his point about sentiment and loyalty to particular institutions. The issue is not the obliteration of units and teams; it is the appropriate location of teams in a setting where they can make a contribution, along with others with different skills and expertise. That is the way forward if we are continue to have a centre of excellence, famous not only in this country but also in the world.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): Can my right hon. Friend confirm that her policy will be to the benefit of such hospitals as Addenbrookes—a teaching hospital—and Papworth, both of which are located in the fastest-growing area of the country and are just as excellent and important as London hospitals, which are in an area of declining population?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend has the privilege of being served by two first-rate hospitals. It will certainly be to the benefit of everyone in the country when we no longer have to subsidise London to the extent to which it is being subsidised at the moment. We estimate that, this year, we are subsidising the London institutions to the tune of £50 million. Next year the figure is likely to be £100 million. As contracts are taken away, as patients wish to be treated outside London, the London hospitals will be left with very heavy, fixed overhead costs. Nobody is served when health resources are invested in buildings and an expensive infrastructure rather than in patients.

Ms. Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): Does the Secretary of State agree that we should be discussing the report "Making London Better" rather than her statement? The report outlines clearly the fate of the London hospitals—death by a thousand cuts. The Secretary of State will not admit it to the House, but that is the Government's intention.

Does the right hon. Lady agree that it is wrong that the internal market should determine the pattern of health care in London, as well as in the rest of the country, which will suffer the same fate, as is detailed in paragraph 9 of the report? Does she agree that the Royal Brompton, the Royal Marsden, St. Bartholomew's and Charing Cross hospitals should not be left at the mercy of the market, to wither away on the vine, as is detailed in paragraph 62 of this report? Does the Secretary of State agree that special health authorities should not be exposed to the vagaries of the market and to certain destruction, as is detailed in paragraph 85 of the report?

Does the Secretary of State agree that the 20,000 health workers—nearly the same number as in the case of the miners—who will lose their jobs are not satisfied with the safeguards that she has announced to the House? Does she agree that any funding for London will be recycled money lost by London as a result of the introduction of weighted capitation? If that is not the case, where will the money come from? Will it be top-sliced from the regions? Will the Secretary of State confirm that UCH Middlesex and Great Ormond Street will remain in existence, that they will not be scaled down or eradicated? In this respect, I refer her to paragraph 66 of "Making London Better".

Does the Secretary of State accept that she has done nothing to arrest the decline of the health service in London and that her proposals on community care are pathetic in the extreme and will desperately disappoint GPs and primary health care workers in London, who can take no comfort from the pathetic provision of only £28 million a year to introduce and improve services?

Mrs. Bottomley: The hon. Lady's remarks are such irresponsible, misleading gibberish that I shall not bother to respond to them. She has been engaging in distortion. She cannot have listened to any of the constructive and helpful discussion that we have had this afternoon. I suggest that she read the report rather more carefully.

I confirm that our proposals are based on four central principles—that people who live and work in London must have ready access to the full range of services that they need; that services must be of a good standard and cost-effective; that the internal health market should work in London as elsewhere; and that high-quality medical education and research must be sustained and fostered. Those are the principles of this report, and they are the principles that we shall see executed.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. We must now move on.

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I realise that there is a time problem, but several London Members, including myself, are confronted with the closure of Queen Charlotte's hospital and with the proposed closure of Charing Cross hospital, which would have a dramatic effect on my constituency. We have not had a chance to raise these matters. May I ask for an urgent debate? As the Secretary of State herself said several times, this is not just a London issue but a national issue. The debate that I seek should take place in Government time and should be arranged soon.

Madam Speaker: I share the hon. Gentleman's disappointment at the fact that I have been unable to call more Members. I went carefully through the list of hon. Members in whose constituencies there are hospitals that are affected, and I attempted to call them. I also attempted to call Members for constituencies throughout other regions, as this is, of course, a national issue. The number of Members that I was able to call was limited by reason of long questions and, I may say, long answers. The House shares my disappointment at my having been unable to call more Members.

Ms. Glenda Jackson: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The question that I put to the Secretary of State referred to the Royal Free hospital medical school. Much to my surprise, it seems that the Secretary of State does not realise that there is a Royal Free hospital and a Royal Free hospital medical school. She chose to centre her reply on the Royal Free hospital. She implied that I had been critical of the service provided by that hospital. In doing so, she insulted not me but the medical and nursing staff——

Madam Speaker: Order. I heard the exchange to which the hon. Lady refers. She must know that it is a matter for argument, and not a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. Corbyn: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I understand your difficulties with regard to the business of the House, as that is, unfortunately, the responsibility of the Government. The problem is that Londonders have no means of expressing a view before the Secretary of State starts radically altering and closing hospitals throughout London. There will be no consultation. No health authority covers London. There are no elections to the bodies concerned.

I appeal to you, Madam Speaker, to use your best endeavours to ensure that there is an urgent debate in which all these issues can be discussed before the Secretary of State goes ahead and implements a policy that has no support from the people of London.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, including the hon. Gentleman, know that the business of the House is not a matter for the Speaker. I have no doubt that these issues will be raised with the Lord President of the Council during business questions.

ROAD TRAFFIC (AMENDMENT)

Mr. Keith Vaz presented a Bill to amend section 170 of the Road Traffic Act 1988: And the same was read a First time, and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 19 February 1993; and to be printed [Bill 137.]

Justice

4.47 pm

Ms. Jean Corston (Bristol, East): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make further provision for the investigation of alleged miscarriages of justice in connection with criminal proceedings in England and Wales; and for related purposes.

For many years the only thing ever said in this country about our criminal justice system was that it was the best in the world. There cannot be many people who would make such a claim now. Most people could recite part of the litany of cases involving the miscarriage of justice—the Guildford Four, the Birmingham Six, the Maguire Seven, the Winchester Three, the Cardiff Three, the Tottenham Three, Judith Ward, Stefan Kiszko.

The Guildford Four were set free in 1989. Since then more than 50 people have been released from prison, their convictions having been set aside or found to be unsafe or unsatisfactory. All those people were victims of miscarriage of justice.

Last November the National Association of Probation Officers and Liberty, both of which have given me advice and assistance in the preparation of this Bill, published a dossier of 163 cases in which there was some doubt about the safety of the convictions. Further, there cannot be an hon. Member who has not received letters from prisoners protesting their innocence. Many of them give rise to disquiet and unease. The House should also be aware that such prisoners pay a high price for protesting their innocence. The parole system is based on acknowledgement of guilt. Any prisoner who maintains innocence of the crime for which he or she is convicted will usually serve a longer sentence than the guilty.

In order to understand why my Bill is vital in restoring confidence to our criminal justice system it is necessary for me to describe the present procedure in cases of alleged miscarriage of justice. A convicted person appeals to the Home Secretary, who alone has the power to refer an individual case to the Court of Appeal for consideration. The case is then considered by the division of the Home Office known as C3. In reply to written questions from me, the Home Secretary confirmed that, during 1992, C3 received 790 representations alleging miscarriage of justice and that 178 were under active consideration. The average time taken to investigate a case was 41 days, although on 1 February this year, 27 cases had been outstanding for more than 12 months. During the whole of 1992, the Home Secretary referred just seven cases in respect of conviction back to the Court of Appeal. The House will also know of the diquiet arising from the Home Secretary's recent refusal to refer the case of the Bridgewater Three.

Another disquieting aspect of the present procedure is that, after the C3 investigation, the Home Office sends the papers to the relevant police force, and neither the convicted person nor his or her legal representative has a right to see the police comment or evidence. Such decisions should be independent of political control. It is not unknown for Home Secretaries to be determined not to be seen to be soft on crime, particularly when they have to face a baying Tory party conference.

Among those who have given support for an independent body are two former Conservative Home Secretaries, the present Foreign Secretary and the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker). Furthermore, in his second report on the Maguire case, presented to the House on 3 December 1992, Lord Justice May said:

"new independent machinery must be set up to carry out all those investigations and inquiries which the circumstances of a given case may require. It will be necessary for this machinery to be set up by statute. It will no doubt have its own procedural rules, but subject to these it should have the power and resources to investigate any conviction which may merit such an inquiry. These will no doubt include the fullest power to call for documents and other exhibits and to be able to enforce their production."

He went on:

"if, upon the completion of the investigation, it is concluded that a miscarriage of justice may have occurred, whatever machinery is set up will no doubt enable the case and the result of the investigations to be referred to the Court of Appeal"

My Bill provides for the establishment of just such a statutory body—the criminal justice review board. The Lord Chancellor will be required to appoint 12 members to the board. They will include people with knowledge of the criminal justice system, those with knowledge and experience of the supervision or aftercare of discharged prisoners and a psychiatrist. The board will have a proper representation of women and people from ethnic minorities.

Any convicted prisoner may refer his or her case to the board, provided that they have been through the Court of Appeal procedure or there has been unreasonable delay. The board will have power to appoint a case officer to investigate any application where it considers it is justified, and the case officer will have wide powers of investigation, search and seizure. At the end of the investigation, the case officer will be required to submit a report to a panel of board members, chaired by a High Court judge.

If the board then considers that there may have been a miscarriage of justice or that the case raises an arguable point of law, it and it alone can refer the case to the Court of Appeal, where it will be treated as an appeal against conviction. The appellant will also be entitled to receive written reasons for the board's decision.

The Bill further provides that, following any criminal conviction on indictment, all the evidence should be preserved. We are too familiar with miscarriage of justice cases where it is not possible to bring proceedings against, for example, police officers who have behaved improperly, because evidence has mysteriously disappeared. For far too long, honest police officers have paid the price of suspicion and disbelief because of those who bend the rules to get a conviction.

We should also treat with caution the assertion that the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 has ensured that the incidence of miscarriage of justice will be rare. There is an emerging body of evidence to show that that faith is misplaced.

Some may argue that there is no need for the House to consider the matter at present, in view of the fact that the Royal Commission on Criminal Justice, chaired by Lord Runciman, is currently conducting its inquiry and will report to the House in the fullness of time. There are those who may agree with the former Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, who said that royal commissions took minutes and wasted years. But it cannot be denied that, even with a fair wind, implementation of any recommendations could not take place before 1996 or 1997. Further, we are entitled to assume that the Runciman inquiry will come up with proposals to ensure that there will be no miscarriages of justice in the future. My Bill will ensure that past mistakes are rectified; past wrongs righted.

For too long, the protestations of innocence from behind prison walls have been as silent screams. It is about time we ensured that those pleas can be properly heard, and I therefore commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Ms. Jean Corston, Mr. Chris Mullin, Mr. Andrew F. Bennett, Mr. Richard Alexander, Mrs. Barbara Roche, Mr. Harry Greenway, Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones, Mr. Stephen Byers, Ms. Tessa Jowell, Mr. John Battle and Ms. Glenda Jackson.

JUSTICE

Ms. Jean Corston accordingly presented a Bill to make further provision for the investigation of alleged miscarriages of justice in connection with criminal proceedings in England and Wales; and for related purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 19 February, and to be printed. [Bill 136.]

Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New clause 6

CONFIDENTIALITY OF TRADE UNION'S REGISTER OF MEMBERS' NAMES AND ADDRESSES

'. After section 24 of the 1992 Act there shall be inserted—

"*Securing confidentiality of register during ballots.*

24A.—(1) This section applies in relation to a ballot of the members of a trade union on—

(a) an election under Chapter IV for a position to which that Chapter applies,

(b) a political resolution under Chapter VI, and

(c) a resolution to approve an instrument of amalgamation or transfer under Chapter VII.

(2) Where this section applies in relation to a ballot the trade union shall impose the duty of confidentiality in relation to the register of members' names and addresses on the scrutineer appointed by the union for the purposes of the ballot and on any person appointed by the union as the independent person for the purposes of the ballot.

(3) Any duty falling upon a branch under this section by reason of its being a trade union shall be treated as having been discharged to the extent to which the union of which it is a branch has discharged the duty instead.

(4) The duty of confidentiality in relation to the register of members' names and addresses is, when imposed on a scrutineer or on an independent person, a duty—

(a) not to disclose any name or address in the register except in permitted circumstances, and

(b) to take all reasonable steps to secure that there is no disclosure of any such name or address by any other person except in permitted circumstances.

(5) The circumstances in which disclosure of a member's name and address is permitted are—

(a) where the member consents;

(b) where it is required for the purposes of the discharge of any of the functions of the Certification Officer or of an inspector appointed by him;

(c) where it is required for the purposes of the discharge of any of the functions of the scrutineer or independent person, as the case may be, under the terms of his appointment;

(d) where it is required for the purposes of the investigation of crime or of criminal proceedings.

(6) Any provision of this Part which incorporates the duty of confidentiality as respects the register into the appointment of a scrutineer or an independent person has the effect of imposing that duty on the scrutineer or independent person as a duty owed by him to the trade union.

(7) The remedy for failure to comply with the requirements of this section is by way of application under section 25 (to the Certification Officer) or section 26 (to the court).

The making of an application to the Certification Officer does not prevent the applicant, or any other person, from making an application to the court in respect of the same matter."'—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

4.57 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Employment (Mr. Michael Forsyth): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): With this it will be convenient to take the following:

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

Government new clause 7—Ballots for union amalgamations and transfers of engagements: notice and voting papers to be unaccompanied by influential material

Government new clause 8—Ballots: repeal of provisions for financial assistance and use of employers' premises

Government amendments Nos. 56 to 58, 9, 59, 10, 60 to 62 and 11.

Mr. Forsyth: The Government clauses tabled for consideration today, with their consequential amendments, all improve the current law on trade unions and industrial relations and in particular the conduct of ballots.

New clause 6 protects the confidentiality of trade union members when their membership details are disclosed to external organisations in the process of ensuring that ballots are properly conducted. New clause 7 ensures that trade union members will not get propaganda material with voting papers for union merger ballots. New clause 8 will, at the appropriate time, remove obsolete provisions from the statute book.

New clause 6 responds to important points made by hon. Members in Committee on the new requirements that the Bill makes in respect of union ballots. Hon. Members were rightly anxious to protect the confidentiality of union members' names and addresses. It is important that union members have the security of knowing that the ballots held by their union are as fair and democratic as possible. The clauses in the measure that deal with union ballots, like those in previous legislation, aim to give them that confidence.

It is therefore necessary that independent and qualified people are involved in supervising the electoral process, both as scrutineer and as the independent person responsible for storing and distributing ballot papers and counting votes. We are equally concerned, however, that the access to names and addresses which those people must therefore have does not risk compromising the privacy of any individual. I know how such information, in the wrong hands, can be used to harass or menace individuals, for example, women under threat of harassment or prison officers in Northern Ireland.

5 pm

Of course, such people should be confident that their privacy will be properly safeguarded. They are certainly far from unprotected at present. Those who scrutinise union elections must already satisfy criteria that aim to ensure that only responsible people will be appointed and the majority of membership registers that are computerised are, of course, subject to the protections afforded by the Data Protection Act 1984. I should also point out that a union could take it upon itself to ensure that its contract with the scrutineer included a duty of confidentiality.

But I accept the argument that we should take steps to ensure that there is no doubt in the minds of those who have legitimate access to, or a copy of, a union's register that they must in all circumstances and at all times be conscious of their responsibilities in this area. The amendment obliges a union to place a duty of confidentiality on the scrutineer and independent person and offers union members a remedy by means of application to the certification officer or the court if it fails to do so. The amendment adds to the existing protections that safeguard the confidentiality of individuals and makes the duty of confidentiality abundantly clear.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): When I used to stand for election at the pits in north Derbyshire, before I became a Member of Parliament, ballots were conducted along similar lines to voting in a general election. We had little booths and we got a turnout of 75 per cent. or more on many occasions. Somehow that fact seems to have been forgotten in the arguments about trade union legislation, of which the Bill is another example. I find it strange that the Government are talking about confidentiality for trade unions when only two years ago the Tory party ballot in a Committee Room for the leader of the party, a putative Prime Minister, was conducted, not confidentially, by the 1922 Committee which could see which way Tory Members were voting——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is very wide of the subject.

Mr. Skinner: It wants putting on the record.

Mr. Forsyth: I must say to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) that it is the first time I have heard such an allegation. The hon. Gentleman will know that the scope of the Bill does not include elections for the leadership of the Conservative party. One difficulty about union ballots such as the hon. Gentleman referred to was that sometimes the number of people voting exceeded the number who might have been expected to do so.

Mr. Skinner: The Minister should give an example.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Forsyth: Before the hon. Member for Bolsover gets on his high horse, he might spend a little time studying the proceedings on the Bill and he would find out that the new clause is a direct result of a request from his hon. Friends, who asked that the Bill be amended.

Mr. Skinner: I just wanted to get in a swipe at the Tory party.

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman must entertain himself in his own way, but throughout the proceedings on the Bill in Committee hon. Members on both sides tried to improve the legislation to make it more workable and effective. I listened to reasoned arguments which were put to the Government. The new clause is a direct response to the persuasive arguments of the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith).

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): While I recognise that there were representations on this matter, is the Minister aware that in my trade union, of which I am proud to have been a member for well over 30 years, there were elections from the time the union was set up? Does not the Minister feel any inhibitions about referring to elections in trade unions when he is an active member of a political party which is known to be the least democratic of all the major political parties in western Europe? When is the Tory party going to reform itself and become democratic?

Mr. Forsyth: The Conservative party is not in a position where the clear majority of votes are cast by the trade unions and where people turn up to cast votes on behalf of millions of other people. I am not prepared to take lectures from the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) on the conduct of political parties. The Bill is not concerned with political parties; it is concerned with trade unions. Trade unions enjoy certain privileges and immunities which political parties do not. In return for those privileges and immunities it is appropriate that there should be a proper framework of law. That is what the Bill is providing.

Indeed, the step-by-step approach that we have taken in the reform of industrial relations has resulted in our seeing the lowest number of days lost through strike action since records began 100 years ago. Had we listened to the advice of the hon. Gentleman, none of those measures would have been brought to the statute book. The hon. Gentleman now finds himself a member of a political party which tells the electorate that it accepts the good sense of much of the legislation which it opposed initially.

On new clause 7, a key principle of the Government's reform of industrial relations and trade union law since 1979 has been our willingness to keep that law under review and to come forward with further measures for reform as and when experience shows them to be needed. The new clause and its associated amendment illustrate that principle in action.

Union merger ballots are important. They affect the very future of a union and its members should have the assurance of a properly conducted, fully postal, and independently scrutinised ballot. Measures already included in the Bill will go a long way towards giving them that assurance. However, during the recent NALGO ballot on merger with other unions to form the proposed new union "UNISON", it became apparent that members needed an additional protection in the case of such ballots. We heard, from various quarters and from several individuals who had brought the matter to the attention of their Members of Parliament, that the NALGO leadership had chosen to send out campaigning material with the actual voting papers themselves. That material was clearly designed to influence voters to cast their votes in favour of the merger. It was one-sided. Given the real division of opinion within the union, it is unsurprising that some members, rightly, felt concerned that the existing law did not prevent that.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): I find the Minister's example difficult to understand. In the complexities of union mergers, which will inevitably take place as part of the pattern of change in the structure of trade unions, with a continuing reduction in number over the years, members will want advice as to what is best. Is the Minister saying that he regards it as inappropriate for the elected—I stress "elected"—executive to express a point of view on the merger, or does he regard union members not really as shareholders in the union who should not get opinions from the executive?

Mr. Forsyth: No, I am not saying that. I agree with the hon. Gentleman. The executive should be able to express a view, but I do not think it appropriate for that view to be included with the ballot papers.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) and my hon. Friends the Members for Boothferry (Mr. Davis) and for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young), in correspondence with me, relayed concerns expressed to them about the matter by constituents. I am glad to be able to move the new clause, and its associated amendment, to make changes to the law which will meet those concerns.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Surely the Minister understands that the trade union leadership would come to a decision in favour of a merger for many common sense reasons. Government pressure may dictate what happens to unions. During a ballot, is not it in order for a trade union to ask its members to consider the views of the union leadership? When political parties—including the Conservative party—take decisions, I am sure that they inform their membership of the views of the executive and the leadership. The idea of a trade union leadership informing its members of its views and the reasons for an amalgamation is not too complex to accept. I am sure that the Minister understands what I am saying. The massive bulk of trade union members is likely to wish to hear the leadership's views.

Mr. Forsyth: I do not disagree with the hon. Gentleman. The changes to be made by the new clause and the amendment will not prevent a union from communicating the views of its leadership or anyone else to members. The leadership will continue to be free to communicate such information about any issue. Nor will unions be prevented from giving members the information necessary to judge the main effects of the subject matter of a merger ballot. The law already provides that such information must be made available to voters in a union merger ballot and has done so for many years. That is secured by a notice, approved by the independent certification officer, which unions have always had to prepare in advance of a merger ballot. In future, by virtue of the provisions of schedule 7 to the Bill, that notice will have to be sent out with the merger ballot voting papers as a matter of course.

Ms. Angela Eagle (Wallasey): I am intrigued at the Minister's use of the most recent example of a successful union ballot—UNISON—as when I worked for the Confederation of Health Service Employees, I was involved in the beginnings of that long and arduous process. Will the Minister confirm that he said that there have been three complaints from Members of Parliament responding to their constituents' concerns? Will he tell the House whether there have been any other complaints during that process, which has lasted three years, and, if so, how many?

Will the Minister also confirm that by the time that UNISON comes into existence in April the union membership will be almost 1 million strong? Is he really saying that the Government are willing to legislate because of three complaints out of 1 million?

Mr. Forsyth: A number of changes have been made to the Bill and the law because of matters that the hon. Lady and her hon. Friends mentioned in Committee. The Government listened to the arguments put to them. Three Members of the House—two Conservatives and one Opposition Member—mentioned the matter to me, following complaints from their constituents. We have considered the arguments and it seems appropriate to ensure that unions considering a merger are able to put the views of the executive or the union to the membership. It

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is right and proper, however, that one-sided material should not go to members when the ballot papers are sent out.

In elections to the executive, as the hon. Lady knows, there is an opportunity for all candidates to put their views. It is important that a balanced argument should be put across, where that is appropriate.

Mr. Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): Will the Minister reflect on the fact that before the UNISON merger got near a ballot it had been discussed extensively in union conference after conference by all three unions involved? There had also been extensive branch consultation on the issue. The merger has had more discussion than many of the provisions of the Bill. By enclosing that material, the union executive was doing no more than articulating the views of the membership, which had been expressed all the way through.

Is not it a fact that the Minister does not like the result of that merger ballot? If he does not object to campaign material being circulated, is not the amendment another attempt to make unions spend more money unnecessarily, by having to make two mailings to members when one would suffice?

5.15 pm

Mr. Forsyth: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman should use that argument. Is he arguing that there had been so much discussion in conference and elsewhere that the executive was expressing the views of the membership? In that case, what would be the point of a ballot, which is to ascertain the views of the membership? There should be proper discussion of a merger and opportunities to get the arguments across. Surely the hon. Gentleman can see that it is difficult to understand why the union's view should be presented again at the final stage, when people are asked to vote in the ballot. He argued that there had already been extensive discussions and, on that basis, the membership would already be familiar with the executive's view. I find it extraordinary that the hon. Gentleman cannot understand why it is inappropriate for partisan information to be issued with ballot papers, because he is usually far more perceptive than that.

Whether I approve of the results of the ballot in question is neither here nor there. It is not for me to take a view on whether it is good or bad. It is, however, a good thing for people to receive ballot papers without partisan views attached to them with a paper clip.

New clause 7 provides for a new subsection, (3A), to be added to section 99 of the 1992 Act. It requires a notice about the subject matter of the ballot to be free of any statement

"making a recommendation or expressing an opinion about the proposed amalgamation or transfer."

That means that the independent certification officer, who polices the relevant legislation and to whom complaints about breaches of union law must be brought, will not approve any notice which, in his opinion, contains such a statement.

Amendment No. 9 provides that only certain materials may be sent to members. They include the approved notice and the means whereby voters can return their completed voting papers.

Those changes to the Bill are modest but practical and have been prompted by consideration of events which occurred after its publication.

New clause 8 and its consequential amendment repeal sections 115 and 116 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.

In December, we announced our intention to phase out public subsidy for trade union ballots. The reasoning behind that decision was made clear—with the aim of ballot funding achieved and now that postal balloting on major issues affecting union members is widespread and well accepted, the scheme does not merit continued public subsidy.

Ms. Eagle: The Minister is smiling.

Mr. Forsyth: If the hon. Lady smiles at me, I am always inclined to smile back. If she wishes to intervene, I shall happily give way.

We decided to phase out the scheme over three years and to announce the decision at the earliest opportunity to give trade unions maximum notice and the opportunity to make alternative plans.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Can the Minister share with the House how much money has been used during each of the past few years and what consultations took place with the party or the trade unions before the Government made the announcement?

Mr. Forsyth: As my hon. Friend will be aware from his experience in Government, there was considerable consultation with members of the Conservative party who were also members of the Government before the announcement was made. The announcement followed the review of public expenditure commitments in the Department. All Government Departments took part in the review as part of the public expenditure survey.

On my hon. Friend's question about the amount spent, if he consults *Hansard* he will find several written answers, which confirm that the figure was about £4 million during the past two years. I think that it was £4·2 million in 1992.

Once the trade union ballot funding scheme ceases to exist in 1996, the power to establish the scheme will be obsolete. Therefore, we have decided to take the opportunity afforded by the Bill to repeal that redundant power. As the new clause makes clear, the power will remain in force until the phasing-out arrangements are concluded at the end of March 1996.

Mr. Graham: Does the Minister believe that now is the appropriate moment to remove a subsidy of £4·2 million from trade unions? It is a time when trade unions are under pressure from rising unemployment, threats to benefits and now the issue of postal ballots—all the result of Government initiatives. How on earth can the Government have decided that now is the appropriate time? Is not it just another example of the Government putting the boot in?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman must have a cynical view of the Government if he can make such a charge and he must have a short memory. He may recall that when we introduced the scheme to provide for the funding of trade union ballots, we had difficulty persuading the trade unions to accept the money. There was strong opposition to the scheme and great criticism of the trade unions that chose to accept the money and participate in the balloting procedure when it was voluntary. It is no longer a voluntary, but a statutory, requirement.

I know that the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham) works hard on behalf of his constituents and promotes many causes involving public expenditure. If we have to decide between using public funds to subsidise ballots on strike action or using them on the many other worthy causes that the hon. Gentleman draws to the attention of the House, I am sure that he will agree that we are right to consider that the continued funding of the scheme is no longer a priority.

Mr. Burden: In a written answer on 16 December, the Minister clarified that the TUC was informed of the Government's plans to phase out funding of ballots on the same day as the public announcement was made—10 December. On 26 November in Committee the Minister said:

"we should not put unreasonable cost burdens on trade unions."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee F,* 26 November 1992; c. 14.]

Does the Minister believe that the proposal would result in a cost burden on trade unions? Does he accept that there could have at least been discussions about whether it was reasonable or unreasonable? Why did not he consult the trade unions before making the announcement?

Mr. Forsyth: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman studies my words in Committee so carefully.

Mr. Burden: I do so all the time.

Mr. Forsyth: If the hon. Gentleman does so all the time, as he says from a sedentary position, he will also see that I said in Committee—I cannot give the exact words—that I was keen that we should give the Committee the clear position on the future of the ballot funding scheme during our consideration of the Bill. The announcement was made in a manner that enabled the Committee to be aware of the position so that it could consider the subject.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that, in response to representations by Opposition Members, I said in Committee that we did not wish to add to the cost burdens on trade unions. The hon. Gentleman will note, from his careful study of my words, that I was then referring to the costs of the scrutiny of ballots, not the costs of running ballots. I think that the hon. Gentleman will recognise that my arguments are wholly consistent.

Mr. Winnick: The Minister has a reputation for frankness, but perhaps it is difficult for him to be too frank when presenting the measure. However, does not he realise that we know that the Government loathe and detest trade unions? They can hardly make remarks about trade unions without attacking them. Of all the Ministers, none is more Thatcherite or more dedicated to Thatcherite views than the Minister of State—I suppose that he will take that as a compliment.

Mr. Forsyth: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his compliment. The second part of his comments may be true, but the first part certainly is not. While at the Department of Employment, I have tried to improve our contacts and relations with trade unions. However, the hon. Gentleman cannot expect the taxpayer to continue to subsidise activities arising from a decision to take industrial action. If trade unions wish to do that, it is clearly for them to find the funds to meet their legal obligations.

As for being Thatcherite—which I take as a great compliment from the hon. Gentleman——

Mr. Winnick: I was in a generous mood.

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman says that he was in a generous mood. On the basis of the attitude that the Labour party has adopted to our trade union reforms—to embrace most of them and refuse to repeal the legislation now in place—the hon. Gentleman must find himself wearing the same mantle as me. I hope that he does so with the same conviction and enthusiasm as he attributes to me.

Mr. Graham: The Minister never told us in Committee that the Government were withdrawing about £4·2 million from the balloting procedure and replacing it by funding scrutineers. Is the Minister now saying that the Government are considering funding scrutineers for ballots for trade unions?

Mr. Forsyth: I am saying no such thing. The hon. Gentleman will recall that when we were ensconced in Committee, one issue raised by, I think, the hon. Member for Warley, West (Mr. Speller) was that the cost of employing scrutineers where the number of people involved in the ballot was small would create difficulties. A request was made as to whether we would consider a concession to reduce the burden of costs on trade unions. I gave an undertaking, which has been honoured, to look at that matter with a view to giving assistance. That undertaking was what the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) was quoting earlier—I suspect in an attempt to trap me with my own words.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth (Coventry, North-East) *rose*——

Mr. Forsyth: I shall happily give way to the hon. Gentleman, but I am in danger of filibustering my own new clause.

Mr. Ainsworth: I am loth to impede the Minister's progress, but the Opposition's problem does not arise from the Minister's frankness, as my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) said earlier —quite the contrary. The Minister is attempting to say that the trade unions' position has changed as they did not want to accept Government money when the systems were being introduced on a voluntary basis. Those systems are now being introduced on a compulsory basis, through legislation, in a deliberately over-bureaucratic way. The Government want to legislate to ensure that there are two separate postal circulations on a ballot, but, meanwhile, they have withdrawn the financial support for that process. The Government want to dictate the details of how trade unions should operate and, having done that, withdraw any subsidy. That is the problem and it shows how the Government's anti-trade unionism is creeping in.

Mr. Forsyth: If the Government were anti-trade union and wanted to make life difficult for trade unions, they could have included in the Bill many provisions that they have not. We are not opposed to trade unions; we simply think that they enjoy great privileges and immunities and that there should be a proper framework of law. We believe that it would be inappropriate to use taxpayers' money to support ballots that are about either internal

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trade union matters or causing disruption in the workplace. We have made no attempt to remove the privileges of trade unions or to argue that they should not be able to go about their business.

The ending of the ballot funding scheme also affects section 116 of the 1992 Act, which relates specifically to ballots that meet requirements of a "scheme under section 115". Clearly, once there is no scheme under section 115 —as will be the case once the phasing-out arrangements for the ballot funding scheme are complete—section 116 will inevitably fall. We are therefore taking this opportunity to repeal section 116 as well.

These repeals are consequent on the decision to phase out public subsidy for trade union ballots. The Bill offers a timely opportunity to repeal soon-to-be redundant provisions and, in the interests of keeping statute up to date and as straightforward as possible, we have taken the opportunity to do so.

5.30 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley: When was the funding for trade union training introduced—mainly for health and safety —and what is its current level?

Mr. Forsyth: I shall be happy to answer that question at some point, but we are now discussing funds provided for ballots rather than funds provided for education and training, which are not affected. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to those arrangements, which are also being phased out. I have asked the Health and Safety Commission to consider how it can improve the provision of training related to safety and we have made it clear that funds would be available for such purposes. If my hon. Friend tables a question, I shall be glad to set out the facts in a written answer.

I commend the new clauses and amendments to the House.

Mr. Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): I welcome the Minister's reassurances about possible increases in funds for training in health and safety. That is a matter of increasing importance. The hon. Gentleman has been particularly mellow this afternoon. I am not sure whether that is due to the sense of relief that we all feel when the Report stage of a Bill is reached, or to the somewhat splendid lunch that we have all had today, but we shall find out as the night progresses.

New clause 6 was tabled in response to representations that we made in Committee. It imposes a statutory obligation of confidentiality on the maintenance of trade union registers. As the Minister said, various statutory regulations under, for instance, data protection legislation would make it difficult for a register to be breached and information given elsewhere. We felt, however, that that protection was not absolute, and that a statutory obligation was required because of the seriousness of the matters involved—especially in relation to security, particularly in Northern Ireland, and to junk mail. We are grateful to the Minister for what he has done in that regard.

New clause 7 can best be described as a piece of unnecessary legislation. Most Opposition Members would agree that it is a bit daft. I understand the Minister's view that only the ballot paper should be sent to trade union members, so that nothing influences their judgment. However, given that the Government's aim has always been the amalgamation of trade unions and a reduction in their number—indeed, some Opposition Members favour that—it seems particularly perverse not to allow ballot papers to be accompanied by information about the rights and wrongs of a proposed merger. That is not a political issue between left and right; it is about good organisation in trade unions.

It should be borne in mind that information is often provided along with ballot papers for elections to a number of organisations—including, probably, trade unions. Frequently, a curriculum vitae is included. Why should not information be contained in the envelope with the ballot paper? Surely that would be a useful way of conveying such information. The Minister may fear that it would be one-sided, but it would be easy to ensure that both sides were represented. The hon. Gentleman has made an unnecessary meal of the issue, basing his argument on representations from three Members of Parliament who have received an unspecified number of complaints. He has gone over the top to try to solve a problem that, in our view, does not exist. We should encourage the provision of information, so that trade union members can make better choices.

It is, however, to new clause 8 that we are most strongly opposed. As the Minister said, it withdraws payment to trade unions for ballots. It exposes the Government's word to some contempt, suggesting that, to a certain extent, they cannot be trusted. The Minister has said that, at the time when ballot funding was introduced, there was a dispute within trade unions about whether the money should be taken. Indeed, there were many arguments on both sides at that time, but it was consistently said that the measure was temporary: it would never stand the test of time. Once the ballots were introduced, the funds would be withdrawn.

Not at all, said the Government—and, unfortunately, chaps like me who supported the funding said the same. My judgment has been found wanting, which is one of the reasons for my anger at the withdrawal of the funds— which, at the time of their introduction, were supposed to be a continuing commitment. In its 1979 manifesto, the Conservative party—mentioning the matter for the first time—said:

> "We will . . . provide public funds for postal ballots".

On Second Reading of the Employment Bill 1979, the then Secretary of State justified the measure by saying that funding would

> "remove financial obstacles to the holding of postal ballots." —[*Official Report*, 17 December 1979; Vol. 976, c. 61.]

The Bill, apparently, was telling trade unions:

> "You do not have to have a secret ballot for any of your decisions. It is up to you. But if you are thinking of having one, you do not have to worry about the cost, for the taxpayer will reimburse you."—[*Official Report*, 17 December 1979; Vol. 976, c. 165.]

First, secret balloting is a statutory obligation; secondly, the Government consider it an essential part of the framework for the nation's industrial recovery and regeneration—and for good industrial relations—for ballots to be held before strike action, and in a host of other circumstances. If ballots are as important as that, surely it is important for the taxpayer to finance them. The Minister has not justified the removal of funds.

During the Report stage of the Employment Bill, the then Secretary of State said:

"the most likely means of achieving our aims, which are so widely shared, is by encouragement and the provision of funds rather than by compulsion."—[*Official Report*, 22 April 1980; Vol. 983, c. 304.]

All those nice words were said at the time, but, as we now realise, the commitment was only temporary. The Minister has told us that, now that the Government's aims have, in fact, been achieved by compulsion, the money will be taken away.

Once again, the Government's reassurances cannot be trusted. The measure will impose a financial burden on the trade unions—a figure of £4·2 million has been given. The Minister will recall that, in Committee, we spent many happy hours smilingly listening to his talk of burdens. He was never worried about the imposition of burdens on the trade unions, but, whenever we suggested imposing a duty on employers, he said that such a burden was unacceptable. Therefore, we oppose the new clause. It reneges on previous commitments given by the Government. Once again, the Government have applied double standards, under which individual trade unionists and their organisations are treated differently from business men.

Mr. Graham: As my hon. Friend knows, the sum of £4·2 million was provided for this purpose. We are now talking about there being a requirement on every trade union to conduct postal ballots. Has my hon. Friend made an estimate of how much they will cost the unions?

Mr. Galbraith: The Minister might find that an interesting question to answer. I do not know the answer. However, my hon. Friend has brought me to my final point.

The trade union legislation to which I referred increased the statutory duty imposed upon trade unions to conduct ballots. The Minister intends to impose additional statutory obligations that will involve additional expense but he also intends to take away from trade unions the money with which to conduct ballots. That is further evidence of his double standards.

We approve of new clause 6. It meets some of the points that we made in Committee. We think that new clause 7 is daft, unnecessary and over the top. The Government have over-reacted to what is not a problem. However, we shall not take the trouble to vote against new clause 7.

On new clause 8, however, we believe that the Government have reneged on their previous commitments to trade unions and individual trade union members. For that reason, therefore, we shall vote against new clause 8.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I believe, as do other hon. Members, that new clause 6 is acceptable. The hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) has just said that new clause 7 does not matter all that much. I should like, however, to say something about new clause 8.

It would be useful if the Minister could tell the House how much money he expects trade unions to have to spend on postal ballots. There were good arguments for the trade union movement accepting the money that was made available on a voluntary basis. The arguments were long and hard. There was some ill-feeling between the brothers, if I may put it that way, at that time. It then came to be accepted. There are now good arguments for ensuring that that money should continue to be made available for all within the trade union movement.

Now, nobody is compelled to be a member of a trade union. For the Minister suddenly to turn round and say that this abolition is part of a bilateral deal with the Treasury within the public expenditure survey, one of the more private aspects of Government that does not involve Parliament, or the trade union movement, is wrong. Half the trade union members are in trade unions that are not affiliated to the Labour party. The issue affects the Trades Union Congress. The TUC is not affiliated to the Labour party.

The trade unions and the TUC are together trying to put behind them the past apparent total assocation with the Labour party and to establish in the minds of their members and in the mind of Government that they—especially those that are affiliated to the Labour party—can do a better job by not constantly backing losers, as they have done in four general elections in a row.

They have become more open to dialogue and debate, with the result that some of the Government's ideas may be acceptable to the trade union movement, after discussion. Furthermore, many of the ideas of the trade union movement have been accepted by the Government, as we shall find when we consider amendment No. 54, which provides that health and safety representatives should not be sacked for drawing attention to potential dangers to health or safety in the workplace. The Government rejected that concept at one time, but a year ago they accepted it and it is now being consolidated in legislation.

In this case, the Government took an arbitrary decision. There was no consultation with Conservative Members who have an interest in the issue and who would have liked to take part in the debate. There were no consultations with Opposition Members, whether or not they are sponsored by trade unions. To drop it like a bombshell, especially on to those trade unions which found the provision useful, strikes me as wrong.

What is wrong with consultation, discussion and debate? Put like that, the House should vote against the new clause. I hope that those who advise Ministers will remember that the habit, over the decades, of discussing issues in the open and having meetings with the TUC and with representatives of the trade unions, was a perfectly reasonable way of going about things. If, after consultation, the Government decide that their expenditure plans require the saving of £4 million in this way, that may be acceptable, but it is unacceptable without consultation.

Mr. Graham: The hon. Gentleman will recall that at that time there was a lot of consultation with the trade unions. They were asked to accept the money. There were an amazing number of articles in the newspapers by Tory supporters and business men, all urging the trade unions to accept the money. Everyone understood at that time that the money was to be for all time and that therefore there was no need not to have ballots—that they could be put in place and paid for. It was said then that the money would be available for all time. How can any trade union now believe that any legislation introduced by this Government is to be trusted?

Mr. Bottomley: That takes us to a debate that I believe should have taken place before the Government announced their decision rather than now. If, as the Minister said, there will be a requirement that postal

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ballots must be held, there is a case to be argued for continuing public funding. We must at least be grateful that there is to be a phasing out of the funding rather than an instant guillotine, but I repeat my point that decisions such as this should not in future be announced in this way.

5.45 pm

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): The hon. Gentleman is making a particularly powerful case as a former Minister at the Department of Employment. He has a unique insight into these issues. Can he give his view of the motives behind the move? Is it to shave £4 million off a £50 billion deficit, or is it a mean, nasty attempt to cripple the trade unions financially?

Mr. Bottomley: It will not cripple the unions financially because not all trade unions have taken advantage of it. There is a debate within the trade union movement as to whether it was right to take the money and whether it is still right to take it. That is a separate set of issues. The key point is that the Government have not been in the habit of taking arbitrary decisions without consultation. I believe that the trade unions should have been consulted. That is why I shall vote against the new clause.

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness): I shall confine my remarks to new clause 8. It is interesting to note, following the point made by the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), that the new clause was not the subject of advance consultations. That is an important point. I suspect that the reason why there was no advance consulation was that the Government were aware of what the response would be if they did consult. The response from both sides of industry would, I am sure, have been against the abolition of state funding for postal ballots.

It is also worth pointing out that we have not heard a convincing case from the Minister this afternoon as to why state funding for postal ballots should be removed. We have not heard a convincing case because a convincing case cannot be made for it. When the scheme was introduced in 1980, the postal balloting regime introduced by the Act was voluntary. There was no compulsion to hold postal ballots. Postal ballots were the preferred method by means of which trade unions could consult their members, but they were not mandatory.

The important point now is that almost all these ballots must be conducted by post. If we add on to the requirement that ballots should be held that they should all be postal, the Bill adds another layer of bureaucracy and requirements on to unions, for they will have to appoint professional scrutineers. The trade unions will be hit by substantial costs.

The figures from the certification officer reveal that last year £4·2 million was spent on the postal ballot scheme, that £2·6 million was spent on the scheme in 1991 and that £1·5 million was spent on it in 1990. Therefore, we see an exponential increase in the costs that trade unions have to shoulder because of the Government's legislative policy. That financial burden on trade unions will increase in the years to come, not just because postal ballots are now mandatory, but because additional costs will be incurred, due to the requirement to appoint scrutineers. The House is entitled to take the view that this is a rather sad measure. No convincing case has been made for withdrawing the state funding regime. The Minister has not made such a case this afternoon because no such case can be made.

It is also worth bearing it in mind that when the regime was introduced, the then Secretary of State for Employment said:

> "it will remove financial obstacles to the holding of postal ballots."—[*Official Report*, 17 December 1979; Vol. 976, c. 61.]

That was the view of the then Secretary of State of the regime that he proposed should be established. It is logical, therefore, that the withdrawal of the scheme will increase the burdens and obstacles which, I suspect, is precisely what lies behind the new clause. It is a sad mistake. There is no case for it and it will add substantially to the financial burdens on trade unions.

The case has often been made that trade unions are in a special position because of their ability to influence industrial policy and to cause disruption in the workplace. It is therefore argued that there is a special case for requiring unions to ballot their members in certain instances. I agree with that argument. I am and have always have been a strong supporter of balloting within the trade union movement and I support the regime for the reimbursement of the cost of postal ballots.

Having made the balloting arrangement compulsory, why are the Government now proposing to withdraw from it? It has never been declared to be a temporary scheme. Our understanding was that it was permanent because of the special costs involved in administering postal ballots. Trade unions are voluntary organisations. Admittedly, they are in a position to have a special influence on the course of industrial policy but, as the hon. Member for Eltham said, they are voluntary associations. Therefore, there is no case for imposing a mandatory obligation to consult by means of a postal ballot on voluntary organisations and for the Government to then say that the unions must bear the cost on their own. That is grossly unfair and unreasonable.

I am sure that hon. Members of all parties support the case for postal balloting. It is a reasonable way to consult the trade union membership, but, having imposed a mandatory obligation on voluntary associations, it is not reasonable or fair for the Government to withdraw funding just at the moment when they are substantially increasing the costs of the postal balloting scheme.

The Minister referred to the fact that postal balloting is an accepted method of consultation and that, because the process has become accepted, now is the moment for the Government to withdraw funding. There is no logic in the Minister's argument, if that is his case. I draw his attention in particular to the Trade Union Act 1984 which made certain ballots mandatory and compulsory, especially those in connection with strikes and trade union elections. There was no choice about whether those ballots should take place in a particular way. However, the Government still applied the postal balloting funding scheme to those compulsory ballots, so there is no argument in precedent to which the Minister can turn to support his case.

The Minister gave the game away in his opening remarks. It is clear that the reason why the Government are withdrawing from the scheme has nothing to do with the balloting practice, democracy or the question of whether the state should subsidise strike ballots, because it was the Conservative Government who introduced the notion of subsidy for strike ballots in the first place. It is purely a matter of public expenditure.

The Government have examined the budget and pointed out to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury £4 million that they can lose this year. They proposed to proceed quietly and without consultation and to spring the decision in the middle of the Committee stage in order to save the Department of Employment £4 million this year, probably £6 million the year after and £8 million the year after that. The cost is substantial as we are talking about many millions of pounds. It is pathetic and sad that the Government have tabled the new clause.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: As has been said, there were differences of opinion during the debates on various pieces of legislation about balloting within trade unions. I readily admit that I never was, and still am not, in favour of compulsory postal ballots, whether or not the Government agree to pay for them. We have reached a point where the deliberate interference in the internal workings of the trade union movement has become unacceptable. That has been widely recognised not only by people within the trade union movement but by the public at large.

On a personal level, I am perhaps not as upset as my hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) who may have accepted the argument in the first place for the introduction of postal ballots and encouraged people to take the Government subsidy. However, I believe that the Government's proposal is run through with cynicism because the Government have no intention of reducing the wholly unreasonable level of interference in trade unions, but are deliberately bringing the full impact of their legislation to bear on them.

It is not only economic problems and the desire to cut public expenditure that is obliging the Government to do so. Vindictiveness runs through the Bill, and there is clearly a desire to punish the trade union movement. It is absolutely beyond me why the Government cannot break out of that mindset. Although it seems that one or two Conservative Members can, members of the Government Front Bench cannot.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Would it not be a good idea to consider asking the Government whether they will allow trade union subscriptions to have, in effect, tax relief at source? At the moment, many trade union members do not apply for it. It would save bother with the Inland Revenue, would help to raise money for the trade unions to pay for the ballot and would probably make more money than if they kept the £4 million.

Mr. Ainsworth: I had not thought of that proposal, but I stand by the general proposition that the trade unions should be accepted as independent organisations. If the Government get involved in such legislative detail, they should be prepared to pay for it. I do not believe that they should get involved with such detail in the first place but that they should leave the trade union movement to organise itself in accordance with certain criteria.

I have always believed that the prime aim of conducting a ballot of members was to gain the maximum participation in the decision-making process. There is clear evidence that in a wide range of decisions postal ballots do not achieve that aim. They were never intended to do so. Well organised factory branch ballots are the way to maximise participation in trade union decisions, whether about strikes or other matters.

Factory branch ballots are a good, efficient and cheap way for people to participate. They were made illegal by the Government who are now withdrawing the funding in order to meddle in the internal organisation of trade unions. For that reason, I deplore the new clause which is vindictive in the extreme.

Mr. Miller: I should like to ask the Minister a simple question.

Sections 115 and 116 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 deals with two effects. The first is the main principle that we have discussed and the second is the use of employers' premises. Section 115 describes the purposes for which the ballots are to take place. One involves strike action and the other deals with

> "the acceptance or rejection of a proposal made by an employer in relation to the contractual terms . . . upon which, or the other incidents of the relationship whereby, a person works or provides services for the employer".

Does the Minister not think that, in his haste to save £4 million or, as I see it, to make life more difficult for the trade union movement, he is putting at risk good industrial relations which could be affected by the removal of a statutory obligation, in certain circumstances, to conduct ballots in the workplace?

Mr. Winnick: Does my hon. Friend accept that the Government are not really concerned with good industrial relations and they are certainly not concerned with any financial problems that trade unions may have? The Government forced on trade unions one type of voting. As I said earlier, the trade unions require no lectures about internal voting. Unlike the Conservative party, all unions have voting systems. The Bill aims to make it far more difficult for trade unions to operate. It is motivated by spite, as has been the case since 1979, and I hope—I am sure that my hopes are well founded—that my hon. Friend has no illusions whatever about what the Government are trying to do in eroding and undermining trade union rights, banning trade unions outright, as at Government Communications Headquarters, and in other places making it extremely difficult for working people to belong to trade unions at their place of work.

6 pm

Mr. Miller: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. It is for the Minister to demonstrate that he is not so cynical towards trade unions as my hon. Friend believes. Having spent many years as a trade union official and three months in Committee, I share my hon. Friend's worries. If the Minister is genuinely concerned about the conduct of good industrial relations, and bearing in mind that the new clause will damage industrial relations by damaging workplace provisions that are set out in clause 116, would it not be better to drop the daft idea to claw back a few million pounds?

Mr. Michael Forsyth: We have had an interesting debate and I shall try to deal with some of the points that have arisen.

I found myself listening to Opposition Members wanting to take me back to 1979 and I was rather puzzled by some of the comments that were made. Unfortunately, the former Member for Dunbartonshire, East, now the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg),

[Mr. Michael Forsyth]

was not able to participate in our proceedings in Committee, although I understand that he is now back in harness in the House and I hope that he will forgive me for referring to him. What he said on 17 December 1979 as an Opposition Member is rather instructive when one compares it with some of the comments made by Opposition Members and one of my hon. Friends here today. He said:

> "I cannot understand why the Government propose that money should be spent in this way."

He was referring to ballots—

> "The trade union movement has not asked for it, and there is no evidence that the trade union movement cannot afford to run secret ballots."—[*Official Report*, 17 December 1979; Vol. 976, c. 121.]

In addition, we have seen various reports from the TUC. In 1981 the TUC said:

> "The general council reaffirmed their policy that affiliated unions should not seek state funds under the Act to finance ballots."

In 1982 the TUC said:

> "Affiliated unions shall observe congress policy and not seek to accept public funds for union ballots under the Employment Act 1980 ballot funds scheme."

My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) was unkind to suggest that the Government were being precipitate. The matter is being phased out over a period to 1996. It does not require legislation to do so. The Bill does not withdraw the funding; it merely withdraws the power to provide funding. The funding would have gone in any case. That is not a legal opinion and I am confident that I shall be able to repeat it with conviction tomorrow and the day after.

Opposition Members will find it difficult to argue the case in the House for items of expenditure which are important to them in the health service or elsewhere while at the same time arguing that the Government should continue to subsidise, for example, ballots on industrial action. That is a matter which should not be a priority charge on the taxpayer.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham asked me to estimate how much trade unions will spend on such ballots. The Government hope that the expenditure will be minimal because we do not want to see ballots on strikes. We want industrial relations conducted in a way which avoids such things.

It is perverse for the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller), who made so many splendid contributions in Committee, to sully his record now by suggesting that industrial relations will be helped by the taxpayer subsidising ballots to hold strikes.

The hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth) said that the new clause was all about a desire to punish the trade unions. I do not believe that he, in his heart of hearts, believes that. He recognises that the Government have to make choices and decide priorities and that it is difficult to justify such expenditure at present.

Opposition Members have expressed their views cogently and I hope that they will understand why, given the current restraints on public expenditure, the Government do not believe that it would be appropriate for funds to be used in this way.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 7

BALLOTS FOR UNION AMALGAMATION AND TRANSFERS OF ENGAGEMENTS: NOTICE AND VOTING PAPERS TO BE UNACCOMPANIED BY INFLUENTIAL MATERIAL

'In section 99 of the 1992 Act (notice relating to proposed amalgamation or transfer), after subsection (3), there shall be inserted—

"(3A) The notice shall not contain any statement making a recommendation or expressing an opinion about the proposed amalgamation or transfer." '—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 8

BALLOTS: REPEAL OF PROVISIONS FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE AND USE OF EMPLOYERS' PREMISES

'.—(1) Sections 115 and 116 of the 1992 Act (financial assistance towards expenditure on certain ballots and obligations of employers to make premises available) shall cease to have effect.

(2) No application under regulations under section 115 (whether made before or after its repeal) shall be entertained by the Certification Officer in relation to expenditure in respect of a ballot if the date of the ballot falls after 31 March 1996 or in respect of arrangements to hold a ballot which is not proceeded with if the date of the ballot would have fallen after that date; but, for the purposes of applications made after (as well as before) the repeal in relation to expenditure not excluded by this subsection, the regulations shall continue in force notwithstanding the repeal.

(3) In subsection (2) above, the "date of the ballot" means, in the case of a ballot in which votes may be cast on more than one day, the last of those days.

(4) Subsection (1) above shall come into force on 1 April 1996.'—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Motion made, and Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 300, Noes 250.

Division No. 151] **[6.05 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clappison, James

Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John

Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth

Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David

Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope and
Mr. Robert G. Hughes.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*

Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Dr John *(C'p'l'nd)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*

Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek *(B'p Auckland)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Salmond, Alex
Sheerman, Barry
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tipping, Paddy
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Eric Illsley and
Mr. Gordon McMaster.

Question accordingly agreed to.

New clause 3

REPORT TO PARLIAMENT ON PAY AND WORKING CONDITIONS

' .—(1) The Secretary of State shall present annually to both Houses of Parliament a report on the pay and working conditions of employees in industries formerly covered by wages councils and in the security and private residential care industries, after having consulted the Trades Union Congress, the Confederation of British Industry, the representatives of employers and employees in the industries concerned and such bodies concerned with low pay and equal opportunities as he shall think fit.

(2) The first such report shall be presented within 12 months of the day on which Royal Assent to this Act is given.'.—*[Mr. Dobson.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take new clause 12—*Protection for workers in former wages council industries*—

'—. Should the abolition of wages councils lead to wage increases in former wages council industries falling behind the pay increases recorded in the Index of Average Earnings published with the monthly unemployment figures for two successive years, it shall be the duty of the Secretary of State to present a report to Parliament giving details of the relevant wage rates and what action he proposes to take to secure the restoration of the value of pay settlements in former wages council industries.'.

Mr. Dobson: The Bill proposes the abolition of wages councils, which set minimum wages for 2,700,000 of the worst paid people in Britain. They are employed mainly in the hotel, catering, retail and hairdressing industries, and about 2 million of them are women. Apparently, they have got to make sacrifices to save the British economy. The Government propose no action on City fraudsters, no action on currency speculators, and no action on property speculators, but the country is in a bad way so the lowest paid are to be paid even less than they are being paid now. It was not people serving in shops or hotels and it was not young women doing hairdressing who were selling the pound short last September or who are selling it short this week. They are the victims of Tory policies and they are being made to suffer.

It is worth pointing out that the highest wages council hourly rate is the somewhat unprincely sum of £3·10. It is our view that the abolition of wages councils will reduce wages. The wages councils set minimum pay, and if that minimum pay floor is taken away people will fall through. The people employed in the industries involved fear that, the Government advocate it, the supporters of the abolition of wages councils say that that is why they want it, and there is no reason to believe that anything else will happen but that people's minimum wages will fall.

It will not be just minimum wages that fall either, because the big hotel groups have said that they do not mind paying people £2·98 an hour—which is very generous of them—but the problem is that they have to pay their supervisors so much more. So we can bet that supervisors' pay will go down when the minimum wage goes down for other people.

As was shown by the Greater Manchester Low Pay Unit's study of what happened to pay for young people in Greater Manchester, when wages council coverage of under-21s was withdrawn their relative pay went down.

In London now, for reasons that I do not understand, chemist shops are not covered as other shops are by the retailing minimum wage set by the wages councils. That wage is about £3, but jobs for chemist shop assistants are being advertised in London at £2·50. So we can see where retailing pay is going in London.

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): On the question of retail pay in London, would my hon. Friend care to reflect on the hypocrisy of top directors working in the retail industries? At Allied-Lyons, for instance, the top director's salary is £369,000; at Forte it is £249,000. That is the sort of sums these people are taking out of the retail industry. Will my hon. Friend reflect on those figures when he is talking about minimum wages, and would he like to comment on the morality and fairness of talking to the Government about introducing a maximum wage to take some of this money from those people who are taking too much out of society?

Mr. Dobson: The rules of order which limit what we are allowed to say rather curtail the expression of my real views concerning some of the people who line their pockets by paying themselves half a million pounds a year and then write letters to the Secretary of State for Employment saying that it caused difficulties for their companies' hotels when wages went up by 4 per cent. to less than £3 an hour. Cant and hypocrisy go nowhere near describing them.

The other problem with the abolition of wages councils is that it will be particularly damaging to women's pay. The great advantage of the wages councils from their inception was that they were unisex and awarded the same hourly rate to people working full time and people working part time. As a consequence, the gap between the average pay of men and the average pay of women is much lower in wages councils trades than it is in other trades.

It is shocking to me that the Secretary of State for Employment, who has been given the task, so we are told, of trying to promote equal opportunities in this country, is not concerned by the likelihood of what will happen to wages in wages councils industries and the way that women are likely to suffer. This is what the Equal Opportunities Commission has to say:

> "If wages councils are abolished without alternative measures such as strengthening the Equal Pay Act, the pay gap, already wider than in most other EC countries, will increase, making it even more difficult for women to achieve economic independence and to provide for their future in old age."

That is the Equal Opportunities Commission's view, and I am sure that it is right. I believe that the Secretary of State, who is responsible for the Equal Opportunities Commission, should have taken a bit more notice of that and a bit less notice of the ideologues in the Tory party who have been driving this through.

Then there are wages which prevail in other industries not covered by wages councils but which are notorious low payers. There is the well-known security industry, as my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth) pointed out in Committee. He cited an advertisement in Coventry for somebody to work as a security guard at £1·80 an hour and to "provide your own dog". That is the sort of wage that these people are talking of providing.

There are also private residential homes where a lot of very vulnerable people are supposed to be properly looked after. Following the excellent "Cutting Edge" programme on TV last night, which exposed the situation in north Lancashire with regard to underpayment, the Low Pay Unit has received approaches from many people throughout the country. It received a telephone call today from a nursing home care assistant who is being paid £1·25 an hour. That is a disgrace. It is a disgrace that employment Ministers are prepared to countenance such things, that social security Ministers are willing to provide finance to such places and that health Ministers are prepared to countenance people being paid such rates for providing vital care for old and vulnerable people. I do not believe that proper standards of care are likely to be provided by people who are so desperate that they have to accept a rate of £1·25 an hour.

6.30 pm

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I saw the programme and I have asked the wages inspectorate to look into the two cases which were identified. Does not the hon. Gentleman think it odd that in three months the journalist, the researcher and the production team managed to find only three cases of underpayment, one of which was resolved immediately? Does he not also think it odd that the programme makers did not ask the wages inspectorate to examine the two unresolved cases of underpayment shown in the programme?

Mr. Dobson: I find that extraordinary. Whether or not I disagree with the Minister, I usually have some time for his intelligence, but that is one of the daftest interventions he must have made in his life. How could the young women have fitted in more underpayments except by working and discovering that the jobs were underpaid or, in one case, that she did not get paid at all unless she went loping along to the owner of the cleaning company at his grand residence in Liverpool? The Minister may recall that she had to spend quite some time going to the nursing home owner's vast ranch next to the golf course in Blackburn. When she tried to get the money that he owed her, she was told that she could not see him because he was on holiday in the Caribbean and she could see him when he got back three weeks later. So it took three weeks.

Is the Minister suggesting that anyone should depend on the wages inspectorate to do anything to help people in those industries? Will the Minister guarantee that the employers who are underpaying will be prosecuted?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman has to address the point I was making. If the programme makers were concerned about low-paid people, and if their argument

[Mr. Forsyth]

was that the existing system with the wages inspectorate should be retained in order to provide protection, does he not find it odd that none of the cases identified by the programme makers was reported to the wages inspectorate so that they could be investigated?

As to the hon. Gentleman's specific point, I will happily say that the matter will be properly investigated, and if the wages inspectorate finds that there has been a breach of the law it will make the appropriate recommendations. However, the wages inspectorate informs me that the vast majority of employers meet their obligations and, of course, the vast majority of people are paid well above the minimum level.

The hon. Gentleman must address my point which he has sidelined. Why does he think that programme makers who are supposedly committed to the cause of maintaining the wages inspectorate and wages councils did not even bother to report the cases for proper investigation by the system that they are arguing to retain?

Mr. Dobson: The programme makers were making a programme; they were not running an operation to suit the Minister and did not want to be diverted by going along to the wages inspectorate. They made an effective programme which had a great impact, and I am glad that it had.

The Minister makes it sound as if the wages inspectorate goes around vigorously looking into things and prosecuting all the cases of wrongdoing that it finds. However, only one in 1,000 cases gets to court. Is that not the figure?

Mr. Forsyth: Last year, a record number of cases were brought to court, far more than were ever brought under the last Labour Government. Employers are often unaware of their obligations and, as the hon. Gentleman knows, the wages inspectorate operates by means of persuasion and without redress to legal measures, and when it finds clear examples of abuse it prosecutes. If the hon. Gentleman is criticising the level of prosecutions, in 1991 we had a record level, considerably higher than anything under the last Labour Government. The Labour Government's record of prosecutions was considerably less than the current level, and it also abolished wages councils, so the hon. Gentleman is trying to make bricks without straw.

Mr. Dobson: I return to the point that the wages council system is not working as well as it should. I am not its greatest supporter. I believe that the system needs to be strengthened and extended. We made that point in Committee.

Ms. Eagle: Will my hon. Friend comment on the fact that the wages council inspectorate's decisions for the north-west in 1991 revealed that 1,083 establishments were underpaying and that there was only one prosecution that year? Will he also comment on the fact that our legislation providing protection against unfair dismissal is now so weak and inadequate, thanks to the Government's dismantling of that protection, that many people currently in low-paid jobs are simply too frightened to report underpayment?

Mr. Dobson: I agree with my hon. Friend. I was quoting the figures for the north-west when I said that there was one prosecution in 1,000 cases.

The Minister said that the employers apparently did not know what their legal obligations were; but employers should know their legal obligations. The Minister is always ranting on about trade unions knowing their legal obligations, so if paid officials of unions are supposed to know, why not people running companies? If they do not, whose fault is it? It is the fault either of the employers or of the Department of Employment and the wages inspectorate for not getting the information through to them. They must take the blame and it is no good the Minister trying to slough it off on other people. Ignorance is no defence. That is a basic principle in English law, and I think in Scottish law as well.

No one can live on the appalling wages that are being paid. I shall quote a very limited number of examples of low pay that the Low Pay Unit has received by telephone today as the result of last night's excellent programme. They include a hairdresser getting £2·39 an hour and being underpaid by £30 a week; a shop worker being paid £2·32 an hour and being underpaid by £31 a week; a 17-year-old working in a butcher's shop for £1·37p an hour and a 19-year-old hairdresser getting £1·50 an hour. That is the demi-paradise in which the Tories have got Britain at the moment. That is their beau ideal. That is how we will compete with the world—by paying people pathetic poverty wages which are demeaning to them and should be demeaning to any Minister of the Crown with any responsibility for it. If the Minister was not ashamed when he watched the film last night, he has lost all sense of shame.

Most of the people who work for those wages are extremely poor and have to fall back on the taxpayer as people on low pay are sometimes entitled to benefit. If their wages are cut, they will be entitled to more benefit, so two groups of people are picking up the price of lining the pockets of Tory supporters who want the abolition of wages councils—the people who will be impoverished by low wages, and the taxpayer who will have to dip into his pocket or her handbag to make up for some of the money that has been taken away.

Who favours abolition? Certainly some free-market freaks, some friends of the Tory party and some people who fall into both categories. There are some notorious contributors to Tory party funds who are strong supporters of the abolition of wages councils. It is a kick-back for putting money into the Tory election fund. It is at the expense of the badly off and the taxpayer.

My hon. Friend referred to the examples of Forte, Allied-Lyons, Whitbread and Scottish and Newcastle Breweries. They paid more than £250,000 to Tory party funds in the most recent year for which the information is available. The lowest paid of the top directors in those companies took home £271,000 in a year, and they all think that £3·10 an hour threatens the future of their companies. They need some attention from some people. They have a lot of explaining to do, especially those in the hotel chains. I ask the directors in the hotel chains or the Minister to give me an explanation.

Why are British hotels more expensive than French hotels, although the wages for French hotel workers are higher than those for British hotel workers? What is wrong? Why are we not competing with the French in hotel prices? If there is any logic in the Minister's case, we should be providing hotel spaces at cheaper prices than the French do, but we do not. We end up charging people more because the bosses pay themselves much more and property speculators still make enormous profits out of most hotel developments. That is where much of the money is going.

Apparently, the Tories believe that there should be no such thing as a minimum wage. They want to leave it to a bargain between the employer and the employee. When wages councils were introduced, Winston Churchill—then a Liberal but with the support of the Conservatives because there was not a vote against the introduction of wages councils—said:

> "Where . . . you have a powerful organisation on both sides . . . you have a healthy bargaining which increases the competitive power of industry and then forces a progressive standard of life. But where . . . you have no organisation, no parity of bargaining, the good employer is undercut by the bad and the bad employer is undercut by the worst."

That was true then and it is true today.

In Standing Committee, what did we get from the Minister when he was provoked by my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms. Eagle)? My hon. Friend said:

> "I still await an answer to my question about how low the Conservative party thinks it is reasonable for wages to fall."

The response from the Minister ended with the magic words:

> "The hon. Lady cannot stand the idea that people should be free to choose for themselves their terms and conditions."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee F,* 28 January 1993; c. 605.]

Winston Churchill talked about

> "a powerful organisation on both sides"

and "parity of bargaining". Let the Minister consider what parity of bargaining there is in my constituency when somebody who has slept in a cardboard box all night, because the Government's policies have not found him or her anywhere to live, goes to one of the hotels owned by Grand Metropolitan or Forte—multi-million pound organisations with multi-million pound profits every year—and bargains for a job in the kitchen in London where 60 people chase every job. Is that

> "a powerful organisation on both sides"?

Are those people who scrape out of their cardboard boxes and look for work powerful? I suggest that they are not; but the people whom they are trying to get jobs from are powerful.

The "Cutting Edge" programme last night revealed that this does not apply simply in London. That young woman, admittedly working for a television programme, was basically forced to beg, bow and scrape to get any job at all and scarcely got enough money to pay the rent even when she did secure one. What a collection of lawbreakers we had on that programme last night.

The Tories say that wages councils lose jobs. There is no possible justification for that statement. If the minimum rates of wages councils lead to the loss of jobs, why has the number of people working in wages council industries in the past three years increased by 90,000 while at the same time the total number of people employed in other industries has decreased by no fewer than 1,364,000? If there is any logic, sense or merit in the Minister's argument, the fall in the number of people employed in wages council industries would have been greater than the fall in other industries. But it has increased in wages council industries while it has fallen in all those industries in which there is no minimum wage.

The other argument of the Tories is that one needs to pay low pay to secure prosperity. That is typical Tory gibberish. If one looks around the world, two things go in parallel: high pay goes with prosperity and low pay goes with poverty. That has always been the case and it always will be the case. Paying poverty-level wages is no way out of Britain's problems.

Apparently, that is the new Tory approach. The Tories have decided that we must compete with the third world and that the way to do that is to have a sort of DIY third world. We are introducing third world pay, work practices, hours and working conditions in Britain. That is shameful.

6.45 pm

The Labour party believes that everyone who wants a job should have one, and that when they have that job they should be able to earn their keep. They should not have to struggle in poverty or depend on benefits when they have been to work. If people have worked a full-time working week, they should be able to maintain themselves and bring up themselves and their family without being dependent on benefits or anything else from anyone. That is what all of us have wanted to do, and most of us have managed to achieve it. We are glad to do it, and we believe that it should apply to everybody else. Everyone should be able to pay his way and look after himself.

I am not the only one who says that. This is a quotation from someone who is well favoured amongst some Conservative Members. In "The Wealth of Nations" in 1776, Adam Smith said:

> "It is but equity . . . that they who feed, clothe and lodge the whole body of the people should have such a share of the produce of their own labour as to be themselves tolerably well-fed, clothed and lodged."

He was the great revolutionary thinker who has been sort of colonised by the right wing of the Tory party who do not read much of what he said. What he said at that time was true and it remains true today.

We do not believe that wages councils should be abolished. If they are abolished, the Government should be required to carry out the proposals in our new clauses. It would provide some element of protection for those whom we believe will be exposed to the harshest economic and social winds unless we do something to offer them some protection.

It boils down to this. On one side of the argument we have a few free-market freaks and Tory vested interests getting their pay-off for putting money into the Tory party. On the other side, we have Adam Smith, Winston Churchill, the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Fawcett Society, the citizens advice bureaux and a legion of other people who have demonstrated over decades that they are interested in the welfare of ordinary people and in promoting equal opportunities for women. I know where we stand tonight. I think that the Minister stands in a shameful position.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I think that the hon. Gentleman was proposing that the Government should be required to bring in a report on what will happen as a consequence of the abolition of the wages council system.

I oppose the abolition of the wages council system. Occasionally, the Minister has asked me whether I appreciate, and did I not say in 1985, that the abolition of the wages council system would cost jobs. In 1985, I was willing to accept that the abolition would cost some jobs.

[Mr. Peter Bottomley]

So does health and safety at work and the sort of formal and informal cartels which help lawyers to be paid a certain amount of money. So, for that matter, does the level of pay of Members of Parliament. If we were paid half as much, we could have twice as many Members of Parliament for the same wage bill. All those things are self-evident. The question is at what level is it worth taking away protection from the vulnerable where it is not possible for them to have any equality in negotiating their pay.

I do not wish to exaggerate the effect of wages councils or the effect of abolishing them. However, if the wage levels set by wages council orders were wrong, it was open to the Government to propose, either in the Conservative election manifesto or subsequently, that they should have the power to reduce wages council orders by, say, 10 per cent., 15 per cent., or even 25 per cent.

The House is justified in being suspicious about a proposal to abolish wages councils based on consultation in 1988 when we had a general election in 1992 at which the issue could have been included in the manifesto and debated between the parties. It could have been a determinant in how people decided to vote. I do not believe that it would have affected many votes because the issue is more a private one. Given the number of people who move in and out of wages council sectors and sectors equivalent to wages council sectors, the issue would not necessarily have been the most important one.

However, the issue is important to more than 2 million people and to people in industries akin to wages council industries. We may hear from my hon. Friend the Minister about anomalies between raw meat and cooked meat shops. But in the high street most shops that are not covered directly by the retail orders pay wages equivalent to shops that are covered. We should ask whether abolition of the wages councils should have been declared policy at the last election.

My recollection of the consultation in 1988 is that there was not a strong view that wages councils should be abolished. Employers did not make strong representations that wages councils had a significant effect on employment or profits. My hon. Friend the Minister has been known to say—I do not want to traduce him completely, although I do not mind in part—that it does not matter very much if wages fall because jobs covered by wages councils are mainly part time and done by women and, in any case, 80 per cent. are paid more than the basic minimum rate.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have said no such thing. I have pointed out that most people who are covered by wages councils live in households in which there is a second source of income. Therefore, the emotive arguments made by Opposition Members do not apply.

Mr. Bottomley: As someone who is paid way above wages council rates but who produces a subsidiary income in a household, I take that as a friendly remark.

If wages councils orders have a highly inhibiting effect on employment, one would expect to find that most people covered by them were on the minimum rate. But most people are not. I could go through the economics if my hon. Friend the Minister was interested, but I might bore the House. That fact that most people are not on the minimum rate suggests that wages councils do not have a great employment effect.

I have tabled various parliamentary questions asking the Government to estimate the employment effect of abolishing the wages councils. They have ducked those questions because the research reports do not indicate strongly one way or the other that there will be a significant employment effect. But we can guarantee that abolition of wages councils will have a significant effect on the pay of some individuals.

I asked the Department of Employment to analyse the levels of underpayment. The Department has consistently answered that it would cost too much to obtain that information. I would have been entertained, if this was not such a serious issue, by the exchanges between my hon. Friend the Minister and the shadow spokeman on employment. Perhaps a television programme could find only one or two people who were significantly underpaid, but the Department's wage inspectors find so many cases that it is not possible to give a full and useful answer to a Member of Parliament who asks how many cases of underpayment occur.

My hon. Friend the Minister talked about the significant increase in the number of employers who are prosecuted. I suspect that, even at the current high level, one would not get through one's fingers and toes in arriving at the annual total. If I am wrong and there have been more than 20 cases in the past year, perhaps my hon. Friend will interrupt my speech and tell me. There may have been a significant increase from seven to 15 prosecutions—more than double the number—but that is insignificant in relation to the amount of deliberate, let alone inadvertent, underpayment which inspectors find.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I am surprised that my hon. Friend of all people should share the views of Opposition Members. In cases where people are paid wages below the legal level, does he want the matter to be put right, people to be paid according to the rate set down and any back-payment to be made, or does he want an increase in the number of prosecutions? If my hon. Friend is worried about low pay, surely the way in which the inspectorate chooses to carry out its task in the interests of those who are paid below the legal rate is a matter for it.

Mr. Bottomley: It would be inelegant for someone who previously held the post of my hon. Friend the Minister, but at a lower ministerial rank, to provide a running commentary. When my hon. Friend the Minister spoke about the increase in the number of prosecutions, I observed that he did not give the number. When I suggested that the increased number was below 20, he did not confirm it directly, but one can presume from his intervention that the figure is below 20. If my hon. Friend wants me to do so, I will say openly and aloud that I approve of the way in which wages inspectors have pay put right and required back-payment. Employers have been required to pay back-pay amounting to hundreds of thousands of pounds. I approve of that. However, I emphasise that the Department is fully aware of the level of underpayment, some of which is deliberate.

I should like my hon. Friend the Minister to give some estimate—I support the idea of a report—of what has happened in the sectors for which wages councils were abolished. He helpfully reminded the House that various wages councils were abolished by the previous Labour Government. One of them was the council for the motor trades. The trade unions, through both organisation and the influence of their negotiations, increased the levels of pay. The wages councils legislation provides that the Secretary of State can lay an order to abolish a wages council where there is an alternative effective means of determining pay. I support that.

On the last Sunday of the 1979 election campaign I went to the Wembley rally as president of the Conservative trade unions. We demonstrated to trade union members and their families that they could cheerfully vote Conservative because the Conservative party understood the interests of working people and their families. Not many of them believe that we have changed much. Not many of them believe that we have changed since 1985, when I expressed to the House the views of the Government on the operation of wages councils. We struck out many of their complications. We proposed that they should not apply to people under the age of 21 because having the chance to start work is far more important than the level of pay at that age. The chance to start work becomes less important to people aged over 21.

I agree with hon. Members on both sides of the House that we should invest more capital so that wages costs become less significant in the cost of production. When I was a Minister in the Department of Employment there was an investment of a quarter of a million pounds for each person employed in glassmaking. Increasingly in offices and retail more money is invested in the system of distribution. The level of pay is not that important. In hotels and other service organisations, investment in cleaning, catering or other equipment can be increased so that the level of pay becomes less important. Yet my hon. Friend the Minister pretends to the House that wages councils have a significant effect on employment.

The challenge to the Government is, first, to explain why they did not make it plain before the last election that abolition of all the wages councils was on the agenda and, secondly, to make plain what they believe will be the employment effect of abolishing the wages council for those at present on or below the minimum rates. I do not want to hear about a statutory minimum wage for everyone. I do not advocate that. I want to hear what will be the effect of abolishing what we have now.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I, too, watched the "Cutting Edge" programme last night. It was about the experience of a young reporter who went underground and worked for low and, indeed, illegal pay. Her experience mirrored that of many of our constituents, particularly my constituents in Halifax and the Calder valley, which is well known as an area of low pay.

The young woman's experience was identical to that of someone who wandered into one of my surgeries who earned £12 a day. A young man to whom I spoke a few weeks ago earned the same. That works out at £1·50 an hour, which is less than half the legal wage for that job. As my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) said, the legal wage is hardly a princely sum at £3·08 per hour. The employer of the boy who came to my surgery knew that he was breaking the law. This is something of which the Minister should take notice. His Government are supposed to be the Government of law and order, but they are very selective in their policy on prosecution. It is all very well for the Secretary of State for Social Security to burst into Gilbert and Sullivan at party conferences, where he sings songs about prosecuting the poor and about the evil of the "something for nothing" society. It is quite wrong that people should claim benefits to which they are not entitled, but Ministers take a myopic view when they condone huge-scale law-breaking such as was depicted in the television programme to which I have just referred.

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): My hon. Friend talks about law-breaking. Does she know that she could go into any job centre in the United Kingdom and find advertisements for jobs which, despite their being in wages council sectors, pay rates below the minima set by the councils for which the Minister has direct responsibility?

7 pm

Mrs. Mahon: That is a very relevant point, which the Minister should address in his reply.

In 1991 in Yorkshire and Humberside, 34,996 establishments were registered with the wages inspectorate. A total of 1,639 workers in the region were found to be being illegally underpaid, with arrears assessed at £174,189—an average underpayment of about £106 per worker. I realise that the proportion of recovered arrears is quite high, but of the 1,777 establishments visited, 44·6 per cent. were found to be illegally underpaying. We know that the wages inspectors visit only a tiny proportion of registered work forces—5·1 per cent., I think. They tend to concentrate on the areas in which they feel that underpayment is most likely to occur.

The Minister is very reluctant to give figures, but I can say that, nationally, 5,971 establishments were found to be illegally underpaying. There were just 15 prosecutions—fewer than the 20 to which we have heard reference. In Yorkshire and Humberside there were only seven prosecutions for illegal underpayment. That should be compared with the number of people prosecuted for claiming benefits illegally. Such a comparison shows where the Government's priorities lie.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Mahon: No. The Minister has intervened about four times. He is taking up the time of everybody else. Any point that he wants to make may be made in his reply.

In Yorkshire and Humberside, inspectors found 934 establishments that were failing to display wages council notices, 259 that were failing to keep adequate records of wages paid and 825 that were failing to keep adequate records of hours worked. I wonder why. Is this a major reason for the Government's negotiating us out of the social chapter in the Maastricht treaty? It is obvious that they are now into law-breaking on a massive scale. Perhaps they think that British workers would have access to European law if they had the same rights as European workers. We have a set of seedy, shabby, unprincipled Ministers presiding over this situation. They know that the law is being broken, but they do not care. Often there is no protection whatsoever for the people least able to protect themselves.

Last night's television programme showed how a reporter obtained a job in a private nursing home. The owner of the home—Mr. Majieson, a very wealthy man—employed the reporter as a laundry worker at £2·40 an hour, which is well below the legal wage. There are other implications for this floating work force. Their pay is so

[Mrs. Mahon]

low that they move on, constantly hoping for something better. Alternatively, they descend into a state of despair. The reporter was given no screening for any type of disease, despite the fact that she was working in a nursing home; she was given no instruction on health and safety; she even had to request rubber gloves, despite the fact that she was handling foul, soiled linen. On a number of occasions she was warned only after the event that she had been handling the soiled linen of a patient who had scabies.

This is not a marginal problem. If the wages council were overseen properly, if the inspectorate were doing its job properly, and if we had a Government who cared about the law, the councils could play an important part in looking after the growing number of people who are working in the private sector of the care industry. In 1982, there were 18,200 residents in private nursing homes and 44,000 in private residential care homes. The numbers have escalated. We are not talking about a marginal problem. We now have 109,000 people working in private nursing homes and 155,000 in private residential homes. We know where these homes are. Every local authority and every health authority has powers of inspection. It would be relatively easy to check on the wages being paid to employees, but the Government make no attempt whatsoever to do so. I am sure that if they were to take such a step they would find hundreds, if not thousands, of people being paid illegal rates.

The situation will undoubtedly get much worse when the wages councils are abolished. I am sure that there are many wealthy Mr. Majiesons who are breaking the law with impunity. The Minister must tell us why he and his colleagues preside over a Department that allows such a situation to continue.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): The hon. Member will have noted that, now that the Secretary of State for Employment has joined her colleagues on the Front Bench, there are more Front-Bench Conservatives than Back-Bench Conservatives in the Chamber—and it is clear that the Back-Bencher who has just made such a fine speech was not invited by his Front Bench. Does the hon. Lady agree that there must be many guilty consciences around the various fine restaurants and bars in the Palace of Westminster this evening?

Mrs. Mahon: Indeed I do. The hon. Gentleman has made a very relevant point. Many of those hon. Members may have a vested interest and may want to stay out of the way because they themselves are private contractors who have done these things to people.

Wages councils are relevant to the protection of 2·5 million, if not 3 million, workers. If we go back to a system in which employers can pay whatever they want, we shall have a new form of slave labour. The Minister has his roots in the 19th, if not the 18th, century. The abolition of wages councils will not result in the creation of any more jobs. Cuts in the pay of already low-paid workers will reduce their spending power at a time of recession and will increase their dependence on state benefits. If the Government, having listened to the arguments in Committee and in the Chamber, still make the case that low pay is necessary to a successful economy, how do they explain the success of the German economy as compared with that of a country like Bangladesh? I do not think that there is much chance of our winning this vote tonight, but I hope that the Government will reply to some of the points that I have raised.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): It is interesting to see such a dearth—indeed, a total absence—of Conservative Back-Benchers wishing to take part in this debate in support of their Front Bench. We may finish the debate having heard only one Conservative Back-Bench speech —that of the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), who spoke most eloquently against the Government's view. What an ironic situation.

It seems to me that one searches Ministers' speeches in vain for one of the three cases that they might make for the abolition of wages councils. One looks for a moral case, an economic case or a political case, but one finds none. Indeed, in the 1909 speech of Winston Churchill to which reference has been made the moral case not against but for wages councils was made out very eloquently:

> "We believe that decent conditions make for industrial efficiency and increase, rather than decrease, competitive power."

That remains true today. The Government have failed to produce any evidence, let alone any cogent evidence, to the effect that competitive power and industrial efficiency will be increased by the abolition of the wages councils. Although wages councils no longer apply to workers aged under 21, there is evidence that the difference between the wages of workers aged under and over 21 in the same industry increased after abolition.

The Government seem to be claiming that 80 per cent. of people who work in wages council industries are in households in which another wage is coming in. I think that I heard the Minister express that view in one of his many interventions. What is the Minister really after? Is he after the sort of low-wage, many-job economy that those who visited central and eastern Europe before the political changes were used to seeing?

I recall getting into a taxi in Budapest a few years ago and being told by the driver that he was a professor of philosophy in a Budapest university, but to make ends meet he needed at least one other job. It was common to find people with two or three other jobs, working every hour possible to eke out a living. The Government seem by their policies to be aiming for that sort of economy.

A TUC survey suggested that four out of every five people involved in a wages council industry were female. Those statistics are undoubtedly right. It is ridiculous for the Government to suggest that all those women are secondary income earners. A 1990 labour force survey showed that 20·3 per cent. of wages council workers were single parents, compared with 13·8 per cent. of the general population. So it is self-evident that a single parent with no other source of income is 50 per cent. more likely to be employed in a wages council industry. The wages council for those single parents, female or male, is well worth having.

It is inevitable that overall wages will decrease following the abolition of wages councils. The effect will be to increase poverty and that will most strikingly affect single parents. The Government do not put forward a moral case, but an immoral, even an amoral, case. Their case is tainted by an acceptance that poverty is an acceptable element of a supposedly civilised economy.

Is there an economic case? In its defence—I emphasise "defence"—of wages councils, the Institute of Management says that any good employer who attempts to maximise profits will automatically and sensibly set wage rates at a level at which the productivity and calibre of workers is reasonable. The institute accepts that wages councils give a valuable guide towards realistic wages levels. An efficient industry is surely one in which the workers are at least reasonably content and are prepared to work longer hours for their wages because they are worth having.

I recall visiting Poland and talking to a privatised industry's chairman just after the political changes there. He described how difficult it was for him to find new workers for his factory, even though he had work for them. The reason was that wages had gone so low under the old communist regime that women in particular thought it was no longer worth working. Wages were set at such an impoverished level that it was not worth doing anything other than rely on the state. There is a danger of that happening if wages councils are abolished.

One is left with the conclusion—if there is no moral or economic case for their abolition—that the Government are relying on a political case. But such a case has yet to be explained to us. As the hon. Member for Eltham pointed out in his powerful speech, if there was such a good political case to be made, that case and the evidence supporting it would have appeared in Doctor Major's casebook, the Tory election manifesto on which the Conservatives, by a squeak, won the election again last April. There was nothing to support that case in the Tory manifesto. We have before us a proposal that has not at any stage been supported by any cogent argument. I hope that the House will vote against abolition tonight.

7.15 pm

Mr. Hanson: It was a pleasure to hear the contribution by the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley). I had the privilege, with many of my hon. Friends here tonight, of discussing the Bill for weeks and months in Committee, during which not a Conservative Member showed an iota of concern for those who will be affected by the abolition of wages councils, the people whom we are seeking to help.

The abolition of wages councils is a squalid part of the Bill, which we shall take pleasure in opposing in the Lobby. While we shall no doubt lose the vote, though not the argument, I trust that the Government will at least listen to the concerns that my hon. Friends and I are expressing as we debate the various clauses and amendments.

We are debating a squalid piece of legislation. Like many of my hon. Friends, I support the establishment of a minimum wage. Indeed, many of us fought the last election on that basis. Some former Conservative Members lost their seats because they opposed the concept. We must have a base line below which people are not allowed to fall, especially in environments which my hon. Friends have described, in which unions are not in place and in which workers are isolated. In some circumstances, workers face tremendous odds in making their voices heard.

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): Does my hon. Friend accept that wages councils are necessary even in some industries where trade unions are in place, such as in retailing, because of the nature of the trade? It is an irony that the Bill will make it harder for workers to organise into trade unions, which means that we are faced with a terrible Siamese twins-type Bill because it makes it harder to achieve powerful trade unions and at the same time makes it more essential for there to be powerful trade unions, as every other form of protection is stripped from workers.

Mr. Hanson: Having worked in the retail sector at the beginning of my career, I am well aware of the low wages, long hours and poor conditions that many in that sector must endure. I have been staggered during the debates on this issue by the way in which Conservative Members do not accept that Britain remains a low-paid, low-income society. The Bill, rather than strengthening people's rights and developing better pay and conditions, will continue to reduce the conditions and standard of living of many people.

There are still 6 million women earning below the Council of Europe's decency threshold. We still have 12 million people on income support, with 2·5 to 2·6 million workers covered by the wages councils that the Government want to abolish. Wales, my region, has the lowest levels of pay in the United Kingdom, currently 87 per cent. of the national average. If the Government press their proposals, the 147,000 people who work in clothing manufacturing and who now earn the princely minimum wage of £102·86 per week, or the 492,000 licensed residential workers who earn £113, will undoubtedly find their wages reduced.

There is overwhelming evidence that the abolition of wages councils will reduce wage rates in those industries, will have an impact on increasing family poverty, will force more people into state subsidy through benefit, will not lead to net job creation and will remove much valuable legal protection. The Labour party has opposed the legislation from the beginning. In Committee we cited strongly the views of the Equal Opportunities Commission, a Government-sponsored body. We also cited the views of the Fawcett Society and the citizens advice bureaux. My citizens advice bureau in Flint lobbied me and put forward suggestions for widening the scope for wages councils to include private nursing homes and the security trade. The Trades Union Congress, the Low Pay Unit, the Institute of Management Consultants and many employers wrote to hon. Members during the Committee stage, saying that the abolition of wages councils was wrong, would not achieve the objectives sought by the Government and would hit hard those who were already suffering

In Committee, with all that weight of evidence in front of him, what did the Minister produce? He produced one solitary letter from Forte, contributors to the Conservative party, who did not even have the courtesy to send the letter to every hon. Member serving on the Standing Committee. Like many of my hon. Friends, I received not one letter nor one piece of evidence to support the abolition of wages councils.

The proposal has no logic. My region in Wales is the lowest-paid region in the United Kingdom. The abolition of wages councils will affect 109,500 workers in Wales; that is one in ten of the work force.

Underpayment has already been mentioned. The reports of wages councils inspectors show that in different parts of Wales 32 per cent. to 41 per cent. of establishments were underpaying their employees. Those underpayments are being made even when it is a criminal offence and there is a check by inspectors. Unscrupulous employers, those

[Mr. Hanson]

who were said by Winston Churchill to undercut good employers, continue to underpay when there are legal checks.

I would welcome the Minister's comments on what will happen when wages councils inspectors have been removed, when underpayment goes underground, and when companies can get away with it because it is no longer a criminal offence. What will happen to the people who need support from the state to get a basic wage? We are not talking about vast burdens on employers but basic wages, low, poverty pay for people who need a strict mechanism to defend them from unscrupulous employers.

In Wales, if wages fell by only 10p per week £394,500 or £20 million a year would be lost to the local economy; one in ten households would be affected.

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): Will the hon. Member give way?

Mr. Hanson: Absolutely; I am glad that we have at last provoked a Conservative Member to say something.

Mr. Heald: When the hon. Gentleman says that the local economy would lose that amount of money, is not that only if no new jobs were created? Is it not the contention of the Government that new jobs would be created? Is not that a laudable and moral aim?

Mr. Hanson: The hon. Gentleman sat in Committee with me for many hours. If wages are reduced, no new jobs will be created. Workers will work harder for poorer pay and people who control the industries will take bigger profits. There will be no increase in jobs.

Mr. Graham: My hon. Friend will realise that the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald) expects people to work for 10p an hour. The Minister expects people to work for notning; he said that in Committee.

Mr. Hanson: My hon. Friend makes an apt observation.

As to the impact on the local economy in my region, my borough council, which is not Labour controlled, has written to me about its concern in regard to the loss of wages. If there is a knock-on effect, there will be greater unemployment. The people on wages councils rates do not go out and buy Alfa Romeos; they do not holiday in Barbados, nor do they buy Italian imports or fine suits of clothes. They go to the local shops to buy local food, they use local transport and they pay for things locally, boosting the local economy. If the money is taken out of the local economy, there will be a knock-on effect, particularly in areas like mine which relies highly on tourism.

Mr. Jimmy Boyce (Rotherham): We have heard much about spiteful policies. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Bill is not the result of a spiteful Government policy, but rather the result of a philosophical policy? If a more caring Government tried to operate the capitalist system and the philosophy of capitalism that the Government purport to operate, it would have the same effect, with decimation of conditions for working people. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government are not capable of implementing a policy that is fair to working people?

Mr. Hanson: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. The Government want to force down the wages of those in the low-paid sector.

The National Institute of Economic and Social Research has estimated that 25,000 jobs will be lost through the knock-on effect of spending cuts because of wage reductions. That will have a major effect on many industries.

I want to give a constituency example in support of the new clause. Just after I was elected, the husband of a constituent came to my surgery because the constituent was too frightened to come. The husband said that, because the powers of the wages council for the hotel trade were being reduced, the workers were not being paid overtime. They were being forced to work overtime on Saturdays and Sundays; if they did not agree, they were told to go because there were plenty of others to take their jobs.

I complained to the wages council inspector, who visited the hotel. He enforced the legislation and made the hotel chain pay the workers a decent overtime rate. The workers had a choice about doing overtime, because people who work in hotels have families too.

If the Government do not accept the amendment and do not undertake to consider the social implications of the abolition of wages councils, and if they proceed to abolish wages councils, what redress will there be for my constituent who is not a member of a trade union and who is only an individual employee in a massive hotel chain? My constituent will have no redress. She will be a cork, bobbing on the waters of a large company, to be washed up anywhere the company chooses to send her. That is not right.

We are are talking about basic rights. What is the objection to monitoring the working conditions and wages of lower-paid workers, and having a report back to Parliament? What is the objection to monitoring the effects of this vicious legislation? There should be no objections. That is why I hope the Minister will support the new clause.

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxstowe): I wish to speak in support of my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley). Way back in history, when I was in the Department of Employment, I was responsible for wages councils. I always supported the principle of wages councils, although I also supported the move to improve their operation by taking away many of their peripheral responsibilities which tended to cloud the issue. Certainly I supported them in looking after sectoral interests and low-paid people.

I am well aware of the argument that the majority of people covered by wages councils earn more than the minimum level, but that does not justify their abolition because it is Parliament's responsibility—and I have always believed it was the responsibility of the Conservative party—to look after those who are least able to defend themselves, and not to stand back and allow those most able to defend themselves to roar away.

We have had many battles with the various think tanks, which purported to support my party but which, in many ways, have led it from the origins and the true traditions of Toryism. The think tanks argued that social security is the level of the basic minimum wage. That statement is offensive, and I find it impossible to support it.

BEST COPY A

7.30 pm

I am chairman of the Family Budget Unit, which is made up of academics and people with great expertise on living costs. We have done a great deal of work on what the family budget should be if a family is to have a minimum standard of living. I am sure that many hon. Members have seen the results as they have been published and many people are asking for them. Hon. Members should examine our report section by section. For example, we say that the food bill for a family of four will be £40 or £50. I often tell my wife, "Darling, this is what the Family Budget Unit says that you should be feeding our family of four on." She gives me a short, sharp reply and shows me the bill from Sainsbury's, which is almost always double or treble the amount that the unit thought necessary for a decent standard of living.

I am constantly amazed that anyone can cope or have a reasonable standard of living on social security. I recognise that even those people on a marginally higher wage find it enormously difficult to sustain a family.

To the Government's credit, they introduced family credit as a way to ensure state assistance for those people identified as living most in poverty—families with children. It seems odd for the Government to say that they want to support families through that scheme when, by abolishing wage councils, this Bill will increase the budget required to pay for it. In other words, we shall use Government money to subsidise low pay, especially for families, which seems a tremendous anomaly. Our thinking about the basic levels of social security and salaries required for people to live on ought to be much clearer, and we should think about protection for people who are least able to protect themselves.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): Does the hon. Member agree that every worker who is responsible for a family deserves the dignity of being able to earn sufficient to provide for his family, irrespective of family credit?

Mr. Lester: Yes, I do; but I also recognise that society has changed considerably. From working with friends in the United States and other parts of the world, I recognise that traditional forms of employment in which a man—nowadays with his wife's assistance—can earn a reasonable income are tending to change. The idea of working for the same firm for 40 years has long since gone. People have to get their salaries as and where they can.

From his experience in Northern Ireland, the hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs) will know that the old basic industries no longer exist. We must look to a different pattern of employment, which forces me to conclude that a basic income system, which does not retract if people earn more money, is the only way forward. That, however, is another argument and I shall not develop it today.

My third reason for not supporting the withdrawal of the wages councils is that I have had experience of running a company for 25 years, and I made a profit in every year except one. I recognise that there are considerable variations in the terms and conditions of employment within industry. The great value of wages councils is that they took into account the conditions for a sector when considering the basic wage. For instance, in some sectors employees receive tips, but in others they do not; and housing may come with some jobs. One cannot directly compare one job with another, and the wages councils acknowledge that.

Wages councils have been reviewed twice since they were formed and tended to include a majority of employers. I cannot conceive why, if employers were in the majority, they could not work within the wages council framework to set satisfactory minimum salaries for their industry—fair levels at which everyone could work.

I have listened to the arguments of some Opposition Members about job creation and also to my hon. Friends. The truth is that if people depress wages to produce goods at lower prices to sell them, it is more likely to reduce jobs than to increase them, because such employers would undercut those offering decent wages and standards. That is not a job-creation formula.

My last reason for not supporting the abolition of wages councils is political. At the next election it would give the Labour party a far stronger argument for introducing a minimum wage as the argument would be more powerful if there were no protection for people at the bottom of the scale. For the reasons that I have stated, I disagree with the arguments on the minimum wage. The wage would not take into account variations in terms of employment in different sectors of industry and would be too high for some industries, which would cause unemployment, or so low that it had no effect and was therefore not worth the legislation that it was written on.

The minimum wage is an alternative to the wages councils, but I support the principle of sectoral minimum wages rather than a national minimum wage. The political reason is that the abolition of the wages councils would give the Opposition a strong case to introduce minimum wage legislation at the next election. I do not agree with such legislation but it has wide appeal. From a study of the opinion polls during the last election, one can learn how popular that suggestion was with the general public. The Bill is one way to make it even more popular at the next election.

An ancillary argument is that people in this country, who have a sense of their own dignity, will not be pushed around or allow their wages to be reduced artificially and wrongly if they feel that that is an injustice. They will do something about it. What can they do? They can join a relevant trade union, or possibly a sectoral trade union, which might well form. Abolition of the wages councils would be a recruiting sergeant for the trade union movement, which was established to protect people whose employment was without protection. That is another reason why those of my colleagues who do not think as highly of trade unions as I do should think twice before supporting the abolition of wages councils. The suggestion that people will sit back and accept such treatment is contrary to my experience of what people feel when they think that they are being unjustly treated.

For all those reasons, I am glad to have been able to contribute to the debate. I signed the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham. I hope that the Government will think seriously about proceeding on their course. As the clause suggests, we ought to be careful to monitor the results of the abolition of the wages councils. For the reasons that I have expressed, their abolition will not do employment or the protection of the work force any good.

AILABLE

Mr. Graham: If anything has made me angry about the Government, it is their commitment to abolish wages councils. I come from Strathclyde, where the Government have inflicted a poverty that we thought unimaginable in a modern, high-technology country such as Britain. The levels of poverty would make anyone cry.

Our people are unemployed in their thousands and our young people are desperate for work, yet the Government have come up with this solution. The Government are going to abolish the wages councils and they imagine that doing so will create jobs. To devise something like that to replace jobs is the product of a sick mind.

Every single hon. Member makes a minimum of £31,000 a year. Yet people in this place have the audacity to suggest that wages from £2·59 to £3·10 an hour are too high—it is mind-boggling to say the least. In Committee, I told the Minister that I had a constituent who was expected to bring his family up on £1·85 an hour. At that time, the Minister agreed that some wages were so low as to be evil. Surely £3·10 an hour is evil pay in a modern society.

After 14 years of the Government totally mismanaging the economy, with unemployment raging at 3 million and bankruptcies hitting our companies every single day, the Government come up with the grand policy of abolishing wages councils. They want to abolish the wages councils that have protected 2·5 million people. The wages councils may not have done as well as we would have liked, but the Government have ensured that they could not be more effective and they have reduced their power.

In 1986, the Government started to reduce some of the wages councils' controls. The Minister knows very well what I am talking about; there has been a systematic and sinister move by the Government to reduce the wages councils' powers over the years. We have now reached the stage where they wish to abolish them. It is amazing that the Tory Government seem to want to ensure only that the rich get richer and the poor poorer. They never think about increasing the quality of life of the folk who live on social security benefit, but just talk about cuts, cuts, cuts.

I wonder why no Conservative Member has tonight been prepared to defend the abolition of wages councils? I was absolutely delighted to hear the two Conservative Members speak in support of wages councils. They are quite correct; there is no way that the abolition of the wages councils and low wages will create new jobs. Anyone who tries to lower already low wages must be the most evil member of society. From 1906 to 1909 there was a sweated trades exhibition, but in those days they had the vision to create the wages councils. We should have learnt from that, but the Minister does not seem to have realised that there are many people who live on low wages and have to have their wages topped up. Those people are means-tested.

Surely in a civilised society people should be entitled to decent wages to pay for rent, clothes, heating and food —why not? Surely all men and women deserve that dignity. Surely it is the right of every man and woman in this country who works to receive decent pay to allow them to afford to buy the necessities of life. However, the Government do not care and have come up with a measure to abolish wages councils. They have not given the House one example of the way in which that measure will create jobs.

Earlier statements have suggested that value added tax might be imposed on food, which could mean families paying £8 or £9 a week extra on food. Let us consider the position. We abolish the wages councils and some unscrupulous employers get together and lower wages. What will happen to the poor families? They will have to pay VAT and pay extra for their food. We will be going back to the bad old days that my mother and father have told me about, when parents went to work hungry and worked hard to ensure that their kids would be fed.

This country has not been brought up to its present standard only to have it lowered so that impoverished mothers and fathers have to work in bad health and, ultimately, cannot work to feed their children. What have we come to? I wonder about the Government's logic.

7.45 pm

Earlier, I spoke about a young man who was getting £1 an hour and was expected to work seven days a week. When he asked for time off work to go to a wedding, his boss sacked him. That seems unbelievable, but it is true. I also told the Minister about the man who earned £1·85 an hour.

I shall tell the House another important, true story. A security guard worked with his dog and got about £1·70 an hour. After he had done 17 hours work with his dog, his partner failed to turn up, so the man worked another 17 hours at £1·70 an hour. A complaint was made about the dog and why it did not get a rest. An animal welfare group said that it would take the case to court if the dog was not given a rest. The man had to give his dog a rest, but the man himself got no rest. We have laws for dogs, but no decent laws for men and women in this country.

The Minister cannot honestly expect to create jobs out of the low paid. If the Government do not have the ability to ensure that this country re-establishes its manufacturing base and if they do not invest in young people, education and the quality of life of our people, they should give up. If the measure is the Government's only means of reducing unemployment—now at 3 million—the Minister should give up.

The Government should give our people a break. Our people need the wages councils, which must be improved and developed. The Government should forget their sick suggestion and get people back to meaningful, fruitful work. They should give my constituent an opportunity to work for a decent wage. He deserves a decent, fair pay for a fair day's work. If the Government give him that, people like him will make Britain great once again.

Mr. Salmond: I was struck by the contributions of the two Conservative Members, who were both against the Minister and the Government's attitude to the wages councils. The hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) made a graceful speech, obviously based on his experience and study of the issue. However, I was particularly struck by the remark of the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester), who said that he thought that the measure was an example of the fact that think tanks now have an over-mighty influence on the Conservative party. He was right—think tanks have taken over the asylum and the personification of that process is sitting on the Treasury Bench.

I studied economics at the same university as the Minister of State. I studied it for somewhat longer than he did and I have a theory that he has since been engaged in a process of trying to devalue not only my degree, but the reputation and standing of one of Scotland's greatest moral philosophers, Adam Smith.

The hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) expressed surprise that someone like Adam Smith should have railed against the concept of low wages. He should have expressed no such surprise: Adam Smith was opposed to low wages for the same reason as he opposed poll taxes. Both were indications of primitive, under-developed economies. That is what the Minister now stands for.

The economic effects of the abolition of wages councils will probably be marginal, because a fairly small number of workers is involved and relatively few of those workers are now earning only wages council rates. It could be argued that there will be an employment effect, but there will certainly be an effect on income and demand which will depress employment. Much more important than the macro-economic effect of abolition is the micro-economic effect on individual workers. Low wages unquestionably lead to the demoralisation of the work force and to a lack of efficiency.

The Minister should not find it particularly surprising that someone reduced to poverty-line wages, struggling to keep body, soul and family together on an income that does not sustain that effort, will feel less than comfortable about his working environment. Such a person may not put everything into being as efficient as possible. I suspect that the Minister greatly underrates the effect on individual companies of driving wages and conditions further down; I am sure that the leaders of such companies do. Many of the industries concerned already provide the worst wages and conditions in the economy.

More revealing in an economic sense, however, is what the Government's attitude to wages councils betrays about their overall approach to the economy. Today's papers quote the Secretary of State for Scotland as saying, in an aside to his speech at Edinburgh university, that people in Scotland must price themselves back into jobs. The Minister probably wrote that speech: he is nodding vigorously in agreement.

According to the Government, a low-wage economy provides the way to be competitive in the modern world. All the evidence suggests, however, that high-wage, high productivity, high-efficiency economies are the most successful in the international environment. That is suggested not just by current evidence, but by historical evidence from Scotland. A hundred years ago, Scotland was the most prosperous country in the world per head of population and also paid the highest industrial wages in the world. Those wages were the result of a highly skilled, highly educated work force, relative to other countries at that time.

Given that historical experience, and given all the current international experience suggesting that high-wage, high-skill economies provide the route to economic success, why should the Minister suddenly find an economic formula suggesting that low wages and low productivity present the magic solution to economic difficulties?

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's analysis of the desirability of a high-wage, high-skill economy and with his analysis of the Scottish economy 100 years ago. Perhaps he will now tell us how Scotland managed to pay high wages before wages councils existed.

Mr. Salmond: Is the Minister now arguing that wages councils are necessary to maintain high wages? If not, why on earth is he pursuing that line?

Wages councils were introduced in the early years of the century to try to introduce some decency to the wage-bargaining process. The argument about wages councils is not an economic one, as the Minister would know if he had followed my speech more carefully. It concerns morality and decency and whether Members of Parliament can legislate, not to protect the poor against the strong, but to reinforce the power of the strong over the weak. It is about whether, instead of further reducing the standards for some of the most powerless and vulnerable sections of society, we should accept responsibility for enacting legislation designed to reinforce whatever power we can give such people.

Yesterday, the Secretary of State for Scotland argued —with the Minister's agreement—that people should price themselves back into jobs. That typifies the Government's overall economic approach. Why cannot people educate themselves into jobs? Why can we not train them into jobs? Why can we not replicate the success of the economies that are currently most successful internationally and the success of Scotland 100 years ago?

Let me end my speech as I began it, with a reference to Adam Smith. It is no great surprise that a moral philosopher like Adam Smith did not consider it appropriate for wages to be driven down—no surprise, that is, to anyone but the Minister, who has abused Adam Smith's theory and writing throughout his political career. The essential question for the House tonight, however, is one of decency. Are we going to pass legislation that will drive down further the wages and conditions of a group of people who may not have much effect on the macro-economy in numerical terms, but whose lives, interests and families are entitled to far more respect than the Minister is prepared to give them?

Ms. Eagle: It is interesting to note that so far every Conservative Member has supported the new clause—which I, too, support—and opposed the Government's move to abolish wages councils. Unfortunately, we were not much enlightened in Committee: after some six hours of argument against abolition, the Minister dismissed what had been said in one and a half sentences. I hope that we shall now hear some explanation for the Minister's belief that the move is reasonable and will create employment—and, perhaps, some evidence for his view.

I do not believe that any such evidence exists, and many of the speeches that we have heard so far have powerfully reinforced my view. I believe that the Government's decision was born out of purely ideological dogma—and they are one of the most dogmatic Governments of the century. The measure is being imposed without consultation, and with hardly any attempt to justify it by means of genuine arguments about the effects of abolition.

The proposal is an example of the Government's obsession with what I described in Committee as neo-classical 19th-century liberalism with a dash of Benthamite utilitarianism. I stand by that analysis. Let me add that that mixture of policy and philosophy is much older than Winston Churchill's observations in 1909—which were derided by some Conservative Back Benchers as old fashioned—and much more out of date.

I pointed out in Committee that the mixture of policy and philosophy to which I have referred led to the creation

[Ms. Eagle]

of the poor laws and the workhouse. In the neo-classical economic model, wages are driven down to whatever level the market dictates—which may be lower than people need in order to live, let alone enjoy life. There is no reason why wages cannot be driven down to zero or below. The Government continue to cling, however, to their outmoded dogma, despite all the evidence to the contrary—that their blessed belief in market forces leads to impoverishment. When the labour market is, as the Government would say, freed up, it fails to provide the work force with wages that can sustain body and soul. If wages councils are abolished, that is what will happen to the 2·7 million workers who now enjoy the protection of wages councils.

8 pm

Simply because of the way that the market operates, the abolition of wages councils will also lead to impoverishment slightly higher up the wages scale. If already low wages are pushed even lower, the wages of people in the more casualised sector of employment will also be pushed lower, which will take even more money and spending power out of the economy and create even more impoverishment. Clause 28 is an attempt to deregulate the labour market even further and to reduce wages costs, the spurious idea being that that, somehow, will create employment.

The Government regard any kind of cost of employing anybody as a burden on business. That is the phrase that they have used. They talk about people being priced back into jobs but we have heard already in the debate that wages council rates are woefully inadequate now. Many examples have been quoted of the wage rates being paid in non-wages council areas. I do not intend to give other examples, although I could do so. I have examples of wage rates as low as £1·80 an hour and others that are as low as £1 an hour.

We are being asked to agree to taxpayers having to subsidise bad employers, who pay poverty, exploitative wages to their work force, with their taxes, simply because people who are paid wages of £1 an hour can scarcely feed themselves on such wages, let alone try to feed and clothe their families. It is insulting that taxpayers should be asked to subsidise bad employers and that wages should then be ratcheted down so far that many other employers, who would prefer to pay higher wages, find that either they have to pay lower wages, because of the competitive pressures, or sack their workers.

That is the way that the market mechanism works. It drives out the good and the responsible employers and replaces them with the bad, irresponsible and exploitative employers. It has happened many times in the last century and a half. If wages councils go, it will happen again and the ratcheting down of wages will accelerate.

One of the Government's policy objectives has been to achieve a widening of the gap between the rich and the poor. They have certainly achieved their objective during their period in office. There is massive poverty now, all of which helps to make it harder for the labour market to have any power. With unemployment standing at 3 million or 4 million—one can argue about the figure, but I say that the figure is closer to 4 million than to 3 million—there is a massive pool of people who are able to replace those who make a fuss about being paid low wages. That immediately leads to another drag on the levels of wages that can be paid.

In addition, there has been a deliberate strategy by the Government and their predecessors since 1979 to strip away, bit by bit, the employment protection measures that were on the statute book when the Conservatives first came to power in 1979. We have now reached the stage where employment protection under the law is at its absolute minimum. One has to work for two years before one qualifies for any kind of protection against unfair dismissal. Even the protection that one gains after two years in full-time employment and five years in part-time employment does not stretch as far as reinstatement. All this intimidates people and prevents them from managing to achieve even the few employment rights that they have under the law to adequate wage levels and adequate terms and conditions of employment.

There has been a deliberate attempt to create a low-tech, no-skill and cheap economy. The result of the deregulation of the labour market—combined, on the macro-economic level, with the Government's incompetence, due to another of their obsessions that is not relevant to the Bill but which I mention only in passing, monetarism—is mass unemployment. That has led to the creation of a one third, two thirds society. The people who are in the bottom third cannot hope to do anything other than casualised, unprotected jobs for wages that, frankly, would have been a scandal at the turn of the century and that are a scandal today.

We, as a legislature, have a responsibility to put a stop to that. The last thing that we should be doing today is dismantling the last vestiges of minimum wage protection for already poor and vulnerable groups.

Mrs. Wise: Has my hon. Friend overlooked the excuse that is given by the Treasury Bench—that most of these people are women, anyway, whose income is therefore subsidiary? Is my hon. Friend waiting with bated breath, as I am, for the Secretary of State for Employment and all her female colleagues to declare themselves as mere subsidiaries and that they are queuing up to take a cut in their salaries on the same grounds?

Ms. Eagle: I agree with the sentiments expressed by my hon. Friend. The abolition of wages councils will affect women more than any other group of workers, because 80 per cent., or thereabouts, of wages council workers are women. The labour market is so segmented at the moment that women generally tend to find themselves in the lower echelons of job grades and, therefore, on lower pay.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) said in his speech, wages councils lead to a unisex wage. The so-called gender gap—the gap between the average earnings of men and women in particular jobs—is consistently narrower in every wages council industry than it is in the non-regulated sector. As the Equal Opportunities Commission points out in its comments on the Government's attempts to abolish the wages councils, their abolition will have another effect. Apart from the effect on relative levels of poverty, when already low wages decline even further there will be a widening of the gender gap between men and women workers in the non-regulated sector.

The abolition of the wages councils will put us in grave danger of being in breach of the equal rights directive. I hope that the Minister will deal with that matter when he replies to the debate. It will run against the spirit of the equal pay legislation that has been on the statute book for 20 years. I shall be interested in what the Minister has to say about the Government's plans to ensure that the gender gap between women's pay and men's pay in this sector, as in all others, is narrowed rather than widened.

The workers in the more exploitable areas tend to be women. They also tend to be members of the ethnic minorities. One in four of the ethnic minorities who are lucky enough to have a job find that they are confined to wages sector industries. We can also expect the gap between their pay and the average rate to widen if wages councils are abolished.

As for the effect that abolition of the wages councils will have in my region, the north-west, in so far as we have been able to find out, 345,000 people are working in wages council industries. It is, however, a reasonable estimate and amounts to one in 10 households.

If we assume that the abolition of wages councils leads to a 20p fall in wages—it is a very generous assumption given that some of the wage rates that I mentioned earlier are currently being paid in the north-west—and if we also assume an 18-hour week because of the part-time nature of some of the employment that we are discussing, the abolition of wages councils will lead to a withdrawal of £52 million from the economy of the north-west and £10·2 million from my own region of Merseyside. Clearly, that will have an effect on employment.

What are the Department's estimates of the employment effect of withdrawing that spending power from not only the north-west but from the country as a whole if, as I believe will happen, wage rates go down in the aftermath of the abolition of wages councils? The new clause would require statistics to be kept not only on the level of wage rates within wages council industries and the areas that were covered by them but on other aspects. We should certainly appreciate some statistics that we can trust so that we can make a proper assessment of the economic effect of abolition. Neoclassical economic theory accurately predicts what will happen.

Having listened to what the Government have said in their justifications—thin as they have so far been—for including abolition in the Bill, it is clear to me that they want wages to fall. Surely that is what "pricing yourself into a job" means in Tory-speak. I do not know how one can price oneself into a job at £1·80 an hour. I wonder whether we want such jobs. Should we be aiming for jobs that pay £1·80 an hour and which offer people absolutely no rights or dignity? Do we want such jobs in an advanced, highly technological society which purports to want to compete with some of the most advanced societies in the western world?

I suspect that the result of the Government's obsession with their own little neoclassical dogmas and the demand and supply curve in the labour market, of their continuing obsession with deregulation and of their seeming indifference to the human effect of the ratcheting down of wages in the one third of the country that has been impoverished by their actions, will be to turn us from the workshop of the world, which we have now ceased to be thanks to the Government's wonderful industrial strategies, into the sweatshop of the world. For that reason, I support new clause 12 and oppose the abolition of the wages councils.

Mr. Burden: I support the new clause because it is important that we have evidence of the impact of the abolition of wages councils. That impact will be not only on statistics but on people, some of the worst-paid employees in the country.

In Committee there was a good deal of double-speak from the Government about why they want to abolish wages councils and what they think the impact of abolition will be. They argue that wages councils are unnecessary because 80 per cent. of employees covered by them are paid more than the legal minimum. That argument does not stand up to too close an examination, but, for the moment, let us accept it.

How does that argument square with the other argument, uttered in the next breath by the same people, that wages councils are apparently a barrier to employment? The Government point to pay increases in wages council industries, allege that they are higher than the general level—although they are not—and imply that the level of wages in wages councils industries and services stop people being employed. The Government cannot have it both ways. They cannot say that wages councils are irrelevant and, in the same breath, say that they are a barrier to employment.

If wages councils are abolished, there will be a cut in pay for some of the lowest-paid employees in the country. The Government will be giving vent to some of their worst and most grotesque ideological prejudices. They are throwing a bone to their right wing, saying, "Don't worry about Maastricht. When all is said and done, we can produce a Bill that will have a go at low-paid workers and the unions." That is what the Bill is all about.

8.15 pm

We have got used to the Government saying that inequality and poverty must be tolerated. We do not accept that, but we have got used to them saying it. We do not and will never accept that inequality and poverty must be deepened and increased, which is the basis of the Bill.

It is time that Conservative Members showed some honesty about how low they are prepared to watch wages fall. We have yet to receive an answer to the question whether they think that £2·78 is too high a wage for a hairdresser. Is it? We have yet to receive an answer to the question whether £2·92 is too high a wage for someone working in a restaurant. We have yet to have some honesty from the Government about the responses that they have received to the proposal, about the fact that the majority of responses opposed the abolition.

We have yet to have some honesty from the Government about what the employment effects will be and the fact that even some of their own studies offer no clear evidence of employment increasing if wages councils are abolished. As my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) made clear, if wages councils were such a barrier to employment, how is it that employment in wages council industries and services has increased in recent years?

We need the Government to show some honesty about the disproportionate effect that the abolition of wages councils will have on women. Eighty per cent. of employees covered by wages councils are women, and the only answer we have had from the Government is, "Don't worry about that because in the main they contribute a second income." The Government then have the gall to get upset when we accuse them, rightly, of advancing the argument about pin money.

The Government should be aware that there are challenges in Europe to the proposed abolition of wages councils and its relationship to the treaty of Rome. I have no doubt that, in a few weeks, we shall hear of another miraculous legal opinion which proves that it does not matter.

In the west midlands, 270,000 employees will be affected if wages councils are abolished. As in other parts of the country, that means about one in every 10 households. If only 20p an hour were taken off the pay in wages council industries, £50 million would be lost to the west midlands alone. That is not about boosting the economy or increasing prosperity; it is about cutting pay. There is no suggestion among my constituents that it is the low-paid workers who cause unemployment. They know that it is Government policies and the recession that they have created and deepened.

In my city of Birmingham, a 33-year-old cafe assistant works 25 hours a week at the rate of £2 an hour. Her legal entitlement is £73 but she received £50. That is an illegal underpayment. I wonder why the Government do not put the emphasis that they put on the Bill into tackling that sort of problem, because the Bill will make such underpayment legal. In Committee, Conservative Members said that they did not condone illegal underpayment, but the Bill will legalise underpayment.

What will be the position of that cafe worker in the brave new world of voluntary bargaining? If she goes to her employer after wages councils have been abolished and exercises the free will, which Conservative Members impress on us that she has, to bargain with her employer for an increase in pay, her employer can sack her on the spot. When he does so, she will have no legal redress. A few years ago she would have had some legal redress, but, under present Government rules, because she has worked for only 10 months she has none.

Why have the Government, who want to abolish wages councils, a ratio of wages inspectors to workers covered by wages councils of 1:40,950? Compare that with the Government's cause celebre, alleged social security fraud. Even on a—I apologise for using the word—conservative estimate of the number of staff in social security offices who are engaged in tracking down alleged social security fraud, the ratio is 1:14,000.

We have had a lot of flannel from the Government Benches, but I wonder who will be seen to have won the argument when the report of tonight's debate and our proceedings in Committee are read. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have said that the Government are wrong to scrap wages councils. The Government have not even managed to summon one Conservative Member to defend them today. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms. Eagle) said, in Committee we heard one and a half sentences from the Minister in answer to six hours of debate.

I have no doubt about the will of the House tonight and who has won the argument, but I suspect that, irrespective of the argument, when it comes to the vote Conservative Members who have not been prepared to back up the Government's argument will troop through the Lobby in their support.

I urge hon. Members to support the new clause and to reject what has been put forward by the Government. We are in the era of citizens charters, but there seems to be no citizens charter for the low paid—quite the opposite. What we have here is a charter for poverty pay put forward by "Citizen Michael" and "Citizen Gillian" which we should reject.

Mr. Hutton: This has been a significant debate for two principal reasons. First, if I am right and we lose the vote tonight, we will be marking the end of a consensus that has united both sides of the House for more than 80 years. That consensus is a matter in which the House can take pride. For that length of time, during two world wars and Governments of intense ideological commitment, both sides of the House have remained committed to the idea that it is appropriate and right for the House to set minimum rates of pay for the lowest-paid workers; those workers who do not have the benefit of collective organisation through the trade unions and who look to us in the House to guarantee them some basic decency and minimum rights in terms of their workplace.

In Committee we heard arguments from the Government about the rationale behind their proposals, but their case was pathetically shallow and superficial. They presented no economic case for the abolition of the wages council and, as many of my hon. Friends have pointed out tonight, there is no economic case for abolishing the wages councils. If we were to abolish them, the same or a declining number of people would simply work for less wages. There would be no stimulus or boost to the employment prospects of tens of thousands of people in our country who are currently out of work. The abolition of the wages councils would simply depress wages for the most vulnerable and exposed section of the work force. That is a contemptible and sad thing for even this Government to be attempting at this moment. When the recession shows no sign of ending and unemployment shows every sign of increasing, the Government's response is to abolish the wages councils, and that is contemptible.

The consensus to which I have drawn attention is worth spelling out and looking at. It represents a philosophical approach, the guaranteeing of statutory employment rights, which is commendable. As part of my preparation for tonight's debate I made an effort to look at speeches made by the then Secretary of State, now the noble Lord Prior, when he spoke for the Government during the debate on the Loyal Address in May 1979. He made an observation which still commands much respect in the House. He said:

> "The law should always give full recognition to the inherent weakness of the individual worker vis-a-vis his employer".—[*Official Report*, 21 May 1979; Vol. 967, c. 824.]

That is a perfectly credible and coherent philosophical approach for hon. Members to embrace again tonight. Ultimately, we are discussing not just the issue of low wages, which is significant and should command attention, but a broader vision of the role of the House in establishing minimum employment rights. It is significant that, for example, when we consider other transactions, other contracts, there is no reluctance on the part of the Government or the Opposition to intervene in the marketplace and establish minimum terms and conditions on which parties can contract.

I think, in particular, of the law relating to consumer protection which has dominated much Government thinking for the past 20 years. Consumerism has become an important issue and Governments of both parties legislated extensively throughout the 1970s to intervene directly to protect consumers. That is perfectly credible because it recognises the fact that, in a normal marketplace transaction, the consumer is often in a weak position. He is unable to negotiate on a one-to-one basis with the supplier of goods and services, and Parliament, through a number of different devices, has intervened to protect consumers.

When it comes to employment protection rights and to protecting the rights of workers, I am afraid that we see a completely different approach from the Conservative Benches. They embrace the notion of the market and express the idea that workers, uniquely, are in a position to negotiate on a one-to-one, head-to-head basis with employers from a position of equal bargaining strength. Opposition Members know that that is simply not the case; it is not a description of the real world. That was recognised in 1909 when the House first established the wages councils. Until this Bill was presented to the House, that was the position embraced by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

The other significant thing about tonight's debate is that those Conservative Members who have spoken—we have heard two excellent speeches from Conservative Members tonight, both ex-Ministers in the Department of Employment—have spoken out against the Government's proposals. The Government have not been able to find one hon. Member to make the case in favour of the abolition of the wages councils. The Minister shakes his head, but I have been in the Chamber throughout the debate and I have not heard one speech from a Conservative Member in support of the Government on this matter. *[Interruption.]* The Government have not found one Conservative Member to speak in favour of their case.

We have heard much waffle from Ministers during the past few weeks about the inherent logic of their decision to abolish the wages councils. For example, the Minister says that they are no longer necessary in the labour market of the 1990s. He has produced not a shred of evidence to support the case that the wages councils are not necessary. The Conservative election manifesto, upon which he and his right hon. and hon. Friends were elected, significantly make no reference to the Government's ambition to abolish the wages councils.

As we are debating a number of issues relating to the clause and the ethos of employment protection, it is worth pointing out that the oblique reference to the Government's philosophical commitment is to be found on page 20 of the manifesto which says:

> "The workers' rights we believe in are those which enhance the individual's status and opportunities."

The abolition of wages councils will do none of those things. It will not enhance the rights of workers or their status, and it will expose them to what I can only describe as the real prospect of significant exploitation by a group of cowboy employers who are rubbing their hands at the prospect of being liberated from the constraints of the wages councils. That, for many millions of British people, will be a grim and horrifying prospect.

It is also worth pointing out that the Government are unique in their isolation among civilised nations in their ambition to remove from British employment law any minimum employment protection in terms of low wages. It is significant that the International Labour Organisation convention No. 26 has 100 nation state signatories, but only this country signed the convention and then deratified it. That shows that the Conservative Government are effectively isolated in the broad sweep of international opinion. No other country is going down this road.

8.30 pm

My hon. Friends and some Conservative hon. Members have drawn attention, rightly, to the remorseless drive to deregulate the labour market and have said that it will not produce the high-wage, prosperous economy that Conservative hon. Members, particularly the Government, pretend to have brought into existence after 14 years in power. We are a long way from that econony, from having that kind of society. I am sure that it is the view of all my hon. Friends that there is no doubt that abolishing the wages councils will accelerate the move towards a low-wage, low-prospect, poor-training, no-prospect labour market with increased exploitation and the prospect of many people working for wages which are disgracefully low.

As I said in Committee, it is an appropriate exercise of our power to make rules and to intervene on behalf of those people who, if they are left to the sheer force of the labour market, will find themselves working for unacceptable wages which we as civilised law-makers should not countenance. That is not a healthy development for this Parliament.

I hope that I speak for all my hon. Friends when I say that it is perfectly legitimate, in pursuit of a broad public policy objective, for this House to continue to express its support for wages councils in the full knowledge that if we do that tonight we shall not be adding to the burdens of employers nor adding to unemployment but doing something positive and constructive. I suspect that that is why most Conservative Members will not support us in the lobbies tonight, because they have a pathological aversion to doing anything that might improve the employment rights of British working people.

It is important that we consider the abolition of wages councils against that background. They are an important part of the broad statutory employment framework that we have developed over many decades which has commanded until now a broad consensus of opinion on both sides.

We can describe the Government's intentions as, at best, wishful thinking in that they hope that the abolition of wages councils will increase employment and improve prospects in the labour market. It will not do that. That is wishful thinking; it is a false hope. There is no evidence for it. It is a sad reflection of the Government's economic agenda that they present that case to the House tonight.

At worst, it is an example of cynical exploitation, exposing workers who deserve and look to this House for protection to the prospect of exploitation by employers who show complete contempt for the laws on minimum wages and wages councils and who will clearly take the opportunity offered to them by this Bill to lower wages even further for people who are already in the poverty trap. That is disgraceful and a pathetic reflection of this Government's ambition and their agenda, of their lack of imagination, in that this is all that they can come up with. I hope that hon. Members on both sides will have the courage and conviction to do the right thing and will reject the Government's shameful proposal.

Mr. Mike Watson (Glasgow, Central): This has been one of the most stimulating debates in which I have

[Mr. Mike Watson]

participated during my years in the House. It has been particularly interesting to note the contributions from hon. Members not just in my party, which were excellent, but from the hon. Members for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) and for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) who not only made excellent speeches but have stayed to listen to most of the debate. I hope they will be in the Lobby with us.

As to the rest of Conservative hon. Members who are here or who should be here—there are empty Conservative Benches—they should find no reason to oppose the two amendments that we are discussing; nor should the Minister. We say in those amendments that if the wages councils are abolished, as the arithmetic of the House tells us they will in the course of time, and if it has the impact which we say it will, then the Minister should come here and tell us what he will do about it. Is that a frightening prospect? If he tells us that there will be no serious effect from this legislation, what is he afraid of and why is he opposing the new clauses? As so many speakers have pointed out this evening, the abolition of wages councils fits somehow into the Government's economic policy and clause 28 of the Bill has to be seen as part of the Government's intention to drive down wages, to bring about a low-skill, low-wage security and a no-hope work force that cannot stop cowering out of fear of being out of a job, desperate to take anything.

If ever there were an example of that, and the Minister seemed to dismiss it earlier, it was provided by that impressive and moving television programme last night, "Cutting Edge". The Minister demeaned it by making some rather trivial points about it. The programme gave a graphic description of the situation facing millions of low-paid workers. We saw a young woman desperately chasing round the country looking for work and we saw the way that she was treated. That seems inevitably to be the way in which such people will be treated, and even more so if abolition of the wages councils goes through. That surely will be the only result.

We have heard many arguments this evening but it is about the fact that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) argued, the key word is poverty. People are living in poverty, being paid poverty wages even if they can find work. This Government should be showing them the way out of poverty, and giving some hope but in fact they are doing the opposite and saying, "If you have not got a job we will give you a job at £1·50 an hour." I can give countless examples from my constituency of people, in the centre of a major city, working for less than £2 an hour. I am not just talking about security guards. People in a hopeless position will of course grab at any lifeline. Does that mean we should be driving them further into the mire? Should we be saying to them—and let us get the figures right—"We think that if you are being paid between £2·59 and £3·10 an hour it will dissuade employers from taking you on"? That is what the Government are saying. If there were any doubt about that, my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), opening the debate, surely sank it decisively by showing that 90,000 new jobs had been created in wages councils areas at a time when unemployment was rising out of control.

I understand that the Minister failed to answer a similar debate in Committee, although I was not on the Committee. If he failed to do so, then he must answer it tonight and come up with a convincing reason, if he can find one, for saying that wages councils prevented employment being created and that they prevent employers taking on people they would be itching to take on if only they did not have to pay them £2·59 an hour.

We have heard many arguments about abolition of the councils, but we have to consider the effect on women because it has been said that 80 per cent. of the 2,500,000 people who come within the remit of wages councils are women. It has to be stressed that most women still work in what are traditionally regarded as women's jobs, usually low-paid and often undervalued.

We had a ministerial answer today showing that male workers' earnings are at present about £221 a week while women, mainly those working as hairdressers, are being paid only £110 a week on average while in the hotel and catering industry, which is also covered by wages councils, they are earning £126 a week. How can anyone say that that dissuades employers from taking people on? If the Government have an economic strategy to raise the country out of its present dire situation with unemployment about to go over the 3 million mark, even on the Government's own figures, how will they arrest that decline by this kind of measure? There are 4,500,000 part-time workers and 83 per cent. of that part-time work force have limited career prospects and involve the sort of women we saw on television last night. Despite the role they play in manufacturing and service industries, the Government give no credence or value to that area of work. I hope that the Minister will answer the points made about the typical role of women in society and in the work force.

The Secretary of State does a great disservice to her gender by suggesting that women have no economic role and no contribution to make to production or to the economy of the country. Surely the time is long overdue for the value of women in the work force to be recognised and for the Minister and his right hon. and hon. Friends to give some thought to the effect that the abolition of wages councils would have not just on women but on their families, and increasingly on those women who are, despite what the Minister has said, the breadwinners in many cases.

Many hon. Members have mentioned the situation in their own areas and I would like to say a few words about the situation in Scotland. Underpayments within Scotland in the period 1987-91 increased by 128 per cent. That is a higher figure—I take no pride in this—than in Wales or any of the English regions. In this connection, I would like the House to consider an aspect that has not been raised in this debate: the enforcement of the decisions of the wages councils and the rates that they have set for the past 80 years.

In 1991, in Scotland, only 7·5 per cent. of employers were visited by wages council inspectors, and 28·6 per cent. —that is, about 750—were found to be underpaying. The wages council inspectors get round far too few employers because of the shortage of staff, but, of those 737 who were underpaying, only two were prosecuted for paying below the set rate. So nearly one third of the employers were found to be paying below the rate—breaking the law, it should be stated again. They should be thrown out of the party which claims to be the party of law and order. But only two were prosecuted, and the rest were let off scot free.

The Government consistently rail against what they call social security scroungers. They ought to turn their attention to the Scrooges who, apparently without any shame, return home every evening and sleep soundly, despite the fact that they are making their money out of paying people less than £2 an hour. What service do they perform for society? What assistance do they give to the development of the economy?

The Government would have us believe that they are doing everybody a favour. There are no restrictions on the levels of wage that they are allowed to pay or on how they can treat people. They can hire and fire at will, and they regularly do, within the excessively long two-year period through which people have to qualify for what are normal, generally acceptable rights at work in other countries. Rather than doing the country a favour, they are doing only themselves a favour. The Government are aware of that, but those are their friends; they are the people in the companies that make contributions to the Conservative party. If there is any logic in this clause in the Bill, it is that the Government are repaying the debts which they contracted during the general election campaign. That may be some form of twisted logic, but it is not a justification.

The situation is that evasion in terms of enforcement of the legislation triumphs over provision, sneer triumphs over fear—again a reference to the television programme last night—and greed triumphs over need. We in the Opposition at least are prepared to say that those in need are those to whom we will give first consideration, and that we will attempt to develop policies which will assist them in raising their standard of living and getting a decent job and a decent wage which will allow them and their families to live with some dignity.

To some extent, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) touched on an interesting statistic—the number of wages inspectors which is currently 61. We have to contrast that figure with the number of inspectors dealing with benefit fraud. About 2·5 million people are covered by wages councils, with 61 wages inspectors to enforce the law on their behalf. There are some 3 million unemployed, at least, yet 780 inspectors are involved in enforcing the law on benefits. That is hardly a balanced approach.

We would not necessarily expect a balanced approach, but the prejudice which the Government show against the poor in society, the powerless and the helpless never ceases to amaze me, yet never seems to cause any kind of shame or embarrassment to Conservative Members. It is a situation which I and my hon. Friends will continue to expose at every opportunity. The Government cannot be serious about their attempts to regenerate the economy, for green shoots to begin to grow, if the only way that they act is to force people to earn less.

I refer, as the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) did earlier in the debate, to the comments by the Secretary of State for Scotland yesterday, speaking at Edinburgh university, about people pricing themselves into jobs. The Minister of State, who nodded vigorously when that point was made, should tell us what is meant by people pricing themselves into jobs. Why is it that the people at the bottom have to reduce their salaries to make themselves employable, yet directors of the public utilities now privatised, or in industry, can only price themselves into jobs by going as high as possible, by going into figures like telephone numbers for salaries? Perhaps the Minister, in winding up, will tell us why there should be such a difference between the top and the bottom of the scale, and why, when push comes to shove, his efforts and his friends' efforts will always be against those at the bottom and in favour of those at the top. There is no logic to that, but I look forward to hearing the Minister's explanation.

I know that many hon. Members wish to speak in the debate, and it has already run for some considerable time, so I will bring my remarks to a close. I am not in any sense exaggerating when I say that the "Cutting Edge" programme last night had a profound effect upon me. It was not just the woman herself, who was, of course, a journalist and to some extent was cushioned from the long-term effects of her experiences over the three months. I was concerned about the people that she was meeting on a daily basis. She was asking them about their wages and why they had never done anything about them, and it was quite clear that they were afraid to raise the matter. We did not learn whether the sectors in question were unionised; I suspect that almost definitely they were not. But the point is that those people are afraid to raise so much as a question with their employers about the rates of pay, the hours they work or the conditions that they have to face, because they are terrified that they will lose their jobs.

That is the situation, because of the desperate state of our economy, and it is a situation that the Government seem to be prepared to accept and make the basis of our economic recovery. It is a scandalous and indefensible position.

The woman in the programme slogged away at a number of pitifully paid jobs and, as if that were not bad enough, had to demean herself by going some 40 or 50 miles to her employer's house to beg for £75 that she had already earned and was entitled to. Then she had to make all kinds of desperate pleas before she got the money. What stuck in my mind at the end of the programme were two words which she used to describe her position and which she felt adequately described the position of the people with whom she had been working for the three months of the programme. She said that she felt powerless and invisible. That is with wages councils in existence, and she still felt powerless, invisible and unable to do anything about it. How much worse will the situation become when those wages councils are abolished?

The Government may well be prepared to abandon these people, to be pleased that they are powerless and to regard them as invisible. Opposition Members are not; we will not abandon them; we will continue to defend them. If the wages councils are abolished, it will be scandalous. None the less, those people can find some solace from the fact that there are those of us who are prepared to stand up for them, argue for them and ensure that they get a decent standard of living and a job that enables them to live with dignity. That is something which the Government and the Ministers will have to live with if they proceed with this obnoxious suggestion of abolishing wages councils.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: I shall be as brief as I can, having been allowed to speak on the earlier clause.

We sat for a couple of months in the Committee discussing the issues and, at the end, were congratulated by the Chairman on having dealt with some politically controversial issues in a correct parliamentary way. The only time when that broke down was during the discussion on the abolition of wages councils, when there was a great deal of anger on our side of the Committee. I cannot quite

[Mr. Robert Ainsworth]

get the anger out of my system now at the proposal under discussion and I know that that feeling is shared by many of my hon. Friends.

The proposal is born of a number of things. It is born out of right-wing ideology and, as has been said by one or two Conservative Members, originated from the think tanks. It is born out of the naked protection and enhancement of vested interests. The only company to have been quoted by the Minister in Committee as having made representations in favour of the abolition of wages councils is Forte. When we pushed the Secretary of State for Employment for a response as to who had made representations to her in favour of the abolition of wages councils, she mentioned hoteliers. The measure is the product of the representations of vested interests.

As was said earlier, the measure is also the product of the instability in the Government. Against the backwoodsmen in their own ranks, they are attempting to push through some pragmatic policies on Europe and they are having to dress themselves up as right-wing ideologues to attempt to keep their coalition together and maintain some semblance of unity. They are doing that at the expense of the weakest people in society.

There is no justification for the abolition of wages councils; we heard none whatsoever in Committee and we have yet to hear any tonight. We all wait with bated breath for the Minister to stand up and give us the first justification for the abolition of wages councils. What we have heard from him is Orwellian double-talk about the abolition of wages councils. He asked why, although the Labour Government abolished certain wages councils, Labour Members are now opposed to the abolition of wages councils. The position is now totally changed. If a wages council had become completely and absolutely obsolete, as many of them did because they no longer provided a safety net as the bargaining arrangements within a particular industry had taken the rates of pay way above any national minimum, at a time when standards of living had risen across the board and there was sustained full employment, there was obviously no need for certain wages councils to continue. They became an anachronism and a complete waste of time. We are now talking about the abolition of the remaining wages councils when the need for them has never been greater in modern times.

Statistics on current living standards which have been released by a number of organisations prove that the gap between the richest and the poorest in Britain is wider than it has been since 1886. I suggest that the conditions prevailing in 1886 led right hon. and hon. Members at the time to the conclusion that there was a need for some safety-net legislation on wages. That was the reason for the introduction of wages councils in the first place. We are now moving back towards a position in which that legislation is necessary. The reason for its existence is the reason behind the proposals for its abolition.

The only weakness in wages councils is the refusal effectively to enforce existing legislation and to extend it to areas where it is clearly inadequate. Some new industries are not covered by wages councils when they should be —the example that always jumps out at me is the security industry, where there are the most appalling rates of pay —yet the Government have refused to extend wages councils legislation into those industries. Now we are faced with the total abolition of the system.

In Committee we heard arguments from Conservative Members—although we have not heard any such arguments from them tonight—for the total application of the market. This is not a debate on the economy and we have to decide for ourselves whether the Government in this day and age and in a so-called democracy have any role to play in saying that a certain standard of living should apply to the citizens of our country—not an extravagant standard by any means, but some minimum standard that we believe it is our responsibility to protect. If we do not believe in that and if we do not believe that the Government have any responsibility in those matters, we should vote for the abolition of wages councils, but if we do, we should oppose it.

We are talking about a blatant abuse of privilege and power at the expense of the weakest in our society. That is what the Government are attempting to push through the House tonight without any adequate defence of their proposals.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: We have been discussing amendments about producing reports to Parliament, but we have heard a number of speeches about the principle of the abolition of wages councils and I shall try briefly to deal with some of the arguments that have been made tonight.

The most extraordinary statement that has been made repeatedly by a number of hon. Members was the criticism of my right hon. and hon. Friends for not having made speeches in favour of Opposition amendments. It is true that two of my hon. Friends did so, but it is for Opposition Members to make their own case for the new clause and amendments that they have tabled.

A number of hon. Members have drawn attention to the attendance on the Conservative Benches. I will not embarrass Opposition Members by pointing out the attendance on their side of the House. Those arguments do not advance their case.

Mr. Salmond: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Forsyth: No, I shall deal with some of the arguments first.

There has also been a disgraceful suggestion, which came first from the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), that the proposals to abolish wages councils had something to do with vested interests in the Conservative party.

The hon. Gentleman might like to reflect on the position that the Labour party has taken on the matter. The Labour Government abolished 11 wages councils. They did so because the trade unions asked them to do so and it is the trade unions that run and fund the Labour party. If the hon. Gentleman wants to talk about vested interests, he might reflect on the fact that the Labour party's position on wages councils has been stood on its head as the trade unions have changed their position from opposing wages councils to being in favour of them.

What has brought about that transformation? I venture to suggest that the Labour Government abolished wages councils at the behest of the trade unions because the trade unions believed that they could organise collective bargaining on a scale which would mean that they would be able to recruit members. As their membership has declined, they have decided that wages councils are quite good because the members of the unions can sit on the boards of wages councils and determine wages and conditions, although they are no longer able to attract the membership which gives them the authority to do the same. Let us not hear anything about vested interests in wages councils.

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Forsyth: I should like to make a little progress. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman has been in the House throughout the debate.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras asked, with an air of puzzlement, why British hotels were more expensive. He did not believe that wages had anything to do with the efficiency of the companies. Ninety per cent. of the representations that we received on wages councils from the business community supported their abolition.

Employers and people affected by wages councils say that the councils are destroying jobs—not, as the hon. Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson) and others have suggested, because they are setting especially high rates of pay, but because they have set, in the hotel industry, for example, which seems to interest the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, increases that are well above the rate of inflation. In one year the increase was 9 per cent., which must be given not simply to those who are affected by the wages council orders but to other employees to maintain differentials. If we are in a period of economic difficulty—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry that hon. Members find it funny. At least the Government's policies are directed at removing the barriers to employment and creating opportunities for recovery. Only Opposition Members would advocate increasing wages by more than employers can afford in a recession.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Forsyth: I shall give way in a moment. The notion that a committee sitting in London can set wage levels that are above people's ability to pay, and that that will not result in jobs being lost, would be absurd and could be held only by people who have never had any experience of employing people. That is certainly true of most Opposition Members who have spoken in the debate.

Mrs. Browning: Does my hon. Friend agree that many hoteliers, especially in the west country—I represent Tiverton in Devon—are not national or multinational companies? Often, they are proprietors of small, family-run hotels who do not have the enormous salaries which Opposition Members claim directors and owners have. We hope that those people will create job opportunities and we rely on them to do so. I have received representations from those people, not the Fortes of this world.

Mr. Forsyth: I agree with my hon. Friend. She makes another important point: by setting national rates, wages councils do not take account of local conditions. They may set rates which are appropriate in London but which are inappropriate for regional areas. My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) made that point, but he could not quite bring himself to support the general thrust of our policy.

Mr. Salmond: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Forsyth: No, I want to deal with the points which have been made.

Mr. Salmond: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Forsyth: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to intervene at a later stage, I shall happily give way to him. If he thinks that I am frit of any intervention that he could make, I assume that his intervention will be a lot more plausible than his speech, with which I shall deal in a moment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham said that, when he was a Minister at the Department, he accepted the idea that wages councils would cost jobs. I hope that I am not misquoting him in the way in which he misquoted me.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I apologise if I misquoted my hon. Friend. I quote him less often than he quotes me. Each time he has quoted me, he has left out any sense of proportion. I have accepted that the wages councils may have some employment effect. I put it to my hon. Friend —perhaps he can respond to this when he refers to economics—that if we accept the study which shows that a 1 per cent. change in real pay has a 1 per cent. effect on employment, why have not the Government, with their pay policy for public sector workers, rolled back their pay, as is likely to happen to people in the wages council industries?

If a 1 per cent. change to employment in wages council industries is likely to be at the cost of an 18 per cent. change in the rate of pay for statutory wages orders, why does not the Minister say so explicitly so that we can see that he believes that a mere £1 in £5 reduction in pay may lead to a 1 per cent. increase in employment?

Mr. Forsyth: My hon. Friend is barking up the wrong tree. The argument put forward by employers to the Department—it is one that has certainly persuaded me —is that, by setting increases for those workers who are within the scope of wages councils orders, which, to maintain differentials, are above the rate of inflation, the pay bill is increased by more than would otherwise be the case and jobs are lost.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham acknowledges that wages councils may cost jobs. He said that he was not prepared to accept the consequences of the abolition of wages councils. It is easy for people who have the comfort and security of employment to advocate policies that will result in jobs no longer being available to the people involved.

The hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon), who is not in her place, gave the House a great lecture on the evils of law-breaking. She complained about the failure of wages councils' inspectors to enforce the law. I said that the cases outlined in the programme were not referred by the journalist to the wages council inspectorate. I referred those cases to the inspectorate as soon as I saw the programme. I am sorry that the hon. Lady is not here. It ill-behoves someone who was a leading proponent of non-payment of the poll tax to lecture the House on the virtues of obeying the law.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): So the Minister supported the poll tax?

Mr. Forsyth: Of course, as a loyal member of the Government, I supported the poll tax.

[Mr. Forsyth]

The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) talked about poverty and said how worried he was about the abolition of the wages councils in the context of poverty. The greatest single source of poverty is unemployment. The hon. and learned Gentleman advocates a policy which would result in fewer people being in work. People in work whose income is insufficient for their needs will be given support through the benefits system in the form of family credit or other benefits. From the point of view of poverty, it is better for people to be in a low-paid job than in no job at all.

The hon. Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson) talked about the importance of wages councils in his constituency. Listening to the speeches of Opposition Members, one could be forgiven for thinking that wages councils covered the whole economy—everyone in every area. One would not imagine that we were talking about bodies which provide protection for 10 per cent. of the work force. If that protection is so essential, how do the other 90 per cent. of the work force get by without them?

Mr. Graham: The Minister suggests that the 10 per cent. of the work force covered by wages councils is unimportant. Eastwood district council is a well-known Tory council. The Member of Parliament for that constituency is a Minister. Yet it sees the importance of maintaining the wages councils. If some Tories do not see the reason for that, why do the rest?

Mr. Forsyth: Eastwood is a splendid council. It is right on most things. If what the hon. Gentleman says is correct, it goes to show that the exception proves the rule.

My hon. Friend the Member for Broxstowe (Mr. Lester) spoke about the importance of the wages councils and said that he could not agree with the change that we were introducing. He said that he was against a minimum wage, but in favour of wages councils because they set minimum wages in different sectors of the economy. He argued that a minimum wage would not be appropriate across the economy. I agree with that.

Perhaps my hon. Friend might reflect on the argument which my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning) put to the House. Just as one cannot set a fixed floor for wages across the economy because of the differing nature of industries, one cannot set wages across the country because it varies from one part to another in particular industries. That is the difficulty with wages councils. It is exactly the problem that he identified.

The hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham) talked about the problems of poverty in his constituency. I sympathise entirely with the difficulties that he described, but wages councils add to those difficulties. They do not make them better.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Who says?

Mr. Forsyth: If the hon. Gentleman wished to listen to the arguments, he could have attended the debate. He was not here. He sails in and finds it possible to comment on a debate that he did not hear.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) told us that 100 years ago Scotland set the highest wages in the world and had a high-productivity, high-efficiency economy. That was before wages councils existed. The hon. Gentleman should learn the lesson to which he drew the attention of the House: that if one wants to have a high-wage economy, one must have a competitive economy. That is what we had in 19th century Scotland, as he told the House.

Mr. Salmond: We do not argue for Victorian values; we prefer the Edwardian values of Winston Churchill. This is not an argument about the economy; wages councils are a matter of decency—a matter that the Minister has not addressed at all. Throughout the debate, the Minister has swept aside the argument that no other Conservative Member has been prepared to argue the Government's case. Can he, having been in the House of Commons for 10 years, recall another reasonably substantial debate in which all speeches, except those of Ministers, have been against the position of the Government? Can he recall one such debate?

Mr. Forsyth: When I was at the Scottish Office, it seemed that all the debates were like that.

The hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) made a very emotional speech, in which he said that tonight we were breaking a consensus of 80 years. He completely forgot that the consensus on wages councils was first broken by a Government of his party, when they abolished 11 councils covering 500,000 workers.

The hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth) said that this was all a plot by right-wing ideologues in the think tanks. Opposition Members should think very hard at a time when large employers in Britain say that wages councils are keeping and putting people out of work. The Government's first priority is to get Britain back to work. If that means removing barriers to employment such as wages councils, we shall do so.

I urge the House to reject the new clauses and amendments.

Mr. Dobson: The Minister has given a totally inadequate response to the points made during the debate. The Tory party has managed to put up one Member in support of the abolition of wages councils. It is totally unsatisfactory to suggest that 2·7 million of the worst-paid people in this country—2 million of them women—should be put in danger of having their wages cut to enable the Tory party to pay off its general election debts to a few rich bosses. If the Minister denies that that is what is happening, why will not he publish all the representations that have been made? Is not the reason that too many of those people are saying, "Thank you for abolishing wages councils. That is why we gave you the money before the general election"?

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 262, Noes 290.

Division No. 152] **[9.11 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland

Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Foster, Derek *(B'p Auckland)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tipping, Paddy
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Eric Illsley and
Mr. Andrew Mackinlay.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold

Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui

Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt. Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith

Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David

Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Andrew Mitchell.

Question accordingly negatived.

New clause 5

PATERNITY RIGHTS

'.—(1) An employee whose wife or partner has given birth shall be entitled to take ten working days leave (referred to in this section as paternity leave).

(2) Paternity leave can be taken at any time from the birth until the end of three months following the birth.

(3) An employee on paternity leave shall be entitled to full pay.

(4) The employee has the right to decide when to take paternity leave except that the employer must be given:

(a) 21 days' notice of the expected week of confinement of the employee's spouse, and

(b) reasonable notice of the time when paternity leave is taken where that is practicable.

(5) For the purposes of this section a partner includes a man and woman who are not married to each other but are living together as man and wife.'.—*[Ms. Quin.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Ms. Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): With this, I understand that it will be convenient to take the following:

New clause 11—*Parental leave*—

'( ).—(1) Following the period of maternity leave laid down in section 19 above, each parent shall be entitled to a period of parental leave of either three months full time or six months part-time, such leave not to be taken by both parents concurrently.

(2) The parental leave referred to in subsection (1) above must be completed before the second birthday of the child, save where a registered general medical practitioner certifies that the health of the child requires an extended permit.

(3) The parental leave referred to in subsections (1) and (2) above shall also be available to adoptive parents.'.

New clause 10—*Maternity employment rights report*—

'(1) The Secretary of State shall publish a report to Parliament annually, to be called "The maternity employment rights report" on the effects of the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993.

(2) The Report shall assess the effects of the Act on:
(a) the employment opportunities for pregnant working women
(b) access to time off for ante-natal care (including relaxation classes and parentcraft classes)
(c) the operation of remuneration during 14 weeks maternity leave
(d) the number of women returning to work after the 14 weeks maternity leave
(e) the adequacy of 14 weeks maternity leave for the health of the mother and the baby.
(f) the operation and complexity of the scheme
(g) the number of women successfully claiming unfair dismissal because of pregnancy under this Act
(h) the number of women medically suspended for health and safety reasons each year

(3) Before publishing the Report, the Secretary of State shall consult such organisations as appear to him to be concerned.'.

Government amendments Nos. 1 to 3.

Amendment No. 63, in clause 19, page 37, line 26, leave out 'fourteen' and insert 'eighteen'.

Government amendments Nos. 37, 38 and 4.

Amendment No. 71, in page 38, line 19, at end insert—

'(1A) An employer may apply to an industrial tribunal to set aside this provision on the ground that greater unfairness would be caused to another employee.'.

Government amendments Nos. 5, 6, 43, 44, 39 to 41, 7, 8 and 42.

Ms. Quin: New clause 5 heads a group of new clauses and amendments that deal with maternity rights for women at work, sharing family responsibilities by recognising fathers' rights to paternity and parental leave, and the need for society to support adoptive parents and to take account of their contribution to children's welfare and to that of the community.

In Committee, the Opposition sought via amendments and new clauses to create a comprehensive system of maternity rights. We also aimed to create a system that would be easy to understand and to implement—in stark contrast to the existing confusing and complex system, which in some ways will be made more complex by the introduction of the clauses relating to maternity rights in the Bill.

Opposition Members believe that we should seek to create an effective system of rights that would at least equal, if not surpass, best practice in Europe—something that the Opposition are determined eventually to implement for working women in our country.

New clause 5 deals with paternity leave and stipulates that:

"An employee whose wife or partner has given birth shall be entitled to take ten working days leave . . . Paternity leave can be taken at any time from the birth until the end of three months following the birth . . . An employee on paternity leave shall be entitled to full pay."

The new clause also deals with the notification requirements that we envisage would be a feasible means of introducing a system of paternity leave.

One of the reasons why we have tabled the new clause is that we deplore the present situation in which fathers have no legal right to paid leave at the time of the birth of their children. That is not good news for fathers, mothers or babies. Paternity leave requirements of the kind envisaged would allow the sharing of child care responsibilities and would help to establish strong paternal bonds at the birth of the child.

An Equal Opportunities Commission study found that 91 per cent. of fathers favoured the introduction of statutory paternity leave. By introducing such leave, the Government would be taking a step towards implementing article 6 of the European Council's recommendations on child care, which I understand that they supported when it was dealt with in the European Council of Ministers.

The cost of introducing paternity leave would be modest. In a workplace of 500 employees, consisting of 60 per cent. men and 40 per cent. women, it has been calculated that 12 or 13 employees are likely to use it in a year. We believe that the cost would be negligible, and the good will created by employers introducing paternity leave would be great.

A number of paternity leave arrangements already exist in many firms throughout the country. The Minister may respond to the new clause by referring to the good practice that already exists on a voluntary basis, where employers have decided to introduce such arrangements. Although I am glad that some employers are enlightened, the argument that was effectively advanced by my hon. Friends in the previous debate about the abolition of wages councils—that the good employer will be undercut by the bad—is just as valid for paternity and parental leave.

9.30 pm

New clause 11 deals with the subject of parental leave. The ideas contained in the new clause are taken from the proposed European Community directive on parental leave which was blocked by the Government in the European Council of Ministers six years ago. We do not pretend that the wording of new clause 11 is perfect. We wanted to embody the principle of parental leave in the new clause. If the Government were prepared to accept the new clause, we would be delighted to negotiate with them and come to a common agreement about the details of the parental leave system.

It is highly regrettable that the Government have always chosen to block the initiative in the European Council of Ministers. That may explain why some of our partners are so keen on the social chapter, which at least allows the other 11 countries to make progress on many of the matters that have been blocked by our Government's negative stance on so much social legislation in the European Community.

Parental leave is common in other European countries. When the matter was last debated in Parliament—I think it was in 1985—10 out of 12 European Community countries already had some form of parental leave entitlement. It is interesting to recall that in the other place their Lordships also favoured the introduction of a statutory period of parental leave. I think that they were in favour of paid parental leave for one month. They certainly did not rule the European proposals out of court in the way that the Government unfortunately did, and continue to do.

Some of the comments that I made about paternity leave on new clause 5 also apply to new clause 11, which specifically refers to the rights of adoptive parents to have some form of parental leave. The European Community draft directive stipulated that adoptive parents would be able to have such leave at any time within the child's first five years of life, taking into account some of the special circumstances that can surround adoption and the fact that parents do not always adopt newly born babies.

The European Community directive also referred to longer leave for single parents, parents of a handicapped child or where difficulties existed. The Equal Opportunities Commission produced lengthy reports and recommendations supporting the parental leave directive. They are a few years old, but I believe that they are still valid. It also did a cost analysis of the possible effects of introducing parental leave. It said that it would increase the total wages and salaries bills by less than 0·01 per cent. The costs were contested in the House at the time. However, we believe that the Equal Opportunities Commission undertook a serious study on the subject which deserves the Government's attention.

Unfortunately, there has been no progress on the matter since 1986. That is very sad and shows the hypocritical attitude of the Government, who have introduced such initiatives as Opportunity 2000, and who supposedly have a commitment to equal opportunities policy. The sharing of family responsibilities is a crucial way of ensuring that women can play a full part in the workplace. Such measures are vital if having a baby is not to penalise a working woman, and cause her and her family to miss out financially.

I have mentioned leave for adoptive parents. We had an interesting debate on that in Committee: it was one of the occasions when Opposition Members were supported by certain Conservative Members—although, unfortunately, they were not supported by the Minister. The new clause on adoptive parents was tabled by the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham), and was strongly supported by the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) and one or two other Conservative Members.

Sadly, the Minister turned a deaf ear to our views. I should be delighted if he announced tonight that he had been converted, for this is yet another area in which we are out of step with many other European countries. Most of them make some provision for leave for adoptive parents. Although some companies in Britain adopt good practice in that respect, the Government's offer in Committee to publicise examples of best practice among employers generally goes nowhere near meeting our concerns. We remain strongly attached to the idea of a statutory right for adoptive parents, and I hope that some Conservative Members will support us.

New clause 10 proposes a maternity employment rights report. We are anxious that the Bill—which, unfortunately, seems likely to come into effect in the form that the Government wish—should at least be evaluated in terms of its effects on women at work, especially in regard to maternity rights. In new clause 10, we ask the Secretary of State to publish an annual report to Parliament on maternity employment rights, and specifically request that the report assess the effects of the Bill—when it is enacted—on different aspects of maternity rights.

For example, we want the report to consider the effects on employment opportunities for pregnant working women, and on access to time off for ante-natal care, including relaxation classes and parentcraft classes. We feel that the Minister's response in Committee was unsatisfactory. He said then that existing United Kingdom legislation was adequate, but he missed the point that many people are unable to exercise their right to ante-natal care, because their employers will not allow them time off. At present there is no satisfactory remedy in law.

In the new clause, we also ask for information about the operation of remuneration during 14 weeks of maternity leave. We have been concerned all along at the Government's failure to deal with the question of maternity pay. We also regret the fact that, throughout the negotiations on the European directive, our Government were alone in wanting maternity pay to be linked with sick pay rather than salaries. We consider that a disgraceful attitude, which represents a lost opportunity for the women of Britain and, indeed, others in the European Community.

We also want information about the number of women who return to work after their 14 weeks of maternity leave—and, moreover, about the adequacy of 14 weeks' leave for the health of mother and baby. On Second Reading and throughout the Committee stage, we argued strongly that 14 weeks was far too short a period. We continue to believe that. One of our amendments would replace 14 weeks with 18 weeks. Although we shall not ask the House to divide on the 18 weeks amendment, we shall divide the House on new clause 10 in order to make clear that we are in favour of 18 weeks rather than 14 weeks.

If the Minister were suddenly to say in reply that he accepts our argument and those of all the other organisations that have lobbied hard for the period of 18 weeks rather than 14 weeks, I should be only too happy not to divide the House on new clause 10. I have the feeling, however, that the Minister is unlikely to give us what we want. Nevertheless, the Government are very much in the minority on this issue. Most people feel that 18 weeks is the minimum period needed if the health of the mother and the baby are to be protected properly. Many women who have worked the statutory period for their current employer have the right to return up to 29 weeks after the birth of their baby. Therefore, it is absurd for the Government to believe that a maternity leave period of only 14 weeks is right for other women. We feel very strongly that that is unsatisfactory. I am sure that my hon. Friends will reinforce that point during the debate.

In asking for a report, we also want information about the operation and complexity of the scheme. We feel that the existing scheme is muddled because of the different periods of maternity leave and also because of the different requirements about the giving of notice. It will not be easy for employers to understand exactly what they will have to comply with. If it will not be easy for employers, it will be even more difficult for pregnant employees—who probably have got other things on their mind than checking notification periods and their entitlement to maternity leave—to understand these complexities. I hope that the Government will take due note of that point.

We should also like information about the number of women who have successfully claimed that they were unfairly dismissed because of pregnancy. There was considerable discussion in Committee about the rules governing pregnant women at work and unfair dismissal. Some progress was made. We were glad, for example, that the Government accepted that the unfair dismissal period should be extended after maternity leave for a further period, particularly if the mother is suffering from health problems as a result of having given birth. Nevertheless, we still believe that the position over unfair dismissal is unsatisfactory.

I was not entirely reassured by the letter that the Minister sent to me on this matter on 28 January. It dealt with the amendment that we tabled in Committee whose purpose was to ensure that the burden of proof would be on the employer rather than the employee in dismissal cases. The position is still very unsatisfactory for those women who do not meet the qualifying period of two years full time and five years part time. The employer could simply say that dismissal was for reasons other than pregnancy. The employee would have no protection against unfair dismissal for those other reasons because she would not have worked for the qualifying period.

Although the Minister has taken a decision about the issue, I hope that he will be open to further representations as the Bill goes through the other place. I know that many organisations are concerned about the matter, including the Maternity Alliance and the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux. They are keen to take up this matter again with the Minister. They feel that the assurances that we were given in Committee do not go far enough to meet the real needs of some women who have found themselves in a difficult position at work, we suspect because of their pregnancy, because employers have been able to say, "Oh, well, it's for other reasons"—for lateness or anything else that they could think of in order conveniently to dispense with the services of those women rather than have to guarantee their employment after they return from maternity leave.

I deal now with the Government amendments to this part of the Bill. Some were clearly tabled in response to concerns that we expressed in Committee and in response to representations that have been made to them. We are pleased about some of the amendments but feel that others could go further.

9.45 pm

We are pleased that the Government have altered the rules about the triggering of the maternity leave period. In that respect, the original draft of the Bill seemed very strange and would have meant that women were forced to leave work when neither they nor their employer wanted them to. It seemed absurd, so we are glad that the Government have taken the opportunity to harmonise part of the existing maternity pay scheme with the new maternity leave scheme by allowing a woman to receive sick pay if she is ill between 11 and six weeks before the baby is due. However, it would have been far more sensible for the Government to have harmonised the two schemes further by extending maternity leave to 18 weeks. This is another reason why we believe that it is important to have an 18-week leave period.

I refer the Government to a National Audit Office report on statutory sick and maternity pay which was published in January after the Committee had covered this part of the Bill. The report makes it clear that the stated objective of the statutory maternity pay scheme is

> "to encourage women not to endanger their or their babies' health by working too late into their pregnancies, or returning to work too soon after their babies are born".

Again, we believe that 14 weeks' leave is insufficient. Even if a woman starts her maternity leave six weeks before the birth, she will have only seven or eight weeks' maternity leave after the week of the baby's birth, which could well be too short in some circumstances.

The Government have introduced changes to the notice requirement for the 14 weeks' maternity leave, but we still believe that the changes, contained in amendments Nos. 1, 3, 4, and 8, are too complex because different notification requirements will apply to women taking 14 weeks' leave and those taking up to 40 weeks' leave. The Government have again missed an opportunity to simplify the scheme for the benefit of all involved.

Women will have to rely on employers to provide information on maternity leave. The same report from the National Audit Office revealed that half of the employers contacted did not provide adequate information on the SMP scheme. Clearly the Government have a great deal of work to do to ensure that the provisions will be implemented correctly but, up to now, there seems little evidence that the Government are prepared to do it.

I mentioned the Government's changes to the protection for women against unfair dismissal if women cannot return after maternity leave because they are unwell. Although we welcome the provision, we agree with organisations such as the Maternity Alliance, which feel that it is very limited because the protection will last for only four weeks. Perhaps the Minister will explain why he decided to offer protection for four weeks and no more.

We should also like the Minister to explain what would happen to a woman who, through no fault of her own, was unable to provide a medical certificate before the end of her maternity leave. For example, what would happen if her leave ended at the weekend and she fell ill during the weekend and therefore technically missed the date for notifying her employer that she was applying for extended leave on medical grounds?

The Government also tabled a wholly unsatisfactory amendment in response to concerns that we expressed in Committee. We were concerned that it was technically possible, due to the strange drafting of the Bill, for a woman to be forced back to work before her child was born.

The Government have sought to deal with that by providing that an employee's maternity leave will continue for 14 weeks or until the birth of the child if later. On superficial reading at least, that suggests that the minute a woman had given birth she would have to go back to work. Would she be expected to go back to work straight from the hospital? There is the additional four-week protection against unfair dismissal, but it is not right that a woman should have to rely on what is effectively sick leave to obtain adequate maternity leave in those circumstances.

I refer the Government to the EC pregnancy directive. It does not specifically require a period of leave after the birth because the relevant article refers to before and/or after the birth, but the whole purpose of the directive is to safeguard the safety and health of workers who have recently given birth.

It could be argued that the Government are failing properly to abide by the terms of the EC equal treatment directive which talks about the period during which problems due to pregnancy and confinement may arise, and which obviously therefore refers to the period before and after the birth.

Certainly the National Audit Office report, to which I have referred, states that the purpose of the statutory maternity pay scheme is to encourage women not to return to work too soon after their babies are born. The Government's amendment does not seem to comply with that commitment. If the Government are not prepared to change it tonight, they should at least undertake to consider the matter further so that it can be dealt with satisfactorily at a subsequent stage in the Bill's proceedings.

Amendment No. 63 reiterates our strong feeling that the maternity leave period should be 18 weeks rather than 14 weeks. I pay tribute to the Maternity Alliance campaign on the matter and, in particular, its publication "One last push for 18 weeks" in which it gives some strong reasons why the leave period should be 18 rather than 14 weeks.

The Maternity Alliance says that the primary purpose of maternity leave is to protect the well-being of mother and baby and it questions whether 14 weeks is long enough to do that. It says, rightly, that it is Government policy to encourage breast feeding for the first four to six months of a baby's life and a 14-week maternity leave period is not consistent with that.

The Maternity Alliance says that finding child care for young babies is particularly difficult, making it unlikely that many women with a baby a few weeks old would be able to return to work. It also says that many women stop work about 11 weeks before the birth of the baby because of tiredness or illness and such women would have to resume work when their babies are only about three weeks old.

Therefore, 18 weeks makes great sense. It also makes sense because, as I have said before, many women in Britain are entitled to a longer maternity leave and, on average, British women take 20 weeks' maternity leave. Therefore, it would be much more sensible to harmonise upwards rather than downwards. As employers already administer for 18 weeks statutory maternity pay, it makes sense for 18 weeks to be the general leave period.

We believe, with the Maternity Alliance, that the cost to employers and the Government of extending maternity leave by four weeks to 18 weeks would be minimal and it would be offset by savings. More women would return to work saving employers recruitment and training costs and saving the Government tax income and benefit cost.

In conclusion, women's working lives are greatly affected by having children and we do not want the fact of giving birth to mean that women lose out. We do not want them to lose an interesting and worthwhile job. We do not want them to lose the chance of promotion, and we do not want them to handicap themselves, sometimes severely from a financial point of view, simply because they have chosen to have children.

Working mothers need a better deal than is being given to them in the Bill. If they are given a better deal, not only they but society will greatly benefit.

Mr. Alex Carlile: I should like to say a few words, particularly in support of new clause 5, but first I thank the Minister for introducing changes in the rules triggering maternity leave. Some improvement is better than no improvement at all.

Times have changed a good deal since those pictures which we see exemplified in old episodes of "Doctor Finlay's Casebook" and "Doctor in the House", when the midwife turned up, the kettle was put on and the expectant father was sent out to the pub while mother and the midwife arranged for the baby to be born, and then the father returned to look at his son and heir, or so he hoped.

Fortunately, things have changed a good deal since then and when a child is born into a family—we should all be aiming to uphold the integrity of the family in these ever-more difficult times for family life—it is now recognised as very desirable that, not just the mother, but the father of the child should form a relationship with the baby quickly and take an active part in looking after the baby. Fathers do much more than merely change nappies these days. That in itself is an advance on the situation 20 or 30 years ago. Fathers play an active and significant role in the upbringing of babies, and it is right that they should.

So new clause 5 recognises the changing times. Secondly, it recognises the realities of modern life, with particular reference to work and the workplace. For many families now it cannot possibly be taken for granted that the father is the breadwinner. In many families the father and the mother of the child have more or less equal incomes and in many families the mother of the newborn child is the breadwinner. If the father is to become the house husband and if, as in an increasing number of families, he is to stay at home and look after the child, or to spend a considerable time at home looking after the child, it is desirable and sensible that the father should form a bond with the baby as quickly as the mother. Paternity leave seems to be a sensible way of achieving that.

I apprehend that there are some Conservative Members, male hon. Members, who find this a faintly hilarious subject but it is not. It is extremely important that babies should be brought up, from the beginning, in stable homes and if that means that we should recognise what has already been recognised in other countries, that paternity leave is a contributory factor towards that, we should not lag behind other countries in Europe in introducing paternity leave.

The third point that I wish to raise on new clause 5 is one that was not raised by the hon. Lady the Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) in her full and excellent presentation of the case on a number of issues, including this clause. My point relates to the all too frequent and sometimes extremely sad onset of puerperal depression. In my professional life as a lawyer, I have had the misfortune to come across the sometimes tragic effects in a family of post-natal depression, particularly in cases where there has not been the support and involvement of the father that one would have hoped for.

I believe that paternity leave would mean that both parents would be together, at least for a time, after the birth of a child and that the support that the father would give the mother would lessen the prospects of serious post-natal depression. That is an important point because, as the Minister knows and I suspect all hon. Members know, puerperal depression is a very common incident of childbirth.

I would also like to say a word about new clause 10. Whether the precise wording is right, in my view, matters not. What new clause 10 would achieve is a way of measuring the success of maternity leave. It would provide a method of producing statistics which would enable not only us, but, more important, the medical profession, employers and trade unions to measure the success or otherwise of the maternity leave regime. It would enable us to know whether justice was being done to mothers and, of course, to their children. Without statistics of the sort that would be provided by the report suggested, we are not really in a position to judge.

Hon. Members who put down parliamentary questions——

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business),

That, at this day's sitting, the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Question agreed to.

As amended, again considered.

Question again proposed, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Carlile: Hon. Members who table questions to Ministers know that it is sometimes difficult to obtain the types of statistics which are referred to in the categories set out in new clause 10. This would enable us and others to have those statistics. I really cannot understand why the Government appear to want to resist the preparation of a report of a type which has now become very common as an adjunct of new statutory provisions, and I hope that the Minister will reflect afresh upon this matter.

Mr. Miller: I shall be brief, bearing in mind that other hon. Members wish to speak.

Referring first to new clause 5, many progressive employers provide some form of paternity leave. My progressive previous employer—the Minister made a number of jokes about it in Committee—provided me with paternity leave some 14 years ago when my daughter was born. I and my family found that, and my daughter found it eventually, a very beneficial provision. The arguments are clearly set out in the clause. But, aside from odd employers, as the Minister would probably consider trade unions, many good employers provide some form of provision for paternity leave.

It seems to me that it would disadvantage those good employers if the cowboys were allowed to maintain standards lower than those applied by the best. So I think that there is an economic argument that supports the development of a clause creating a consistent provision and a right throughout our society.

With regard to new clause 10, the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) made a good point about the need to collate statistical evidence. It is only when that evidence is collated properly that we will know whether the Government's attempts at reform in this area, some of which are opposed and some of which are accepted by Opposition Members, are appropriate and will be able to analyse the facts and make some progress.

I draw the attention of the House in particular to paragraphs (g) and (h) of subsection (2) concerning the number of women successfully claiming unfair dismissal because of pregnancy. This is particularly important. A number of cases have gone through the tribunal and higher courts relating to dismissals that have been alleged redundancies during periods of maternity leave, and so on. This information is loosely collated. I believe that it needs to be collated in the context of this clause rather than in the generality of overall case law statistics.

If we look at it in the context of other aspects of the clause, we will begin to understand the meaning of the statistics. Equally, and in some respects more importantly, the same argument applies to paragraph (h). Inevitably, there will be cases in which women are suspended for health and safety reasons. However, it is important to separate genuine health-related reasons from concocted reasons because, in the later stages of pregnancy, a woman may not be able to fulfil a task at the same pace as, for example, young, fit Ministers; but perhaps that is not the case.

Against that background, and for the powerful reasons set out by my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) and by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery, I shall support new clause 10.

Ms. Eagle: I shall spend a short time on some of the history of the new rights established in the Bill. Clearly, the Opposition welcome any conversion of the Government to improving employment rights, albeit in a grudging and technical way. They have reacted to being dragged kicking and screaming by the European Commission into making at least some concession to the needs of women in the work force.

Let us examine the history of the provisions and why the Government, who spend most of their time wanting to reduce what they euphemistically call burdens on business, have suddenly introduced a measure which, albeit grudgingly, slightly increases those burdens on business. That has come about simply because of the EC directive on maternity leave in which the British Government played a pretty villainous role, first in holding up its progress through the EC institutions and secondly, when they realised that they could not hold it up much longer, in watering it down. They insisted that they would not agree to the original draft of the directive which granted maternity pay at 90 per cent. of earnings and would support the directive only if maternity pay was reduced to the level of sick pay. Far from being 90 per cent. of what a pregnant woman was earning before her pregnancy, levels of statutory sick pay in Britain are about 15 per cent. of average earnings, which in real and proportional terms is a much lower level than that which could have been achieved had the Government been less destructive in its dealings with the EC.

Having held up the directive and then watered it down, the Government then abstained on it, so they did not even vote for it. The Government have accepted pretty grudgingly that increased maternity rights should be granted to millions of women in the work force today and the millions of women who may want to join the work force if they are given equal treatment and rights by British laws.

Although we must congratulate the Government on the rights they are bringing in, our congratulations must be fairly narrow. The Government have brought in those rights in a typical technical and grudging way.

The law contains a right to maternity leave somewhere. However, one must search high and low, and one must be virtually a lawyer of international repute to understand those rights, much less attempt to exercise them.

What we have is a technical granting of a right with absolutely no attempt being made by the Government to tackle the real problem of the piecemeal approach to equal opportunities legislation in the United Kingdom. Indeed, the Government have introduced the right to maternity leave—which is welcome—in the most complex way possible in the hope that it will be so perplexing that many people will not, first, realise that they have the right and, secondly, be able to work out how they should exercise it. That applies to both employers and employees.

I would prefer to see—the Equal Opportunities Commission is on record as saying this about the Bill—the Government make a genuine attempt to deal with their

[Ms. Eagle]

piecemeal approach to current equal opportunities legislation and simplify it rather than introduce a third tier to an already complex system. The Government should simplify the system to one tier so that people may know that they have a simple right which is easily applied for. People would know what they were entitled to and they could go on to deal with the normal everyday problems with pregnancy and the arrangements which they must make as they approach confinement in a more optimistic way without the uncertainty and insecurity which currently surround maternity leave at work.

The rights introduced by the Government should be more generous. I certainly support the view that we should have an 18-week leave period rather than 14 weeks. My hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) has dealt effectively with some of the more bizarre aspects of the way in which the legislation is drafted. There are many issues which we will want to assess. We will want to see how the right is being used and whether it makes much practical difference.

The reason for new clause 10 is to produce a statistical digest to deal with some of the issues—how complex the scheme is, whether people are able to use it and the number of women who successfully claim unfair dismissal because of pregnancy, as they are given a right to do so under the legislation. That right is grudgingly given in the same way as maternity rights are given. Women must prove, rather than the employer having to disprove, that they were sacked for being pregnant, which is a difficult thing to do. If the Government intended to give proper and appropriate protection to women in the work force, they would have switched the burden of proof in the way in which the new right was introduced. New clause 10 deals with those issues.

It gives me a sense of pride and a special feeling that, as one of only 10 per cent. of women Members in the House, I can represent the interests of women on this important issue. Women can take their rightful place in society only with a guarantee of proper equal treatment. The Government's attempts to introduce some sort of limited new employment rights are woefully inadequate. I look forward to their doing much better in the near future.

Mr. Burden: I rise to support the new clauses and the amendment proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin). I want to speak to new clause 10 because it seems to be especially important that we compile the sort of statistics which are being advocated on the impact of the maternity leave changes which the Government wish to introduce.

To hear Ministers talk, one would think that they were introducing proposals which would transform the rights of working women. In Britain, not only will the impact of what is being suggested—welcome though it is—be somewhat more limited: it will produce a rather selective view of how the legislation came to be before the House in the first place.

10.15 pm

My hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms. Eagle) catalogued what took place when the European Commission and the Council of Ministers considered the pregnant women at work directive. The delays caused principally by the British Government held up that directive for no less than two years. Indeed, the timing was so tight by the end of that period that in order to ratify the directive before it lapsed, Ministers had to do so at a meeting about fisheries. As we have heard, even at that stage the Government, having watered down the directive, could not bring themselves to vote for it and abstained. One would think that it was hardly worth the air fare for them to go over there to do it.

If the Government had not watered it down, the directive could have provided women with the right to 16 weeks paid time off for maternity. The Government not only reduced that to 14 weeks but watered down the pay provisions. They do not even mention maternity pay in the Bill. Indeed, they have ruled out any consideration of maternity pay as if the issue were irrelevant to maternity leave.

It is instructive to examine why it was so important to the Government to rule out consideration of maternity pay. A quick look through the level of maternity pay in other countries in Europe shows why the Government are so bashful. The total equivalent maternity pay in other European countries is as follows: Denmark 22 weeks, Italy 17 weeks, Luxembourg 16 weeks, Greece 16 weeks, the Netherlands 16 weeks, Germany 14 weeks, France 13½ weeks, Spain 12 weeks, Belgium 11 weeks and Ireland 10 weeks.

Ministers will probably say that the directive advocated at least 14 weeks and many women will receive more than that. True enough, but in Britain the equivalent total weeks of maternity pay for women who have worked full time for more than two years is the princely period of eight weeks. Women who do not meet that requirement receive the equivalent of four weeks in total. That is the reality of maternity leave in Britain. That is why new clause 5 and the other new clauses in the group are important.

One cannot separate out the issue of maternity pay, all the more so because the Government have insisted on scrapping the wages councils. The effect of that will be to drive the earnings of many thousands of women below the national insurance threshold. That will remove their entitlement to the higher rate of statutory maternity pay. So it will increase the problems of poverty among women employees.

We have already heard that the maternity leave period advocated by the Government is too short. All expert opinion agrees that 14 weeks simply is not long enough for the health of the mother, the family or the baby. In Britain the need to extend the period from 14 weeks to 18 weeks is even more important than in other parts of Europe because the Government have refused and refused again to introduce any scheme of parental or paternity leave. That makes the need for a decent scheme for maternity leave that much more important.

In eight out of 12 European countries there is some provision for paternity or parental leave. Why in Britain do we come up against a brick wall when we seek such provisions? In the United States of America there is movement on leave for family reasons. The measure is supported by large parts of the Republican party. So why in Britain does a brick wall still go up on paternity and parental leave?

My hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey also described the complexity of the rules introduced in the Bill. That is yet another reason why we must consider the impact of the Bill. If a woman is to find her way through the myriad rules, regulations and laws on maternity leave she needs to be an expert in employment law and pretty good at lateral thinking. If she works for one length of time she qualifies for something called maternity leave. If she works for another period she has no entitlement to maternity leave beyond 14 weeks but she qualifies for something called the right of return.

The notification requirements are different, as are the rules and regulations about what one is able to accrue in terms of contractual rights. That is the effect of provisions of this type. Under the Bill in its original form we had the crazy situation of a woman having to go back to work before having her baby. Fortunately, the Government saw sense to some extent and removed that provision. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East pointed out, a woman might now have to return to work the day after having her baby. I suppose that that is an improvement, but it will not be much consolation to the women involved.

A woman has to jump through very difficult hoops in order to find reality in terms of the rights that she will receive under this Bill. In Committee we heard about a woman whose employer had denied her access to ante-natal classes on the ground that such an arrangement was not company policy. That is not unique. We have heard about women whose employers dissuaded them from claiming even the limited rights to which they are currently entitled under statute. That is the reality of irresponsible employers in Britain.

Despite all this, the Government continue to resist the case that we put forward in Committee and are urging tonight. We say that the burden of proof in cases like this should be on the employers. If an employer dismisses someone because that person is claiming her rights under maternity leave provisions, or because he, the employer, does not want to have the hassle of having such a woman on his work force, can anyone seriously suggest that he, with hand on heart, would state that that was the reason for dismissal? Of course not. The evidence that Conservative Members, as well as Opposition Members, have been receiving from citizens advice bureaux, the Equal Opportunities Commission and many other organisations indicates that, in respect of matters of this sort, employers do not always tell the truth.

Why is it regarded as unreasonable to put on the employer the onus to prove that he acted unreasonably in dismissing a woman employee? The Government are resisting such action, and, like my hon. Friends, I have been forced to the conclusion that the reason is that they did not want to have these rights in the first place. They resisted them in Europe. The hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth), when he was at the Department of Employment, gave evidence suggesting that the Government did not want them, and in the final vote, the provisions having been watered down, they abstained.

On the front page of the last issue of *The Independent on Sunday* is a report to the effect that—surprise, surprise—employers are now discovering that their commitment to equal opportunity lasts only so long as they think that, from the labour market point of view, it is necessary to employ more women. As soon as they feel that unemployment is at such a level that the issue of equal opportunity and rights for women can be disposed of, the tendency will be for that commitment to disappear. That is why we need effective maternity rights and effective legislation against sex discrimination. It is also why we need effective rights for working parents in general. This Bill's provisions on maternity rights represent an improvement, but that is testimony to the inadequacy of the current provisions rather than to a commitment to improvement.

I hope that the Government, even at this late stage, will take account of what was said during many hours in Committee. They have not argued effectively against the cases that have been put to them. I hope that they will at least agree to collect statistics so that it may be seen whether we are right and what effect this legislation will have. If the Government claim to have any regard at all for the rights of working parents, they should take on board the comments of hon. Members in favour of paternity leave and effective parental rights.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): Some Opposition Members have simply reiterated tonight the comments that they made in Committee. I was glad to hear the welcome that the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) gave to the many concessions that the Government have made following representations made to us. As she dealt with most of those concessions and basically welcomed them, I shall, at the appropriate time, simply move formally the provisions which apply them. That will probably be for the convenience of the House because, as the hon. Lady recognised, those concessions go a considerable way to meeting many of the concerns that were expressed.

Opposition Members should get their position clear on the EC directive. It is nonsense to suggest that the United Kingdom watered down that directive. The common position text agreed last December was produced by the Dutch presidency because it was clear that the Commission's original proposals were unacceptable to the great majority of member states. The treaty base for the directive provides for qualified majority voting, not unanimity, and the United Kingdom was never in a position of being able to threaten to use a veto. No member state voted against the text of the directive agreed last year and the subsequent negotiations which led to the adoption of the directive on 19 October had not changed in any essential respect. Indeed, it was to the great credit of the Secretary of State that the matter was brought to a conclusion during the United Kingdom's presidency. So I cannot accept that in some way the United Kingdom was responsible for watering down the directive.

Ms. Quin: Is not it a fact that the British Government were the only Administration who wanted maternity pay to be allied with sick pay, and in that respect did water down the directive?

Mr. McLoughlin: I said in Committee that the Secretary of State for Social Security would be making a statement on maternity pay and, in so doing, would make the position of the Government clear.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) will persist in the fantasy that, somehow, the treatment of pregnant employees in the United Kingdom is inferior to such treatment in other EC member states. At 14 weeks, Britain has the longest period of maternity absence in Europe and, at 18 weeks, one of the longest periods of paid maternity absence. In addition, all pregnant employees in the United Kingdom have had the right to paid time off for antenatal care since 1980, a right which Spanish and

[Mr. McLoughlin]

French women will enjoy as a result of the directive. I might have added that that will apply in socialist France and Spain—*[Interruption.]* It is for the French and Spanish people to reach their own decision on the matter.

I cannot accept new clauses 5 and 11. The purpose of the statutory maternity provisions is to safeguard the mother's career, while also giving her a period of time to prepare for, and recover from, childbirth and to nurse and care for her baby in its early life. The same considerations do not apply to paternity and parental leave. I do not consider that the measures proposed in either new clause are suitable for legislation.

Having listened to Opposition Members at Question Time continually asking us to ensure that we have the right conditions for employment growth, it is a bit rich of them to try to impose yet more burdens on employers, burdens that would lead to exactly the opposite of what they desire in terms of employment prospects in Britain.

Mr. Burden *rose*——

Mr. McLoughlin: I will not give way because we must make progress and the hon. Gentleman spoke for a considerable time.

I recognise the concerns that new clause 10 and amendment No. 63 seek to address. It is important that we keep track of how new legislation is working in practice. I assure hon. Members that we shall keep the Bill under review, as we are anxious to do with any new legislation. But I see no justification for a statutory requirement to produce a report. It is clear that the real concerns of Opposition Members are less that we should publish an annual review of the working of the valuable new rights and more that we should greatly add to the costs of employers by increasing those rights in a wholly unacceptable way.

Opposition Members do not know a good deal when they see one. The Bill will ensure that every employee, no matter what her hours of work or how long she has been with her employer, will be entitled to take 14 weeks off work to have a baby. Currently anyone with under two years' service must look purely to the contract of employment for any rights at all to take time off work.

The changes are an important step forward and will go a long way to ensuring that rights for mothers and women expecting children are greatly enhanced. I commend the Government amendments to the House and hope that it will vote against the new clauses put forward by the Opposition.

10.30 pm

Ms. Quin: We have had an interesting debate, although it has been staggering that no hon. Member on the Government Benches, apart from the Minister, has intervened on the important subject of maternity rights. I do not know whether that means that Government Back Benchers are not interested, or that they do not support the Government's view. Some of my hon. Friends correctly pointed out that the Government had been dragged kicking and screaming by the European Community to accept some of the limited and modest gains. Perhaps that is why none of the Minister's hon. Friends have supported him by speaking in the debate. The Government have been isolated on many issues in the European Community. I agree with the points made by my hon. Friends about that.

I welcome the support of the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile), the spokesman for the Liberal Democrats, on the issue and the additional arguments which he put forward.

The Minister stuck rigidly to his brief, as we came to expect in Committee. None the less, we hope that he will consider some of our arguments, particularly about some Government amendments which do not go far enough. At the very least, we hope that the Government will listen to representations from outside organisations.

Having said that, we do not wish to press new clause 5 to a vote, but when the time comes, we would like to vote on new clause 10. It is a modest amendment, calling for a report on the implementation and the working of the Bill. We are disappointed that the Government will not accept the new clause and it is important to vote on it.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, and clause, by leave withdrawn.

New clause 10

MATERNITY EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS REPORT

'(1) The Secretary of State shall publish a report to Parliament annually, to be called "The maternity employment rights report" on the effects of the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993.

(2) The Report shall assess the effects of the Act on:

(a) the employment opportunities for pregnant working women

(b) access to time off for ante-natal care (including relaxation classes and parentcraft classes)

(c) the operation of remuneration during 14 weeks maternity leave

(d) the number of women returning to work after the 14 weeks maternity leave

(e) the adequacy of 14 weeks maternity leave for the health of the mother and the baby.

(f) the operation and complexity of the scheme

(g) the number of women successfully claiming unfair dismissal because of pregnancy under this Act

(h) the number of women medically suspended for health and safety reasons each year

(3) Before publishing the Report, the Secretary of State shall consult such organisations as appear to him to be concerned.'.—*[Ms. Quin.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Motion made, and Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 263, Noes 298.

Division No. 153] **[10.32 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard

Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Dr John *(C'p'l'nd)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek *(B'p Auckland)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug

Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hume, John
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward

Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*

Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Tipping, Paddy
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jack Thompson and
Mr. Jon Owen Jones.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*

Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ruclif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim

Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope and
Mr. Robert G. Hughes.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 1

ELECTION SCRUTINEER TO CHECK REGISTER

Amendment made: No. 56, in page 2, line 28, at end insert—

'(3C) The duty of confidentiality as respects the register is incorporated in the scrutineer's appointment.'—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Clause 2

COUNTING OF ELECTION VOTES ETC. BY INDEPENDENT PERSON

Amendment made: No. 57, in page 3, line 42, at end insert—

'( ) The duty of confidentiality as respects the register is incorporated in an appointment under this section.'—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Clause 4

BALLOTS FOR UNION AMALGAMATION AND TRANSFERS OF ENGAGEMENTS

Amendments made: No. 58, in page 6, line 29, at end insert—

'( ) The duty of confidentiality as respects the register is incorporated in the scrutineer's appointment.'

No. 9 in page 8, line 8, at end insert—

'(4A) No voting paper which is sent to a person for voting shall have enclosed with any other document except

(a) the notice which, under section 99(1) is to accompany the voting paper,
(b) an addressed envelope, and
(c) a document containing instructions for the return of the voting paper, without any other statement.'

No. 59, in page 8, line 37, at end insert—

'( ) The duty of confidentiality as respects the register is incorporated in an appointment under this section.'—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Clause 6

STATEMENT TO MEMBERS FOLLOWING ANNUAL RETURN

10.45 pm

Mr. McLoughlin: I beg to move amendment No. 12, in page 11, line 25, leave out from 'Officer' to end of line 27 and insert

'all the members of the union are provided with the statement required by this section by any of the methods allowed by subsection (1A).

(1A) Those methods are—

(a) the sending of individual copies of the statement to members; or

(b) any other means (whether by including the statement in a publication of the union or otherwise) which it is the practice of the union to use when information of general interest to all its members needs to be provided to them.'

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): With this we may take the following: Amendment No. 65, in page 11, line 37, leave out

'and other benefits provided to'.

Government amendment No. 13.

Mr. McLoughlin: Amendments Nos. 12 and 13 respond to concerns expressed in Committee on 3 December. They fulfil the Government's commitment to table amendments that would address the issues raised in amendments Nos. 9 and 10.

Mr. Galbraith: The Minister is right in saying that Government amendment No. 12 fulfils obligations made in Committee to deal with the means by which members can be notified about accounts. Amendment No. 65 was tabled by the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), who will wish to speak to it. We have already discussed the issues in Committee, and we support the aim of the amendment, for reasons that the hon. Gentleman will no doubt want to raise again later.

As for Government amendment No. 13, will the Minister explain why the copies of the statement should be provided free of charge if a copy has already been provided, either directly or through publication? Why should a member be able to request a copy without at least paying for delivery?

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I tabled amendment No. 65 because I fear that the Government's definition of "other benefits" may be too broad. I should be interested to know whether there is a greater requirement to add up all the small benefits that trade unions might have in theory, compared with the requirement for company directors to have their package put together.

If we are talking just about pay and pensions, that seems fine; if the provision goes wider than that, I feel that we should be given an explanation why we are picking out trade union leaders and assuming that they are far more likely to go off with the family silver than a director of a public company.

Mr. McLoughlin: Let me deal first with the point raised by the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith). His point was that we originally said that copies had to be provided directly to all members. We have now accepted the points made by the Opposition in Committee, but we have said that, if someone wants a more specified account, that person will have a right to it free of charge. I think that our amendments go some way towards meeting the concerns expressed by Opposition Members.

As for amendment No. 65, I have already said that the Government welcome the fact that, on Second Reading, the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) expressed support for the new rules. We consider them important. There would be little point in setting up arrangements meaning that, for example, a union could legitimately avoid having to tell its members the value or nature of the personal benefits received by its leader; yet that is exactly what the amendment would do.

I should make clear the nature of the information that will have to be given—as, indeed, was made clear in Committee on 1 December, during debate on amendment No. 20. In order to satisfy the new duty, a union must do its best to give details of all salary payments expressed in cash amounts and all other benefits that could either be expressed in terms of cash equivalent figures or in terms of an adequate description of the benefits concerned, if that is more appropriate or practical. The Government are grateful for the way in which the Opposition addressed these particular points. The principles, while providing the unions with more flexibility and options in respect of the discharge of their new duties, are acceptable to the House.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I do not intend to press the amendment to a Division, but if Bill Morris, the general secretary of my trade union, the Transport and General Workers Union, is provided with a flat—I do not know whether he is or not—would that be counted? If, for example, the chief operating officer of ICI is provided with a flat, would that be counted in the company's report and accounts? If there is a difference in treatment, why?

Mr McLoughlin: My hon. Friend needs to look only at the way that this issue was dealt with in Committee. If a benefit to a person is a benefit over and above what is regarded as for his official duties, it should be shown.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 13, in page 12, line 51, at end insert—

'( ) If at any time during the period of two years beginning with the day referred to in subsection (1) any member of the trade union requests a copy of the statement required by this section, the union shall, as soon as practicable, furnish him with such a copy free of charge.'—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Clause 8

OFFENCES

Mr. McLoughlin: I beg to move amendment No. 14, in page 19, line 6, leave out '(1)'.

As hon. Members know, clause 8 makes further provisions relating to offences by amending, and adding to, section 45 of the 1992 Act. This amendment modifies provisions in new section 45A(2).

New section 45A(2) deals with prosecution time limits for offences under section 45(1) relating to the duty imposed by section 32(1). This duty requires trade unions to send the certification officer an annual return relating to its financial affairs. As they appear in the Bill, the provisions allow proceedings for an offence relating to the duty to be commenced within three years of the date when the offence was committed.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 10

RIGHT NOT TO BE EXCLUDED OR EXPELLED

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I beg to move amendment No. 15, in page 22, line 17, leave out 'or'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take Government amendment No. 16.

Mr. Forsyth: These amendments were introduced in response to a valuable suggestion made by my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) and were welcomed on both sides of the Committee when we debated this clause. Essentially, the amendments ensure that it is not possible to exclude someone from membership of a trade union because of his or her membership of a political party. This was welcomed on both sides of the Committee. I commend the amendment to the House.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 16, in page 22, line 19, at end insert—

'(iii) a member of a political party, or'.—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Clause 11

RIGHT NOT TO SUFFER DEDUCTION OF UNAUTHORISED OR EXCESSIVE SUBSCRIPTIONS

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I beg to move amendment No. 17, in page 25, line 8, leave out 'remains in force' and insert 'is current'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to consider the following amendments: Government amendments Nos. 18 and 19.

No. 67, in page 25, line 13, leave out 'three' and insert 'seven'.

No. 83, in page 25, line 13, leave out 'three' and insert 'ten'.

Government amendment No. 20.

Mr. Forsyth: Government amendments Nos. 17 to 20, like many others for consideration today, have been introduced as the result of the constructive discussion of the Bill's provisions that took place in Standing Committee F.

When what is now clause 11 was debated in that Committee, the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) stated that it would be helpful if we adopted what he termed the "big bang" approach to the renewal of consent to check-off deductions from salary—that is, that employers should be able to seek renewed consent from all their work force at once.

It is an essential point of principle underpinning this clause that individuals who pay their union dues through the check-off should have the opportunity periodically to reconsider their consent and renew it, if they so wish. It is no part of this policy, however, that unnecessary administrative burdens should be incurred by employers. Let us remember that we are not imposing any unavoidable duty on employers; employers are free to decide for themselves whether they wish to enter into an agreement with a trade union to operate check-off arrangements.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Is it open to an employer, as a consenting organisation, to come to an agreement with a trade union and employees that they do not have to renew the arrangements every three years or after any other specified period? Is there any reason why it should not be left to employers, trade unions and employees?

Mr. Forsyth: My hon. Friend will recognise that it is extremely important that, if deductions are being made from individuals' pay packets, consent is obtained on a regular basis. When my hon. Friend invites me to speculate about the type of agreement, it sounds like a remarkably collectivist approach. Perhaps he will explain what he means.

Mr. Bottomley: I know that one of my difficulties is that of communicating clearly. Is there any reason why an employer and his employee should not make an agreement that the consent will run for more than three years? Why should the House say that, whatever the two of them may want to agree, they are not allowed to?

Mr. Forsyth: My hon. Friend needs to recognise the fact that the agreement is between not the employer and the employee but the employer and the trade union. The employer agrees to take money out of the employee's pay packet and give it to the trade union. During and prior to the general election campaign, the Government made it clear that it was their policy that there should be a requirement to obtain individual consent from an employee on a regular basis before money was deducted.

Mr. Bill Olner (Nuneaton): Does not the Minister realise that any check-off agreement is an agreement between the employer, the employee and the trade union? Three groups make the agreement possible. For the life of me, I cannot see why renewal has to be applied for after a specified number of years, as the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) said.

When we paid rates, I signed a direct debit to have my rates stopped from my account. That direct debit did not end when I unfortunately had to pay my poll tax and it will continue when I pay my council tax this year. I cannot understand why there has to be so much interference and over-regulation, with the Government insisting that an agreement must be renewed every three years.

Mr. Forsyth: I am delighted to hear of the direct debit arrangement that the hon. Gentleman made for his poll tax as he calls it. There is nothing to stop such an agreement being made by an employee and a trade union. An employee could perfectly well pay his subscriptions by direct debit, which would not be affected by this or any other legislation.

What is at issue is the situation in which the trade union tells an employer that it would like him to deduct union subscriptions from an individual employee's——

Mr. Miller: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Forsyth: When I have answered the hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Olner).

When a union has agreed with an employer that the employer will deduct subscriptions from the employee's wages before they are paid to the employee, there should be a requirement for written consent to be given by the employee and that it should be renewed. I know that the hon. Gentleman understands that because the amendment has been tabled in response to representations made by his colleague for renewal of consent to be obtained within a three-year period.

Mr. Miller: What if the agreement is specifically between the employee and the employer, and the employee fills in a form saying, "Please deduct the following sums of money and pass them to my trade union"? The trade union is not involved. In that case, there is no three-way discussion as in the circumstances described by my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Olner), because the employee freely passes the form on to a third party for it to be collected like a direct debit. Those circumstances are distinct from those that the Minister tried to portray, in which a monolithic trade union tells the employer to make large deductions from the employee's pay packet and pass them to it. Is the Minister prepared to accept that, if an employee freely enters into an agreement, that agreement can last for the length of time that the employee or employer is prepared to live with it?

Mr. Forsyth: No. The hon. Gentleman obviously thinks that, as it is late, he can get me into a muddle so that I agree to what he would like to happen. The hon. Gentleman would like dues to be deducted from the employees' pay packet without their express consent on a regular basis——

Mr. Miller: I did not say that.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to intervene again, he is at liberty to do so, but not from a sedentary position.

11 pm

Mr. Forsyth: The provisions in the Bill are clear and they are perfectly reasonable and responsible. They are that if a trade union wishes an employer to deduct subs from an employee's pay packet, consent is required initially, and that consent needs to be renewed on a three-year basis.

The second part of the hon. Gentleman's question related to an arrangement between the trade union and the employee. If a trade union arranges with employees to pay direct by direct debit subscriptions, none of these provisions applies. I should have thought that that was perfectly clear and simple and perfectly acceptable to any right-thinking person.

Mr. Winnick: I am grateful to the Minister, who has given way a number of times. Why does not he admit that there has been no pressure from employers for this change and that the real explanation is simply the Government's spite? Moreover, if the Minister, his colleagues and supporters are really concerned about finance, would it not be worthwhile for them to publish the accounts of their own party? Secretive methods are used to finance the Conservative party, and its accounts are not published in the same way as those of other political parties. That is the problem that should be addressed, and as soon as possible.

Mr. Forsyth: I know that the hon. Gentleman has not followed our proceedings particularly carefully, but this has nothing to do with the political levy. The hon. Gentleman must not tempt me to consider the political levy and those matters which, so far, in the process of considering the Bill, we have avoided. This is about the payment of subscriptions using the check-off system.

As to the point that the hon. Gentleman asked me to confirm, that not a single employer had made representations, no, that is not the case.

Mr. Winnick: I said that there had been no pressure from employers.

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman said that there had been no pressure from employers or employers' organisations for this change. Had the hon. Gentleman followed the proceedings, he would know that we have made a change. Instead of requiring annual renewal of consent, it will be required every three years, as a result of representations from the Institute of Personnel Management.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: My hon. Friend said that some employers had asked for this. My understanding is that the Institute of Personnel Management employs a small number of people in Wimbledon. When I asked

> "which employers' associations or employers have asked for trades unions to be required to review members' written authorisations to deduction at source of union subscriptions every three years",

my hon. Friend's answer was:

> "My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received no such representations."—[*Official Report*, 2 February 1993; Vol. 218, c. *160-61*.]

Mr. Forsyth: I am rather puzzled by my hon. Friend's description of the Institute of Personnel Management, which has something of a reputation in this area. I said that it made representations for the change that is incorporated in the Bill which requires consent on a three-year basis. It is perfectly reasonable for the Government to respond to representations from such a body. The CBI and others originally pressed for an extension of the time scale to every five years. I now understand that the CBI and the Institute of Personnel Management accept that three years is a reasonable compromise, which I should have thought would have been acceptable to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Bottomley: As a Fellow of the Institute of Personnel Management, may I say that what my hon. Friend is saying does not reflect the general view of those at the top of the profession. It may be that he has better and further particulars, but in another answer he said that the proposal was made to him in the first place in the response of the Institute of Personnel Management to the Green Paper. I suspect that if he dug rather more deeply he would find that the IPM may have said it, but that there is no weight of support for the measure within that organisation. I suspect that the CBI would much prefer seven or 10 years, and that most employers do not want the provision at all.

Mr. Forsyth: It is a basic principle, on which we fought the general election, that trade union subs should not be deducted without the consent of members, and the Green Paper set out our plans which were originally for annual consent. I find it slightly odd that my hon. Friend appears to be criticising the Government for responding to representations from the Institute of Personnel Management which has made the Bill closer to the position that he evidently supports.

Mr. Dobson: Having confirmed that no employers asked for check-off to be fouled up, can the Minister confirm that the Government have received representations from employers asking them to leave things alone?

Mr. Forsyth: We have been round this course so many times. Perhaps I could remind the hon. Gentleman of the support which that splendid organisation the Institute of Directors has given in respect of this. Perhaps I could read a brief extract from the evidence that it provided. I am not sure how many people it employs, but it represents a number of businesses and business interests. The evidence reads:

> "The collection of trade union subscriptions by employers through the check-off system represents a substantial subsidy to trade unions by employers. The 1989 dispute in the engineering industry where a strike levy had to be deducted through the check-off system by the very employers who were targeted in the dispute supports the IOD's contention that the process cannot be justified."

The institute cannot be clearer than that.

My hon. Friend quoted from a parliamentary answer that I gave him. The question that he asked was

> "which employers' associations or employers have asked for trades unions to be required to review members', written authorisations to deduction at source of union subscriptions every three years."—[*Official Report*, 2 February 1993; Vol. 218, c. *160-61*.]

I said that we had received no such written representations and pointed out that, under the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Bill, it was employers who were required to seek renewed consent to check-off deductions from their employees every three years, and not the unions, as his question implied.

Mr. Dobson: Setting aside employers' organisations, which I did not mention, will the Minister confirm that the Government have received no representation in favour of this overall policy from any employer, and that the Government have received several representations from employers against what they are proposing?

Mr. Forsyth: Labour hon. Members may do what trade unions tell them, but, on this side, we do not necessarily do what employers tell us. The process by which we have brought about the reforms which have produced a transformation in industrial relations in this country has been a step-by-step approach which has been based on enhancing the rights of individual trade union members. If the hon. Member is seriously arguing that it is wrong to give individual trade union members the right to consent to deductions being made from their pay packets on a regular basis, and that I need to justify that by pointing to employer interest, then I have to say that earlier this evening the hon. Member was arguing that we were doing everything because we were responding to the vested interests of employers. Now he is criticising me because he cannot demonstrate that we are doing this in response to representations from employers—*[Interruption.]* The consistency which the hon. Member seeks is the consistency of standing up——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. We cannot have a private conversation. *[Interruption.]* Well, not with me.

Mr. Forsyth: I am sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was tempted into straying into a debate with the hon. Member. The point that I was wishing to make is that the golden thread, the consistency of our policy, is standing up for trade union rights of individual trade union members instead of speaking for trade union leaders and barons on whom the Labour party is so heavily dependent, and controls.

Mr. Dobson: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that it is, under existing law, a criminal offence for an employer to deduct any sum of money from an employee's pay packet without his or her previous consent?

Mr. Forsyth: Indeed, I can confirm that. But the hon. Gentleman did not go on to point out that, if employees are bound by a collective agreement, that can be taken as individual consent. *[Interruption.]* We have had this debate on Second Reading and in Committee, and members of the TUC and others have acknowledged the position. We are making it absolutely clear that individual consent will be required on a regular basis.

What is it that the Labour party is so afraid of—or perhaps not just the Labour party—when individuals have to give their express consent before money is paid——

Mr. Peter Bottomley *rose*——

Mr. Forsyth: Very well, I give way.

Mr. Bottomley: The Government are in a weak position; they ought to try to sort out their arguments. In an answer, my hon. Friend said to me that there was no reason why clause 11 should entail any extra work for employers. Just now he said to me that he thought that his answer previously related to the fact that trade unions did not have to provide this renewed consent. If it is the employers who have to do it, how can he say that there is no reason why this measure should entail any extra work for employers?

Mr. Forsyth: Because, as my hon. Friend will be aware, there is nothing in the legislation which requires employers to operate check-off. If they decide to operate check-off, they do so on a voluntary basis; it is an agreement between them and the trade unions. There is no statutory requirement to do so. All we are saying is that, if the employers and the trade unions decide to reach such an arrangement, there should be a proper framework to protect the rights of the individual trade union member. Indeed, it is open to employers, if they wish to operate check-off, to make a charge to the trade unions to cover this.

Mr. Winnick *rose*——

Mr. Forsyth: Well, it is getting late and we have been round the course several times. I have given way a number of times, but I will give way once more to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Winnick: If there is any ambiguity whatsoever—and my hon. Friends and I tend to disagree that there is—the present legal position is that an employee has to sign a statement that he is willing for the deduction to be made. The Minister says that that is not necessarily so, if I understand him. Will he therefore accept that we would have no opposition whatsoever to making the law absolutely clear that, whatever may be the collective agreement, the individual concerned should and must give his agreement? There would be no opposition from me, and I cannot imagine there would be from any of my hon. Friends. But, once having given his agreement in writing, there is no reason, except spite, why that should have to be renewed every three of four years. Why not accept that this is an agreement that has been given by the employee, and, unless he or she wants to change it, there is no reason why the law should interfere?

Mr. Forsyth: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for at least acknowledging that individual consent should be required, and I look forward to his support. But what a damning indictment of the trade union movement that the hon. Gentleman feels threatened in some way by the fact that individual consent is required to be renewed on a regular basis. The hon. Gentleman sounds like an inertia salesman arguing that, because he signed the form once, it will be held that he will always wish to be a member of the trade union. What the hon. Gentleman calls spite I would call ensuring that the individual is aware of the amounts being paid and is given the opportunity to renew his consent.

I am glad to commend these Government amendments to the House.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I am not sure whether my hon. Friend has been a member of a trade union, an employer—although I may be wrong about that—or that he is qualified in personnel management. I have had experience of all three. I do not profess to know it all and I may occasionally make mistakes. However, if I signed up for give as you earn, I would not expect the Government to

[Mr. Peter Bottomley]

say that I had to renew my consent to that, although the money that I would be giving away was likely to be more than my union subscription.

I suspect that the reason for the provision was a strike levy and some employers found that they were making deductions to run a strike against themselves. If the Government want to tackle that issue, it should be targeted. The Government have found it perfectly possible in this Bill and in others to target particular issues which upset one of the consenting parties, although it is open to an employer to decide not to continue with the check-off deductions from wages.

I suspect that we have been carried away. I also suspect that there has been some confusion and that, when I check with the Institute of Personnel Management, I will find that it suggested renewal every three years rather than annually. That was not the answer which I understood from my hon. Friend, but that was probably my mistake.

11.15 pm

I thought that when I asked my hon. Friend who suggested it, he replied that the Institute of Personnel Management had suggested renewed consent, but I am sure that that was my mistake.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is the position. I assumed that my hon. Friend would be aware of the commitments that we made before the general election and during the election campaign.

Mr. Bottomley: I spend my time supporting some and saying that I do not support others. One reason for getting elected to the House is not just to be a nodding toy in favour of whatever the Government propose. It strikes me as a good idea to bring forward one's own ideas and commitments, especially if they are long term and consistent. Without straying too far from the terms of the order, that is what I did in regard to child benefit, to get the Government to adopt their old policy rather than sticking to their medium-term policy.

When I asked my right hon. Friend

"what assessment she has made of the extra work required by employers as a result of clause 11 of the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Bill",

my hon. Friend replied:

"Clause 11 of the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Bill gives individuals a greater right to belong to the union of their choice."

That is not quite right unless the order of the clauses has changed, because clause 11 deals with the right not to suffer deductions of unauthorised or excessive subscriptions and I do not see how that clause deals with greater rights for individuals to belong to the union of their choice. The second sentence of my hon. Friend's reply stated:

"There is no reason why this measure should entail any extra work for employers."—*[Official Report*, 1 February 1993; Vol. 218, c. 60.]

I may have asked the wrong question when I asked

"which employers' associations or employers have asked for trades' unions to be required to review members' written authorisation to deduction at source of union subscriptions every three years."

My hon. Friend replied that our right hon. Friend

"the Secretary of State has received no such representations. Under proposals in the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Bill it is employers who will be required to seek renewed consent to check-off deductions from their employees every three years."—*[Official Report*, 2 February 1993; Vol. 218, c. 160-161.]

Those two replies are inconsistent; they cannot both be right. Either the trade union or the employer has to do the work. In practice, I suspect that both will have to do the work.

When I was a member of the Government I used to attend a committee trying to reduce the burden on business. If the committee had come across issues involving employers having to go out 4 million or 6 million times—whatever the figure may be—every three years, my noble Friend Lord Young would have said that it should stop and that we should carry out a survey of 100 employers, 10 employers or even ask the next person in the bus queue, "Are you an employer? Do you want every three years to get a renewed consent to a deduction when an employee has voluntarily asked an employer to deduct his union subscription?" The proposal would not have lasted a moment.

I suggest that, whatever the result tonight, the Government take away their proposal and, before the Bill reaches another place, they should ask employers about it. I have done a survey, but I have not asked the employers for their consent to give their views. Every employer that I asked—the major ones feel more strongly than the small ones as they deal with larger numbers—does not want it. If they must have it, they do not want three years: they want five years, seven years or 10 years.

I have approached some issues in the Bill from the point of view of trade union members or low-paid employees. I have approached this issue from the point of view of employers. Employers agree that it is necessary to get written consent from employees who are trade union members, but they do not want to do any more.

I shall make two suggestions to the Minister. First, the provision must be modified in such a way that, if there is to be a variable sum not linked simply to how much people earn but possibly annual, semi-annual or biannual changes to union subscriptions, it can be let through without renewed consent as long as the employee, the member, is told what the new sum will be. That is much the same way in which I pay my electricity, gas and telephone bills. Information about any change in the figure is worth while. That is the smallest requirement which is needed.

Secondly, the Government should start treating those who vote for trade union leaders through secret or postal ballots as grown-ups and people who make up their own mind as to whether they want to stop or continue being a member of a trade union or whether they want to change the way in which they pay their subscription. It strikes me as common sense, fair and reasonable.

Mr. Galbraith: It is difficult for me to say much more, following the speech of the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley). As the Minister said, we have been round the issue many times. Although we have come back to it, the Minister is still in as much of a muddle as he was in Committee. His position is still as rocky and difficult as ever. He has failed to provide any justification whatever for the check-off arrangement and its renewal.

Let us be clear what the Conservative party manifesto said.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I am puzzled that the hon. Gentleman has made that point because my heart leapt for joy when I saw amendment No. 83, in which the Labour party seems to accept the principle that there should be renewed consent. Although the Government's proposal is for consent every three years and the proposal of the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) is for consent every 10 years, the Opposition, by tabling the amendment, have accepted the principle of renewed consent.

Mr. Galbraith: I never thought the Minister was quite so silly, but he is certainly demonstrating his ability tonight. We tabled the amendment because sometimes we accept the lesser of two evils and try to ameliorate what is inevitable from the Government. In Committee, we made it clear that we oppose the repeated renewal of the check-off arrangement and that has been the basis of our argument against it. The Minister should not be so silly, making such a cheap political point which will not find him favour with anyone.

The Minister, by sleight of hand, tried to imply to Conservative Members that there was something in the Conservative election manifesto which imposed a time limit on the regular renewal of union subscriptions. The manifesto says:

> "We will make automatic deduction of union membership dues without written authorisation unlawful."

It says nothing whatever about a time scale. Conservative Members should be clear on that matter.

Sometimes I wonder why that statement is in the manifesto because, on our understanding of the law, it is unlawful to take money from people's salaries without their express written consent. There is no need to change the law. The election manifesto commitment has been fulfilled and therefore the clause is unnecessary.

The Labour party is not opposed to members being notified of any increases in their union subscriptions. We do not object to employers notifying members that they can withdraw from the arrangement at any time. The present position is that subscriptions cannot be deducted without the member's express written permission and changes to the law are not necessary. We object to the time scale, especially the three-yearly renewal that is required. It is bureaucratic and unnecessary and it places burdens on both employers and trade unions.

We asked the Minister again to tell us who supported the idea. Again, he had trouble. He brought in the Institute of Directors, the provisional wing of the Tory party. We would expect it to support almost anything. But he found it difficult to find anyone else who has pressed for the restriction. Some employers' organisations realised that they would face a yearly renewal and therefore decided to go for something less damaging. We are willing to accept five or three years.

Let us hear some of the words of some of the employers' organisations in response to the suggestion that there should be annual renewal. The Engineering Employers Federation said that it was

> "an unnecessary administrative nightmare without any commensurate benefits."

The British Institute of Management echoed that and said:

> "It will lead to administrative burdens on employers."

The Institute of Personnel Management, whom the Minister tried to call in to support his case, said:

> "There has been no groundswell of support from our members for a change in the check-off arrangements."

The Association of British Chambers of Commerce, that well-known left-wing organisation, said:

> "Many Chambers have difficulty in seeing what advantage this proposal has for the employers."

So there is no groundswell of support for the measure, even from the employers' organisations.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I have asked another parliamentary question on the matter. I asked the Secretary of State

> "if employers are presently prohibited from checking at any time and at any interval whether any employee maintains consent previously given for deductions of union subscriptions."

My hon. Friend the Minister confirmed that employers could do roughly what they liked. But he went on to say —the hon. Gentleman might like to test the Minister on this——

> "Existing law on the operation of the 'check-off' offers little protection to employees who pay their union subscriptions through the check-off."—[*Official Report*, 9 February 1993; Vol. 218, c. *590*.]

Presumably they have all consented to pay. What can he possibly have meant?

Mr. Galbraith: There is no need for me to ask the Minister the question again. He might like to answer it in his reply.

The question remains why trade unions have been taken out and given special consideration in the matter of having to renew an agreement for a financial deduction. Never mind that we are not required to make annual, three-yearly or even 10-yearly renewal of the direct debit arrangements which all of us have for paying electricity bills and gas bills and some of us even for paying Access bills—although not necessarily everyone. Other deductions are made from employees' wages which do not require annual, three-yearly or even 10-yearly renewal. Such deductions include payments to charities. It is not necessary for them to be renewed every three years. Why are they different? They also include deductions for sports club subscriptions. Why do not they have to be renewed every year?

Why is it that the trade unions have been singled out? What is the basis of the measure? Is some abuse of the system taking place? If so, let the Minister tell us what it is and why he is not taking corrective action. In our view, if there is abuse, those involved in it are breaking the law and it is up to the Government to ensure that the law is enforced. If that is not the case and he cannot give us the details of any abuse, why does he persist with the measure?

Is the reason that suggested by the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) and that which the Minister slightly suggested again tonight? The employers are under no obligation to operate check-off. Therefore, the Government hope that if they make it bureaucratically difficult, employers will stop operating it and so damage the trade unions. Of course, that is just a cynical view not held widely among Opposition Members. We think it is a piece of utter stupidity introduced by the Minister with no justification whatever. That is the reason why we shall ask the House to support amendment No. 83 in the Lobby tonight.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. May we be sure which amendment we are voting on?

Madam Deputy Speaker: A decision has just been taken on Government amendment No. 17.

Amendments made: No. 18, in page 25, line 10, leave out 'remains in force' and insert 'is current'.

[Madam Deputy Speaker]

No. 19, in page 25, line 11, leave out from beginning to end of line 14 and insert

'if that day falls within the period of three years beginning with the date of the document containing the authorisation and subsection (3A) does not apply.'—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Amendment proposed: No. 83, in page 25, line 13, leave out 'three' and insert 'ten'.—*[Mr. Dobson.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 259, Noes 296.

Division No. 154] **[11.29 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Dr John *(C'p'l'nd)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek *(B'p Auckland)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hume, John
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tipping, Paddy
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jack Thompson and
Mr. Jon Owen Jones.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*

Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ruclif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Andrew Mitchell and
Mr. Andrew Mackay.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendments made: No. 20, in page 25, line 15, at beginning insert—

'(3A) This subsection applies if'.

No. 21, in page 25, line 27, leave out 'an' and insert 'a relevant'.

No. 22, in page 25, line 32, at end insert—

'( ) So much of the increase referred to in subsection (4)(b) is relevant as is not attributable solely to an increase in the wages payable on the relevant day.'.

No. 23, in page 25, line 33, at end insert—

', subject to subsection (5A) below'.

No. 24, in page 25, line 40, at end insert—

'(5A) Where the relevant increase is attributable to an increase in any percentage by reference to which the worker's subscription deductions are calculated, subsection (5) above shall have effect with the substitution, in paragraph (a), for the reference to the amount of the increase and the increased amount of the deductions of a reference to the percentage before and the percentage after the increase.'

No. 25, in page 25, line 45, at end insert—

'( ) Where arrangements, whether included in subscription deduction arrangements or not, exist between the parties to subscription deduction arrangements for the making from workers' wages of deductions representing payments to the union which are additional to subscription deductions, the amount of the deductions representing such additional payments shall be treated for the purposes of this section (where they would otherwise not be so treated) as part of the subscription deductions.'—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Clause 12

EXTENSION OF RIGHT NOT TO BE UNJUSTIFIABLY DISCIPLINED

Amendments made: No. 26, in page 27, line 14, leave out 'or'

No. 27, in page 27, line 18, at end insert 'or

(j) requiring the union to do an act which the union is, by any provision of this Act, required to do on the requisition of a member.'

No. 28, in page 27, line 18, at end insert—

'(2) In section 65(7) of the 1992 Act (definitions), at the end, there shall be inserted the following—

""require" (on the part of an individual) includes request or apply for, and "requisition" shall be construed accordingly".'—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Clause 13

REQUIREMENT OF POSTAL BALLOT

Mr. McLoughlin: I beg to move amendment No. 29, in page 27, line 22, at beginning insert

'Except as regards persons falling within subsection (2A)'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 30, 33, 31, 34, 35, 32 and 36.

Mr. Galbraith: Is it permissible for me to talk about Government amendment No. 33 at this stage, Madam Deputy Speaker?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Yes, that is in order.

Mr. Galbraith: Thank you. I shall not delay the House long. As the Minister will point out, the amendment is one of the concessions that the Government made to the Opposition, following our frequent well-reasoned and eloquent propositions in Committee.

The following issue is at stake: according to the wording in the Bill, when employers are notified of people taking industrial action, is it necessary for them to be informed of the employees' names and addresses? The Minister and I had a long debate on the matter and he agreed to consider it.

As a result of the amendment, the word "identify" has been changed to "ascertain". Of all the amendments that the Minister has given to us, this is the least satisfactory. There is a subtle difference between identify and ascertain. For example, in the House we have to identify the Minister by the area that he represents. Ascertain is similar to identify but leaves the second party with an element of investigation if he wishes to identify the hon. Member concerned. Will it not be necessary to give the employees' names and addresses to the employer if he or she is to ascertain their identities? The amendment does not deal with our worries.

Mr. McLoughlin: I thought that the amendment, which was the result of representations made by the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith), met the requirements requested of us. However, if the hon. Gentleman is concerned, I shall look at the amendment again to ascertain that it meets his requirements.

Mr. Galbraith: Having identified the Minister's generosity, I have been able to ascertain that that is a splendid response and I am happy not to pursue the matter any further.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 30, in page 27, line 27, at end insert—

'(2A) Where a merchant seaman to whom this subsection applies is entitled to vote in the ballot he must, so far as is reasonably practicable—

(a) have a voting paper made available to him while he is on board the ship or is at a place where the ship is;

(b) be given an opportunity to vote while he is on board the ship or is at a place where the ship is.

(2B) Subsection (2A) applies to a merchant seaman who the trade union reasonably believes will, throughout the period during which votes may be cast in the ballot, be employed in a ship either at sea or at a place outside Great Britain.

(2C) In subsections (2A) and (2B) "merchant seaman" means a person whose employment, or the greater part of it, is carried out on board sea-going ships.'—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Clause 14

NOTICE OF BALLOT AND SAMPLE VOTING PAPER FOR EMPLOYERS

Amendments made: No. 33, in page 28, leave out lines 14 to 19 and insert —

'(c) describing (so that he can readily ascertain them) the employees of the employer who it is reasonable for the union to believe (at the time when the steps to comply with that paragraph are taken) will be entitled to vote in the ballot.'

No. 31, in page 28, line 33, at end insert—

'(5) This section, in its application to a ballot in which merchant seamen to whom section 230(2A) applies are entitled to vote, shall have effect with the substitution in subsection (3), for references to the voting paper which is to be sent to the employees, of references to the voting paper which is to be sent or otherwise provided to them.'—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Clause 16

SCRUTINY OF BALLOTS

Amendments made: No. 34, in page 29, line 37, at end insert—

'(a) state the name of the independent scrutineer,'.

No. 35, in page 29, line 38, leave out from beginning to 'clearly'.

No. 32, in page 29, line 45, at end insert—

'This subsection, in its application to a ballot in which merchant seamen to whom section 230(2A) applies are entitled to vote, shall have effect with the substitution, for the reference to the address to which the voting paper is to be returned, of a reference to the ship to which the seamen belong.'

No. 36, in page 30, line 27, at end insert—

'(4) After section 226B of the 1992 Act there shall be inserted—

"*Exclusion for small ballots.*

226C. Nothing in section 226B, section 229(1A)(a) or section 231B shall impose a requirement on a trade union unless—

(a) the number of members entitled to vote in the ballot, or

(b) where separate workplace ballots are held in accordance with section 228(1), the aggregate of the number of members entitled to vote in each of them,

exceeds 50".'—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Clause 19

RIGHT TO MATERNITY LEAVE AND RIGHT TO RETURN TO WORK

Amendments made: No. 1, in page 36, line 44, after 'shall' insert

'subject to sections 36 and 37'.

No. 2, in page 37, line 6, at end insert—

'(3) An employee who has both the right conferred by this section and a corresponding right conferred by her contract of employment or otherwise may take advantage of whichever right is, in any particular respect, the more favourable.'

No. 3, in page 37, line 8, leave out from 'with' to end of line 14 and insert—

'(a) the date which, in accordance with section 36, she notifies to her employer as the date on which she intends her period of absence from work in exercise of her right to maternity leave to commence, or

(b) if earlier, the first day on which she is absent from work wholly or partly because of pregnancy or childbirth after the beginning of the sixth week before the expected week of childbirth.'

No. 37, in page 37, line 26, at end insert

'or until the birth of the child, if later'.

No. 38, in page 37, line 32, leave out from first 'of' to 'by' and insert

'the period mentioned in subsection (1)'.

No. 4, in page 37, line 43, at end insert—

'Notice of commencement of leave.

36.—(1) An employee shall not have the right conferred by section 33 unless—

(a) she notifies her employer of the date (within the restriction imposed by subsection (2)) ("the notified leave date") on which she intends her period of absence from work in exercise of her right to maternity leave to commence—

(i) not less than twenty-one days before that date, or

(ii) if that is not reasonably practicable, as soon as is reasonably practicable,

(b) where she is first absent from work wholly or partly because of pregnancy or childbirth before the notified leave date or before she has notified such a date and after the beginning of the sixth week before the expected week of childbirth, she notifies her employer as soon as is reasonably practicable that she is absent for that reason, or

(c) where childbirth occurs before the notified leave date or before she has notified such a date, she notifies her employer that she has given birth as soon as is reasonably practicable after the birth,

and any notice she is required to give under paragraphs (a) to (c) shall, if her employer so requests, be given in writing.

(2) No date may be notified under subsection (1)(a) which occurs before the beginning of the eleventh week before the expected week of childbirth.

(3) Where, in the case of an employee, either paragraph (b) or (c) of subsection (1) has fallen to be satisfied, and has been so satisfied, nothing in paragraph (a) of that subsection shall impose any requirement on the employee.'.

No. 5, in page 38, leave out lines 33 to 37.—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Clause 20

DISMISSAL RIGHTS

Amendments made: No. 6, in page 39, line 6, at end insert—

'( ) the reason (or, if there is more than one, the principal reason) for her dismissal—

(i) where, before the end of her maternity leave period, she gave to her employer a certificate from a registered medical practitioner stating that by reason of disease or bodily or mental disablement she would be incapable of work after the end of that period, and

(ii) her contract of employment was terminated within the four week period following the end of her maternity leave period in circumstances where she continued to be incapable of work and the certificate relating to her incapacity remained current,

is that she has given birth to a child or any other reason connected with her having given birth to a child,'

No. 43, in page 39, line 39, leave out '(a)'.

No. 44, in page 39, line 46, leave out '(a)'.—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Clause 29

CONSTITUTION OF INDUSTRIAL TRIBUNALS

Amendment proposed: No. 45, in page 44, line 29 at end insert—

'( ) No order shall be made under subsection (2D) unless a draft of the order has been laid before Parliament and approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament.'.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): I wish to speak to the amendment as I believe that legislation passed in the House should have our constituents' footprints across it. While the title of the clause to which the amendment relates is: "Constitution of industrial tribunals", one should rightly call it the "unibunal" clause as I cannot think of another word to describe a tribunal which has one person sitting alone. The amendment is important as the factors set out in subsection (2D) can be brought into effect only by an affirmative resolution.

I wish to illustrate with a constituency case why the House must be careful before it allows a tribunal to become a "unibunal", especially in a case which is not contested, where the employer does not turn up. It is a case with which Ministers, particularly the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, should be familiar, as he has dismissed most of the parliamentary questions that I have asked on the matter in recent months. I have corresponded with Ministers, asked parliamentary questions and even contacted the chair of the tribunal, which took me back to where I started, as he said that he could not tell me any more than he had already said.

I shall take a few minutes to outline the case, as it is crucial. One of my constituents, Mr. Colin Yates, was dismissed by his employers in January 1991 on the ground of redundancy. He appealed to a tribunal against the dismissal, claiming that it was unfair as he had not been consulted or offered alternative employment, which was available.

He won his case at a tribunal hearing in July 1991. The employer did not turn up. The tribunal did not even make a basic award because my constituent had already received

[Mr. Jeff Rooker]

a redundancy payment, but it made a very large compensatory award—more than £33,000—for the loss of salary. That is the highest award made by a tribunal that I have located in my researches. That led my constituent to believe that he was due to obtain a considerable amount of compensation.

At the time of the award there was a maximum statutory level on compensatory awards of £8,925. Yet the chair of the tribunal awarded more than £33,000. My constituent lost £1,400 in unemployment benefit, leaving an expectation of over £7,500.

Here comes the rub. The firm, Bygging Rust Proofing, went into voluntary liquidation in 1991. The law does not allow compensatory awards in respect of unfair dismissal to be paid out of the national insurance fund: the employee goes to the back of the queue, which means that he will never see a penny piece.

That strikes me as ludicrous. In the instance that I have raised, one party did not turn up to contest the case, as set out in new subsection (2C)(f), and a huge compensatory award was made on the merits of the case. Yet, by means of a quirk—the wheeze of voluntary liquidation—the firm was able to avoid paying a penny to an aggrieved ex-employee. I might add that the company is still operating under another name, and that its chief director, Henry Gold, is still a director of what is effectively the same company.

In correspondence, Ministers and—before the general election—their predecessors have dismissed my constituent's case out of hand. They have flatly refused to say that compensatory awards should be met from within the national insurance fund, as is the basic award in unfair dismissal cases.

We may legislate tonight to allow tribunals to engage in City-style procedures, whereby a single person can make a decision which will apparently be fairly easy to accept if it is not contested. Because an employer did not turn up and thus avoided contesting the case that I have cited, a huge award will never be paid. My constituent will not receive a penny.

If the Minister is not prepared to answer my point now, I hope that he will go away and think about it. Perhaps he will look at the volumes of correspondence. It is grossly unfair that, following the making of an award in a public tribunal, a citizen who expects to receive some, if not all, of the money should not receive a penny because of a quirk in the law.

I am sorry to have detained the House at this late hour, but I promised my constituent Colin Yates that, if an occasion arose for me to put his case to the House succinctly without going into laborious detail, I would do so. I have tried every other avenue: I have tried correspondence, parliamentary questions and even writing to the chairman of the tribunal, which got me nowhere. The amendment seemed to be the best hook on which to hang what, in other circumstances, would have been an Adjournment debate. I am grateful to the House for its tolerance.

Mr. McLoughlin: We are to allow industrial tribunal chairmen to sit alone in some very specific cases. As the hon Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) said, the change that we are making is to invoke the affirmative-resolution procedure, which was welcomed by the Committee and, indeed, will probably be welcomed by the hon. Gentleman. The case to which he referred raises serious questions; perhaps we could meet and discuss it more fully.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I welcome the amendment, which improves new subsections (2C) and (2D). I hope that the Government will continue to find ways in which initial tribunal claims can be heard more quickly, and that they will find more ways of keeping the lawyers out whenever possible. In particular—this applies to a certain extent to clause 30—I hope that there will be some way of ensuring that the appeal tribunal waiting time no longer remains at two years in England and Wales, when it is only five months in Scotland.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 33

FEES FOR EXERCISE OF FUNCTIONS BY ACAS

Amendment made: No. 46, in page 47, line 24, leave out from 'person' to 'unless' in line 26.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Clause 34

CAREERS SERVICES

Mr. Dobson: I beg to move amendment No. 84, in page 48, line 8, at end insert—

'(1A) In exercising his functions under subsection (11) the Secretary of State shall meet the requirements of disabled persons or persons having learning difficulties.'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to consider amendment No. 85, in page 48, line 31, at end insert—

'(3A) For the purposes of this section a disabled person is defined in section 1 of the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944, and persons having learning difficulties as defined under section 120, subsections (11) and (12), of the Education Reform Act 1988.'.

Mr. Dobson: I do not want to detain the House unduly, but it is an important principle that if the Government are to privatise the schools careers service they should write into law requirements to meet the particular needs of disabled persons, or persons with learning difficulties. The Government do not want to accept our amendment at this stage, but I should like an undertaking from them that they will reconsider the issue and possibly table amendments in the other place.

Mr. McLoughlin: We have covered some of the points raised by the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues in Committee. I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern about the amendment. I think that we have the powers to deal with the matter. However, I take on board the point made by the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends, and also the representations that have been put to me by my hon. Friends. I very much hope that we can come to an agreement. I hope, too, that, even though we cannot accept the amendment, we shall be able to satisfy the hon. Gentleman by means of orders and the way that we implement the changes.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the way he has responded to the sensible points that have been made by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) in trying to meet the requirements of disabled people, or people with learning difficulties. I understand why it is not possible to debate my suggestion that there should be an annual report from the careers service in its new form. If that point could be discussed in another place, it would be possible to consider how the careers service would want to adapt to the changing situation. This, however, is not the time to do that.

Mr. Dobson: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 41

COMMENCEMENT

Amendment made: No. 10, in page 54, line 7, at beginning insert 'Subject to any other commencement provision,'.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Schedule 1

POLITICAL FUND BALLOTS

Amendments made: No. 60, in page 56, line 43, at end insert—

'(3C) The duty of confidentiality as respects the register is incorporated in the scrutineer's appointment.'

No. 61, in page 57, line 35, at end insert—

'( ) The duty of confidentiality as respects the register is incorporated in an appointment under this section.'—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Schedule 3

SUSPENSION FROM WORK ON MATERNITY GROUNDS

Amendments made: No. 39, in page 62, line 22, leave out from first 'employee' to 'the' in line 23.

No. 40, in page 62, line 24, at end insert—

'(1A) For alternative work to be suitable for an employee for the purposes of this section—

(a) the work must be of a kind which is both suitable in relation to her and appropriate for her to do in the circumstances; and

(b) the terms and conditions applicable to her for performing the work, if they differ from the corresponding terms and conditions applicable to her for performing the work she normally performs under her contract of employment, must not be substantially less favourable to her than those corresponding terms and conditions.'

No. 41, in page 62, line 45, leave out from beginning to 'and' in line 47 and insert

'work which is suitable alternative work for the purposes of section 46.'—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Schedule 4

PROVISIONS SUBSTITUTED FOR SECTIONS 1 TO 6 OF 1978 ACT

Amendment made: No. 51, in page 66, leave out lines 26 to 49.—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Schedule 5

EMPLOYMENT PROTECTION IN HEALTH AND SAFETY CASES

Amendment proposed: No. 54, in page 68, line 10, at end insert—

'(bb) being an employee at a place where—

(i) there was no such representative or safety committee, or

(ii) there was such a representative or safety committee but it was not reasonably practicable for the employee to raise the matter by those means,

he brought to his employer's attention, by reasonable means, circumstances connected with his work which he reasonably believed were harmful or potentially harmful to health or safety,'.—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 47, 48, 55, 49 and 50.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: If I may speak briefly to the amendment, it brings us to the end of the Report stage and also to what I call the social aspect of the European Community. It is worth recognising that the United Kingdom has one of the best health and safety records in the Community.

Amendment No. 54 deals with an employee at a place where there is no such representative or safety committee. Our law builds on the Act that makes provision for health and safety and on the work of the Health and Safety Executive. It also builds on the tripartite Health and Safety Commission.

I hope that those who are considering the social policy of the European Community in the context of other Bills understand that one of the reasons why our health and safety performance is better than that of most other countries is the co-operation at work between representatives of employees and representatives of employers. As well as the responsibility at individual workplaces, the framework of the Health and Safety Commission is built upon recognition of the expertise, interests and responsibility of people at work.

I recommend that the Treasury Bench should try to build on that as a way of resisting some of the amendments to other Bills and should try to recognise the role of trade unions and the hundreds of thousands of people within the trade union movement who give of their time to represent their fellow workers and, for that matter, who help to protect their own employers from the health and safety risks that would otherwise threaten their businesses.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 47, in page 68, line 11 leave out 'was' and insert 'he reasonably believed to be'.

No. 48, in page 68, line 17 leave out from 'of' to 'he' and insert

'danger which he reasonably believed to be serious and imminent,'.

No. 55, in page 70, line 5, at end insert—

'(bb) being an employee at a place where—

(i) there was no such representative or safety committee, or

(ii) there was such a representative or safety committee but it was not reasonably practicable for the employee to raise the matter by those means,

brought to his employer's attention, by reasonable means, circumstances connected with his work which he reasonably believed were harmful or potentially harmful to health or safety,'.

No. 49, in page 70, line 6, leave out 'was' and insert 'he reasonably believed to be'.

No. 50, in page 70, line 12 leave out from 'of' to end and insert

'danger which he reasonably believed to be serious and imminent,'.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Schedule 7

CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendments made: No. 7, in page 85, line 6 leave out second 'and'.

No. 8, in page 85, line 10, at end insert—

'(v) after that definition there shall be inserted—

"" notified leave date" shall be construed in accordance with section 36;";'.

No. 42, in page 87, line 5, after 'begins' insert

'or where that day falls within an employee's maternity leave period or within the further period up to the day on which an employee exercises her right to return to work under section 39, the day before the beginning of the maternity leave period.'

No. 62, in page 88, line 2, at beginning insert—

'. In section 25 of the 1992 Act (application to Certification Officer as respects failures in relation to the register of members)—

(a) in subsection (1), after the words "section 24" there shall be inserted the words "or 24A"; and

(b) after subsection (7), there shall be inserted—

"(8) The Certification Officer shall not entertain an application for a declaration as respects an alleged failure to comply with the requirements of section 24A in relation to a ballot to which that section applies unless the application is made before the end of the period of one year beginning with the last day on which votes could be cast in the ballot".

. In section 26 of the 1992 Act (application to court as respects failures in relation to the register of members)—

(a) in subsection (1), after the words "section 24" there shall be inserted the words "or 24A"; and

(b) after subsection (6) there shall be inserted—

"(7) The court shall not entertain an application for a declaration as respects an alleged failure to comply with the requirements of section 24A in relation to a ballot to which that section applies unless the application is made before the end of the period of one year beginning with the last day on which votes could be cast in the ballot".'—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Schedule 8

TRANSITIONAL PROVISIONS AND SAVINGS

Amendments made: No. 52, in page 98, line 36, at end insert

'; and subsections (2) and (4) of that section shall apply accordingly.'.

No. 53, in page 98, leave out lines 37 to 44.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Schedule 9

REPEALS AND REVOCATIONS

Amendment made: No. 11, in page 103, line 20, column 3, at end insert 'Sections 115 and 116'.

Bill to be read the Third time this day.

Hill Livestock (Compensatory Allowances)

12.4 am

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Hill Livestock (Compensatory Allowances) (Amendment) Regulations 1993 (S.I., 1993, No. 70), dated 18th January 1993, a copy of which was laid before this House on 18th January, be annulled.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. There is notification on the Order Paper that the

"Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments has not yet completed its consideration of the Instrument."

That rubric is no longer true because this afternoon, at a meeting of the Joint Committee, we completed our consideration. In the Vote Office, a very brief extract from our report is available to hon. Members. However, I must point out that the terms of the Standing Order under which the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments is established places an obligation on that Committee to provide a report for the House. Had the matter been more complicated or had it required evidence or a further memorandum, it would not have been possible to have provided the information in time for the debate. That would have negated the whole purpose of having a Joint Committee to review statutory instruments and report to the House. I hope that the Government will note that they should seek to lay instruments on the Order Paper only when the Joint Committee has reported.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): I know that the hon. Gentleman has great experience of these matters. He will know that the arrangement of business is not a matter for the Chair, but I have no doubt that Ministers will have noted what the hon. Gentleman said.

Dr. Strang: Successive Governments have recognised the need to provide special assistance for livestock farmers in our hill areas. That assistance is necessary to compensate them for the difficult farming conditions in our hills and uplands.

It was the post-war Labour Government who enacted the Hill Farming Act 1946, which was introduced to rehabilitate hill farming land. Farmers who adopted hill improvement schemes received capital grants for farm buildings, houses, roads, fencing and land improvement. The Act also made long-term provision for headage payments for hill cows and hill sheep.

In 1972 it was the Conservative Government who negotiated an annex to the treaty of accession to the European Community which enabled the British Government to continue the hill subsidies. Again, a Labour Government were in power in 1975 when the hill livestock compensatory allowance directive was negotiated.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Strang: In a moment.

That directive enabled the hill subsidies to be put on a European Community basis.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman has forgotten Joe Godber's work on this matter. On 1 May 1973, the Council, at his behest, agreed a resolution about farming in poorer areas. He had to fight very hard for that. The hon. Gentleman omitted that little bit.

Dr. Strang: No, the hon. Lady has got that wrong. I remember putting a question to the right hon. Gentleman when he was Minister for Agriculture. He made a contribution when the Conservative Government were in power from 1970-74.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I know, at column 997.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. This is not a private conversation.

Dr. Strang: It is important to recognise that hill livestock compensatory allowances are paid to compensate farmers for the natural handicaps in the hills. Hon. Members who represent constituencies with hills and uplands well know the severe conditions with which the farmers have to cope. They know that hill farmers cannot be expected to compete with farms in the lowlands without special Government assistance. They also know that the hill farming measures have been successful in maintaining the population in our rural areas and in supporting the rural economy.

The purpose of the Opposition's prayer is to reject the cut in the hill livestock compensatory allowances for sheep in severely disadvantaged areas announced by the Government in December. If the prayer is carried, the Government's regulations cutting the HLCAs will be annulled. In those circumstances, the Government would have a duty to implement the wishes of Parliament and table new regulations maintaining the HLCAs at their current levels.

Mr. Jonathan Evans (Brecon and Radnor): Will the hon. Gentleman clarify the position for those of us who are concerned about the reduction in HLCAs? If the prayer is carried, will it be possible to make HLCA payments, or will they be stopped from tonight?

Dr. Strang: I have just explained that. This is the proper procedure for voting against the cuts. The Government have an obligation to implement the wishes of Parliament. If the hon. Gentleman wants to stand up for his hill farmers and their families tonight, he must vote with the Opposition.

The Government have advanced two arguments to justify the cuts in the HLCAs. First, they have referred to an improvement in hill farm incomes in recent years. Secondly, they have pointed to the increase in the hill ewe premium and to the less-favoured areas supplement to that hill ewe premium.

But the Government must recognise that, while it is true that on their own figures hill farm incomes are estimated to rise this year and the previous year, that increase is from a desperately low level. The average incomes are well below the 1988-89 level and significantly below the average in the five years from 1983-84 to 1987-88.

According to the Government's figures for the distribution of farm incomes for 1991, the most recent year for which figures are available, 48 per cent. of English LFA farms produced for their occupants a cash income of less than £10,000. In Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland the corresponding figures were respectively 42 per cent., 37 per cent. and 62 per cent.

Some farmers earn a great deal less. A recent survey showed that in Wales 17 per cent. of farmers in the less-favoured areas earned less than £5,000 a year. We welcome the evidence that hill farm incomes are increasing, but they are rising from a dismally low level.

We also welcome the increase in the hill ewe premium, arising from the devaluation of sterling in October and the consequent devaluation of the green pound in January, and in the less-favoured areas supplement, agreed at the Agricultural Council in December.

It is true that the combined effect of those increases more than offsets the cut in the HLCAs. But the Minister must appreciate that it is unfair to tell hill farmers that, because their incomes now show some prospect of rising after such desperately low levels during the 1980s, the HLCAs will be cut.

Why did farmers from throughout the United Kingdom converge on Parliament earlier this year to protest against the cuts in the HLCAs? It was because they saw the cuts as unprecedented. It is true that previous Governments had failed to increase the HLCAs in some years, but the farmers regarded it as unprecedented for a Government to cut them in cash terms.

It is true that farmers hoped that their incomes were beginning to rise again, but from the Government's statements it seemed clear that they had no idea of the level of poverty and misery which had occurred in the hill areas throughout the 1980s because of the total collapse in those incomes. When an income falls by 50 per cent., as these incomes fell between 1988-89 and 1989-90, one needs an increase of 100 per cent. to return to the original level. That is something which the Government do not seem to appreciate in all their statements about this.

We shall vote for this motion because we want a fair deal for hill farmers and their families. We shall vote for it because we shall be voting against depopulation in the hills and the uplands. We shall vote for it out of our recognition of the crucial importance of hill farming to the rural economy in some of the most beautiful parts of these islands. I urge all hon. Members to support the Opposition motion.

12.16 am

Mr. Cryer: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I wonder whether there has been any explanation of why the Minister of Agriculture is not here——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member well knows that that is not a point of order for me.

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Curry): It seems to me to be both natural and right that a member of the ministerial team in the Ministry of Agriculture who has a very large number of hill farmers in his constituency and knows them well should seek to reply to this debate, because—*[Interruption.]* Well, let me finish my point. Because it is natural that my personal experience of my constituency leads me to want to do so. I asked my right hon. Friend that I should speak in this debate, and he agreed that I should. It is my responsibility, and I will take that responsibility. I cannot see why anyone at all should complain.

Ms. Hilary Armstrong (Durham, North-West): Perhaps the Minister is unaware of the great insult felt by hill

[Ms. Hilary Armstrong]

farmers because of the words and pronouncements of the Minister of Agriculture. That is why we want him here. It is he who insulted hill farmers.

Mr. Curry: We have had the thinnest speech that I have heard from an Opposition spokesman for a very long time. We have now had an entirely irrelevant point from the hon. Lady. Clearly, the Opposition have not got their hearts in it. I think that they are beginning to regret that they launched this operation.

Dr. Strang: What concerns Labour hon. Members is that the Minister was seen in the Chamber during the previous Division. Why is he not present for the debate?

Mr. Curry: This is typical of the Opposition. They are not concerned about hill farmers at all. If they are so concerned about hill farmers, why have they spent the past five minutes talking about my right hon. Friend?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. There is too much noise and now too much heat is being generated. Perhaps the hon. Member can now continue with his speech. May I add that a number of hon. Members have indicated that they wish to speak in this fairly short debate.

Mr. Curry: The decision on HLCAs has to be seen in the context of the total support for farmers in the uplands which is directly linked to production. I am not talking about the environmentally sensitive areas; I am not talking about the countryside stewardship; I am talking about the totality of support. *[Interruption.]* Madam Deputy Speaker, there is a choice. I do not mind giving way. I often give way. It simply eats into the time that other hon. Members have to intervene in the debate. I will give way once more, and that will be 50 per cent. more than the Opposition spokesman did.

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): I was wondering whether the Minister would like to meditate on the significance of the fact that the Minister of Agriculture said that the market conditions had improved to such an extent that the HLCA must be cut. As chairman of the Agriculture Council, he suggested that the sheep annual premium supplement needed to be increased because of the difficult conditions in the sheep meat market especially for producers in the uplands.

Mr. Curry: If the hon. Gentleman waits, I will come to the figures. My right hon. Friend was an excellent chairman of the Agriculture Council for three— *[Interruption.]* I hope that farmers will listen to the irrelevant babble coming from the Opposition Benches and judge how seriously they take these matters.

There are three sources of support for farmers. There is the market place, which is sometimes forgotten; there is the ewe premium, and that obviously depends on the pound-ecu rate and the supplement; and there is the HLCA payment. When all these are taken into consideration, as they all were taken into consideration at the beginning of this calculation, the hill sheep farmer is significantly better off.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery) *rose*——

Mr. Curry: I will not give way; I want to make some progress.

Madam Deputy Speaker: If the Minister is not giving way, the hon. Member must resume his seat, as I am sure he knows.

Mr. Carlile: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it right for a Minister to misinform the House? The fact is that hill farmers will be worse off this year. Next year there may be a marginal improvement. Why will he not tell the truth to the House, or leave it to his Minister of Agriculture to do so?

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. and learned Member raised that as a point of order. The accuracy of what the Minister or anybody else says is not a matter for the Chair—thank goodness.

Mr. Curry: The figures that I will give are absolutely accurate. There is no purpose whatsoever in my seeking to misrepresent the situation. I cannot think why the hon. and learned Gentleman thinks that there would be the slightest profit in that, and I do not intend to do it.

Mr. Colin Shepherd (Hereford): I would be most grateful if my hon. Friend could explore the question of the returns from the market place. I have to say in all honesty that my hill farmers are puzzled as to how their figures match up with his. I do not doubt that there is an adequate explanation, but the sort of figures that I am quoted are these. Between 1991 and 1992, one farmer dropped 13·2 per cent. in the market place, another 17·2 per cent., another 7·6 per cent. and another 21·7 per cent. So, if they are supposed to have had a better return from the market place for fat lambs, possibly there is some aspect that I am not taking into account. Can my hon. Friend help?

Mr. Curry: I will try to help my hon. Friend. I will give him the figures, which are, of course, arrived at by independent academic authorities. Those are the figures on which we have based all our calculations in the past and they have not changed in this circumstance.

It is entirely wrong to isolate the HLCA from the totality of support that farmers get, as if there were a moral virtue in the HLCA payment which does not obtain with any other payment. The decision on the HLCA was taken after the pound had left the exchange rate mechanism, when the consequent devaluation was clearly signalled, and when the imminent abolition of MCAs meant that that would work through very rapidly indeed into the price farmers received. The three factors are income, the ewe premium and the HLCAs. I will deal with them in turn. The income survey is conducted by universities and colleges, except in Northern Ireland, where it is conducted by the Government Department there. It is based on 850 hill livestock farms in the less-favoured areas. The survey has been carried on for 50 years and this particular method has been carried on for over 10 years. Nobody, and that includes the National Farmers Union, disputes the methodology used or the legitimacy of the survey.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): I thank the Minister for giving way in this short debate. If the methodology is accepted—and I do not believe that it is accepted by my farmers—can he explain why all the farmers in the severely disadvantaged areas, who do not seem to be singled out in the surveys, are of one mind in believing that their position, as expressed to Members by their bankers, their accountants and those in the Benefits

Agency who are having to pay out family credit to farmers this year, is so much worse, and that their plight seems not to be appreciated at all by the Government?

Mr. Curry: That is not true on any count. We carry out surveys on income. They are not disputed in their base because they are carried out by academic institutions and not by the Government. They are not rigged. The NFU and the Scottish NFU have not disputed their validity. I do not deny that the income increase is from a low base. I am not trying to pretend that is not the case. However, it has been an increase from a low base and refers to representative farms.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): The Minister mentioned the Scottish NFU. Just last night I received a call from a member of the executive of the Forth Valley NFU telling me that the figures for Scotland that the Minister quoted misrepresented income figures, as income for the year 1992 did not relate to a 12-month year but to the period from 1 January 1992 to 31 March 1993. Suddenly we had a 15-month year. Those figures were quoted in the House and denied by the Scottish NFU.

Mr. Curry: All the figures are in the Library of the House of Commons, so the hon. Gentleman can examine them, but those income figures are identical to those which we have used in the past. When we use them as the basis for demanding an increase, the complaints are far fewer than when they are used to justify a decline.

Livestock farms in the severely disadvantaged areas throughout the United Kingdom—that is 90 per cent. of the less-favoured areas—have seen their income go up by 35 per cent. in real terms in the two years to mid-February 1993. In England, the net farm income on specialist sheep farms has gone from £6,600 to £14,200. That relates just to the farm and does not include bed and breakfast or the wife's activities. It takes into account the costs of depreciation, unpaid family labour, valuation charges and imputed rent for owner-occupiers. In Scotland the equivalent figure has risen from £8,100 to £11,400 and in Wales the same survey shows that the figures have increased from £10,500 to £18,700 and for Northern Ireland, where all the farms are livestock farms, the figure has increased from £4,000 to £6,800—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Gentlemen should complain to the University College, Aberystwyth, because that institution provided the figures.

Mr. Alex Carlile *rose*——

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North) *rose*——

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Minister is misinforming the House about the figures for Northern Ireland because the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland stated quite recently that the average hill-farm income for Northern Ireland is exactly £3,761. If the Minister considers that to be an adequate income, he is being ridiculous.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have already told another hon. Gentleman that accuracy is not a matter for the Chair and is not a point of order.

Mr. Curry: The figures——

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: It is not a point of order. Mr. Curry.

Mr. Curry: The figures are in the Library of the House of Commons. I am quoting figures which are in the public domain and which are the results of the surveys upon which we have always based our actions in the past. I am sorry if hon. Gentlemen do not like the outcome of the figures, but they remain the same, and the figures for cash in hand are proportionately larger.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Curry: I shall not give way again because it would not be fair to those who wish to speak in the debate.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The matter in dispute is central to the case that will be made by Members representing constituencies in Northern Ireland. The Minister with responsibilities for agriculture in Northern Ireland is sitting next to the Minister of State. Can he confirm or deny the figures presented by the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland? Would it not be advisable to ask him to clear it up now and take the opportunity to stand by his figures—or not?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have made it quite clear that the accuracy or otherwise of figures has nothing whatsoever to do with the Chair and is not a point of order.

Rev. Ian Paisley: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I hope that it is not the same point of order.

Rev. Ian Paisley: No. If the Minister is giving figures from the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland, let him give the figures and not misrepresent what he is saying to the House.

Mr. Curry: I am misrepresenting nothing; I am reporting the outcome of the surveys.

The ewe premium is paid in three instalments. Without any devaluation, the ewe premium would have been £14·61. After devaluation, it comes to £17·25. The supplement for less-favoured areas was £4·37. After devaluation plus the additional £1·05, this takes the figure to £6·57. The overall net gain on that subsidy is £4·84 per ewe.

The final payment for the ewe premium and the supplement is £23·82 per ewe. That is the supplement for hardy ewes in severely disadvantaged areas. When the third instalment of the ewe premium is paid in early April, the overwhelming majority of 90,000 claims will receive a sum of about £10.50.

The third strand is the hill livestock compensatory allowance. The high rate was £8·75, and that has gone down to £6·50. The lower rate, which is for non-hardy ewes, has gone down by the same amount proportionally to £3·60. In the disadvantaged areas, there has been no cut in the hill livestock compensatory allowance; it has been increased to £2·86.

If we net all that out, we find that farmers in severely disadvantaged areas will be £2·59 per ewe better off with regard to their hardy ewes, which are 58 per cent. of the flock. They will be £3·54 per ewe better off for their non-hardy ewes, which are 28 per cent. of the flock. In the

[Mr. Curry]

disadvantaged areas, farmers will be £5·25 per ewe better off with regard to about 14 per cent. of the flock. Hill farmers in severely disadvantaged areas will get £13 per hardy ewe more than farmers in the low land. It is worth while reporting that that is the case.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his full explanation. I represent hill farmers and those in less-favoured areas. If the figures are so good in my hon. Friend's view, why are the National Farmers Union, the Country Landowners Association and the Council for the Protection of Rural England—none of them really anti-Tory organisations—so worried about the income of hill farmers and their ability to maintain themselves and the countryside which many of us consider so important?

Mr. Curry: My hon. Friend is not an anti-Tory organisation, either. Did he really expect any of those organisations to applaud the cuts? We know that they do not applaud them. They would prefer the cuts not to be made.

What I am saying to those organisations and many individual farmers is that the net effect of the cuts will leave them better off than many anticipated when they made their farm plans. When they made their farm plans, I am sure that they were not banking on a ewe premium at the present rate.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): The Minister has just accepted that there is a cut. In the figures which he has just given—even if we accept his figures as to the net effect—he made it perfectly clear that the positive net effect is much less for those in severely disadvantaged areas than for those in disadvantaged areas. Surely the whole point of the hill livestock compensatory allowance is to give specific advantage to those who have difficulties because of transport and other factors. The Minister is eroding the differential, and that is the whole point.

Mr. Curry: In certain respects, low-land sheep producers found themselves in the most difficult circumstances recently. Upland farmers have the push in the hill livestock compensatory allowance for the less-favoured premium. The differential between the allowances for upland farmers and some lowland farmers is significant. Lowland farmers have found themselves in some difficulties.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Curry: I shall give way to my hon. Friend. It will be the last time that I give way, otherwise no one else will get a chance to speak.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: As I do not come from Cheshire, and I have farmed 1,600 feet up, I know something about sheep. My farmers appreciate the battle that my hon. Friend the Minister had to get the extra 79p. It was a bit of very smart footwork on his part. He got it a year early. But the sting is in the tail. Devaluation gives us a bonus for now. But what will happen if it goes the other way? Can my hon. Friend guarantee that we will then get the benefit? If the pound goes the wrong way, will he increase the compensatory allowance?

Mr. Curry: I had better not speculate about which is the right way for the pound to go. Just as on this occasion we examined all the factors in determining the final conclusion, so next year we shall examine all the factors present in determining the recommendations that we make. That would be a sensible thing to do.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Curry: No. I have given way infinitely more frequently than the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman.

Mr. Foulkes: I am grateful to the Minister.

Mr. Curry: No. I shall not give way.

Some farmers will not receive the sums that I have quoted. I wish to make that clear to the House so that I am not accused of misrepresentation. They include those with more than 1,000 ewes, to whom the ceiling applies if they have not organised their partnership schemes—but most of them have. They also include those with un-tupped Herdwick shearlings. I will translate for those who might have a problem with that. The Herdwick is a sheep; un-tupped means that it has not yet had the pleasure of a ram; shearling means that it has been sheared once but is less than two years old. Such sheep receive only a 70 per cent. premium. But there are only 25,000 sheep in the country to which that applies.

Mr. Foulkes: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Curry: No.

I shall give some typical consequences of the change. Farmer No. 1 claims on 662 ewes, as against 652 last year and 40 cows, which is the same as last year. His total subsidy from HLCA and the ewe premium will be £22,485. That is £3,868 more than the previous year—an increase of 20·1 per cent.

A second farmer has 483 ewes, on top of which are 102 Herdwicks. Last year he had 439, on top of which were 84 Herdwicks. He has five cattle—unchanged from last year. He will receive £17,512 in support from the two schemes. That is £3,879 up on the previous year—an increase of 28·5 per cent.

A third farmer has 607 ewes, as against 590 the previous year. His number of cows is unchanged at 72. He will receive £21,318—an increase of £4,235. A farmer with 683 ewes, against 696 the previous year—so he has destocked somewhat—with no cattle, against six the previous year, will receive £19,835. That is an increase of £3,031, or 18 per cent.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it appropriate in this debate to refer to the problem of the hill shipyard workers, the hill steel workers and other workers who apparently do not get all this nonsense? They would not know——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I think that I can help the hon. Gentleman. The answer is no.

Mr. Curry: The four cases that I have quoted are not taken entirely at random. They are the four farmers with whom the National Farmers Union invited journalists to discuss their position at the mass lobby of Parliament. Every one of them is substantially better off as a result of the change that we have made.

Mr. Foulkes: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Curry: Farmers will be paid the HLCAs. The first batch of cheques is ready to go out today. We shall pay as soon as the applications come in. The third instalment of the ewe premium will go out in early April. It will be about £10·50. It will go to 90,000 eligible farmers. So the Government's commitment is clear. Half a billion pounds a year of public support goes to hill farmers.

Mr. Foulkes: Will the Minister give way on that point?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman should be congratulated on his persistence but not on his success.

We support hill farmers and we are proud to do so. We support the landscape and we are proud to do so. We promote the food which a farmer produces and we seek an ever wider market for it. We are proud to do that. We have husbanded agriculture through an intensely difficult period of change and challenge. We are passionately committed to doing that.

Hill farming is tough; we do not deny that. The conditions are hard, and the rewards are rarely generous, and often meagre. We know that the contribution that farmers make to the community is essential, and we shall sustain them in that role. In this regard, we have kept faith with them, and we shall continue to do so. By their baying tonight, the Opposition have shown that this motion is opportunistic, outrageous and ill-informed. Their concern is simulated, and I urge my hon. Friends to oppose the motion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: As a great many hon. Members wish to contribute to this debate, I make a plea for short, succinct speeches.

12.40 am

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South-West): During agriculture questions on 3 December I asked the Minister if he could give an undertaking that the GATT negotiations would not affect support for hill farmers. I received the very comforting answer that those negotiations would not affect HLCA payments. I should have asked the Minister whether he would tamper with HLCA payments, as, two or three weeks later, he announced that he would cut them. This was a bombshell to my farmers, who attempt to make a living in the upland areas of Clwyd. Farmers in those and other severely disadvantaged areas throughout the United Kingdom are trapped by the conditions in which they find themselves. They depend on traditional methods, and have little opportunity to diversify. For years they have been at the bottom of the incomes league table. This has taken its toll on hill farming areas in economic, cultural and social terms.

Farming is absolutely necessary to maintenance of the current condition of the countryside—the state in which the city dweller expects to see it—and to preservation of the fabric of rural areas already eroded by Government policy on the privatisation of bus services and by cuts in education and in council services. The need for hill farms has been recognised by successive Governments and by the European Communities, and the HLCAs go some way towards helping to maintain the upland farmers. But these were cut for the first time ever by the Minister. After my farmers had got over the shock of this unprecedented move, they were astonished—nay, incredulous—to be told that the cut was justified by some massive rise in incomes that they were supposed to have enjoyed over the past 18 months. Such farmers are hardy folk. They may spend most of their working lives on the hilltops by themselves, but they are not stupid. They know that in some cases incomes have improved, but they know also to what levels incomes sank in the previous two years.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Minister of State have acknowledged that incomes have risen from a low base, but they are very coy about describing how low that base has been. In 1991, statistics showed that farm businesses in Wales suffered a net drop in income of more than 25 per cent., to £7,500. Of hill farmers, 45 per cent. are on zero net incomes and a further 40 per cent. have incomes of less than £10,000. In other words, 85 per cent. of all farmers in the less-favoured areas have incomes of £145 or less a week—only 56 per cent. of the average industrial wage.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I am sure that the experience of the hon. Gentleman's farmers is the same as that of mine: that about 40 per cent. of them are on family credit schemes. Those are the ones who are eligible. The worry is that the next generation simply will not go into this work unless the recompense is better.

Mr. Jones: I agree entirely. And family credit is means-tested. This tends to give the lie to figures such as those that we have heard from the Minister. We all know that statistics can be used to prove or disprove anything.

I have here a sheaf of letters from my farmers, all of whom are suffering real problems. This is not a joke. It is not spurious or made up. We know that farmers in general have a reputation for crying "Wolf", but this time the farmers in the less-favoured areas of my constituency are indeed badly affected. They are in real trouble. On one day in Ruthin market I received a petition signed by 150 farmers. Typically, they are facing small cuts—£350 to £500 a year—in income. When their income is so low that that constitutes 10 per cent. of their net income, they are in real trouble.

The use of percentages by the Minister is also misleading. A 50 per cent. reduction in income needs a 100 per cent. increase just to return to the previous position. There has also been a reliance on figures relating to sheep farms. Thanks to the Government's failure to stay within the ERM and the resulting devaluation, sheep farmers have benefited slightly from the devaluation of the green pound. But most LFA farms are sheep and cattle farms and have done considerably worse, and—like the rest of us—they all are facing higher bills for inputs, council tax and so on.

To add insult to injury, most farmers, even some of the least well off, face council tax bills based on being placed in band G, giving a valuation of between £160,000 and £320,000. That is crazy. I would develop the point if there were time, but I am aware that other hon. Members are anxious to speak.

Never have HLCAs been cut. I am not aware of such cuts being made by other member states, so it is hardly surprising that hill farmers feel let down. It is true that the HLCAs represent a compensatory allowance, but they are not, as the Minister implied, a direct compensatory allowance for fluctuations in prices or incomes. If they were, they would have been reduced long ago. They represent compensation for farming in some of the worst

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and bleakest farming conditions in northern Europe. Even so, those farms are essential for the maintenance of the rural uplands.

The proposed cut is nothing but a Treasury-inspired money-saving plan because the Government are in desperate financial trouble, in a hole of their own digging, and they expect the most vulnerable farming sector to get them out of it. I urge the Minister to reconsider the cut in HLCAs for the benefit of all who enjoy the countryside and for the culture of rural Wales. He should give the money to those who desperately need it.

12.46 am

Mr. Paul Marland (Gloucestershire, West): It is refreshing to note that there is at least one area of agreement between the two sides of the House—that we should seek to keep the rural and difficult areas populated. But am I the only person who is wondering whether there is a limit to which we can ask the taxpayer to contribute when it is possible for hill farmers to get income from other sources? *[Interruption.]* I shall explain what I mean.

Farmers today are living in a different world. The farm gate mentality is nearly dead. That applies in every sector of farming. No longer can they simply produce goods and get them to the farm gate, and then leave it to someone else. Farmers recognise that they must grow for a market, and that applies even in very difficult areas. A friend of mine farms in the Inner Hebrides, on the Isle of Mull. He is a west highland sheep farmer who has discovered a way to finish his sheep, by changing their diet, in such a way as to fill a niche in the Spanish market. He is making extra money by going after that market.

As David Naish, president of the National Farmers Union, said at the NFU's annual general meeting this week:

> "Farmers must innovate and differentiate and promote their own products."

We must urge farmers to do that, in whatever part of the country they live. In their turn, the Government must produce sound and sensible economic policies in which farming can flourish, and that they are clearly trying to do. Inflation has dropped from 11 to 1·7 per cent. and interest rates have come down from 15 to 6 per cent. Marketing grants are available to help farmers market their products.

We are witnessing an onslaught on over-regulation and a massive cut in red tape. Opposition Members say that HLCAs have never been cut before and that farmers are working from a very low base. Both statements are correct. But thousands of other businesses in difficult areas are working from a low base. Consider, for example, garages, retail shops and hotels. They are all suffering in what is a world recession. But we do not say that garage proprietors or hoteliers in difficult areas should receive a massive subsidy from the Government to enable them to keep going.

I was pleased to hear my hon. Friend the Minister of State reminding the House that HLCAs are reviewed annually with interested parties. So those who are worried that the reduction in HLCAs is set in concrete for ever need have no worries because they are reviewed annually. This year the currency changes will have a major influence on farm incomes. That view is supported by the most recent edition of *Farming News* which, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) and I know, is not a paper that is necessarily well disposed towards the Government. Its leader in this week's issue says:

> "Currency changes put back a bit of bounce. Sterling's exit from the exchange rate mechanism is putting some bounce back into British agriculture. Seven straight devaluations of the Green £, allied to almost as many cuts in interest rates, have not only taken the sting out of the MacSharry reforms, they have left many of us better off than before . . . the currency realignments will work similar magic on livestock returns, helping to restore battered confidence there. This week's announcement of an extra 79p on the hill sheep supplement, worth some £10 million, is a case in point."

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): The hon. Gentleman can read!

Mr. Marland: I can read.

> "So, for the moment at least, the news is good, and far better than we dared hope only five months ago. Long may it continue so."

Mr. Connarty: I notice in Vacher's that the hon. Gentleman's previous occupation is listed as a farmer and that he owns a farm. If it is so lucrative, why has he got out of farming?

Mr. Marland: I am happy to give way to useful interventions—but what a feckless, useless and unnecessary intervention!

My hon. Friend the Minister has given details of the changes in pounds and pence. I am ready to back him. Suffice it to say that hill farmers are getting more money. It is worth mentioning that the total payment per ewe to hill sheep farmers in difficult areas will be £30·92. So a hill sheep farmer with 500 ewes will get a subsidy from the taxpayers of more than £15,000 per annum, and a man with 1,000 ewes will get a subsidy of more than £30,000 a year. As I have said, there is plenty for the sheep farmers but nothing for the garages, the hotels or other businesses in difficult areas.

Mr. Dafis: May I point out to the hon. Gentleman that the shift in emphasis from the HLCA to the annual premium means that the British Treasury will make a substantially reduced contribution, with the weight of the contribution coming from the European Community? Is the hon. Gentleman aware of that, and is he aware too that that means that the Treasury is trying to offload the responsibility on to the European Community?

Mr. Marland: Whether the money comes in theory from the European Community or from the British taxpayers, my point, which I think is supported by my hon. Friends, is that it is still coming from the British taxpayers. We have a duty to look after their interests. Opposition Members may be willing to ignore that duty, as they have done in other cases, but my hon. Friends are not. We are the guardians of the taxpayers' purse, and it is fair and reasonable that we should do everything we can to protect it. How much more do Opposition Members expect the British taxpayers to pay out?

If I did not know as much as I do about the tactics of the Opposition, I would be deeply shocked by what I have heard in the debate. Once again we have an example of Opposition parties seeking to create the maximim misunderstanding and confusion in the minds of sheep farmers. Once again they are seeking to muddy the waters and distort the truth in an effort to pretend to be the farmers' friend. Not for the Labour party the clear and concise exposition that we have had from my hon. Friend the Minister of State.

When the money starts to flow, farmers will see how much better off they are. When they recognise that farmers are better off, I hope that Opposition Members will have the good manners to come back and apologise to all hon. Members for the disgusting performance which they have put on this morning.

12.54 am

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): This debate is remarkable both for the Members who are here and for those who are not here. We have had the benefit of the presence of the Leader of the House, the Secretary of State for Defence, the Home Secretary, the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Secretary of State for Wales—but lo and behold, where is the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food? I have some sympathy for the Minister of State, who has had to take his place. Obviously he has been selected to be ducked in the pond.

We must take the figures that have been put before the House with a large pinch of salt. The hon. Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland) clearly does not come from an upland area, a less-favoured area, or one of the areas where farmers have been very angry, not merely about what has happened, but about the manner in which it has happened.

I come from an upland area and live among the hills of Bodmin moor. I am not a farmer and do not have to declare that interest, but I am passionately interested in the future health of upland communities. The hill livestock compensatory allowances were originally introduced—and have been maintained by successive Governments—to try to help such communities, and not as a form of income support. They are unrelated to other forms of subsidy. The HLCAs are there to try to ensure that such areas remain working communities and that people can make a realistic living there.

If the hills are to continue to be alive environmentally, economically and socially, the HLCA system has to be in place. That is what has gone wrong and what has caused so much consternation.

The hon. Member for Gloucestershire, West is wrong. No one had to stir the hill farmers into protesting about that outrageous decision—they were stirring us. If he had attended the lobby a couple of weeks ago, he would have found that evident. My Scottish colleagues have received representations from their constituents and from the Scottish National Farmers Union. My Welsh colleagues have received submissions from Wales. Many upland areas happen to be represented by Liberal Democrats.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): What about Northern Ireland?

Mr. Tyler: We have not received representations from Northern Ireland, but we would have been pleased to do so. No doubt the right hon. Member for Strangford will speak about that later.

The key issue is where does one start from? The figures for the past few years are immaterial. The Minister's Department has given us figures that show a dramatic drop, of about 75 per cent., in average farm incomes for the upland areas over the past 10 years. What would the Minister say if his salary level had dropped by three quarters, in real terms, between 1982 and 1992?

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Perhaps it should have.

Mr. Tyler: The hon. Member may be right. That is the level of the reduction.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): Will the hon. Member give way?

Mr. Tyler: I shall not, as I know that many hon. Members on both sides of the House wish to enter into the debate and I am trying to be as brief as I can.

The long-term viability of very vulnerable rural communities is at stake and the HLCAs are the only safeguard against those fragile economies being destroyed.

The Farmers Union of Wales has rightly pointed out that

> "hill farmers have no recourse to alternative enterprises. They are trapped within a restrictive environment and terrain, which will only support hill livestock production."

The hon. Member for Gloucestershire, West mentioned diversification; but clearly he has never been to an upland area. What sort of diversification could there be?

Mr. Marland: I was not talking about diversification; I was simply talking about trying to add value to what the farmer was producing.

Mr. Tyler: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman has visited Dartmoor, Exmoor, Bodmin moor and the Brecon Beacons. One cannot add value in those terrains. The HLCAs were designed to demonstrate clearly that there are areas of Europe, and not merely of the United Kingdom, that need special support if we are going to maintain a working and environmentally acceptable countryside. A derelict countryside is not acceptable.

Mr. David Nicholson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way as he mentioned Exmoor in my constituency. When the first announcement about the cut in the HLCAs was made there was great anger among farmers, which affected a number of my hon. Friends who represent hill farming areas. However, since then it has become apparent that there has been a significant increase in the ewe premium, we have felt the full effects of the green pound devaluation and, most recently, thanks partly to my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) and the pressure that he and others have placed on Ministers, we have experienced the 79p supplement. Finally, we had the details of the environmentally sensitive areas which affect Exmoor and other places. Would not the hon. Gentleman agree that all those factors have counterbalanced the initial shock of the HLCA cut?

Mr. Tyler: The hon. Gentleman must recognise that we shall not have a devaluation every year and we shall not be able to cover all the upland areas with ESAs; it is physically impossible. The HLCAs stand alone as a policy that successive Governments have used to support the upland communities. The other factors—many of which affect lowland areas as well—are irrelevant to the decision.

Sir Roger Moate (Faversham) *(rose)*——

Mr. Tyler: I shall not give way as I have done so several times and I want to allow time for other hon. Members to speak.

[Mr. Tyler]

The declared aim of the subsidies was clear. I am sure that hon. Members who have intervened in the debate have read about the purpose of the subsidies, which was

"to ensure the continuation of livestock farming, to maintain a viable population in the LFA and to conserve the countryside".

They were not, and have never been, intended as a direct income support system. Therefore, the overall level is of critical importance in maintaining the healthy economy of those areas.

It is extremely important to recognise that the figures that we have been given this evening must be seen against a backdrop of steady decline in recent years. In an answer to a recent question posed by my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey), the Minister said that, in real terms, the value of the allowance for higher rate sheep in severely disadvantaged areas had fallen by 45 per cent. and for the lower rate, by 60 per cent. since 1980. We are not considering the figures against a pattern of two years of looking slightly better, but against a steady decline over a decade.

When I posed questions to the Minister about farmers' incomes on hill and upland livestock holdings, he demonstrated that they were consistently below that of the earnings of full-time adult manual workers in the country —they continue to be so and they continue to fall relatively. Since 1982, the income of LFA livestock farmers has collapsed by 75 per cent. Therefore, whatever rise now occurs, it will be only a modest upward blip against the depressing trend.

In Scotland the effect is felt even deeper than in the rest of the United Kingdom—98 per cent. of Scottish LFA ewes were in the severely disadvantaged areas in 1992. Therefore, 98 per cent. of the Scottish LFA stock will experience a reduction in HLCAs in 1993—a fall of 12 per cent. in income from an already low base.

We have heard quite a lot this evening about the devaluation of the green pound. What would have happened if there had not been a black Wednesday and a devaluation of the green currency? Would the Minister now be suggesting a major increase in the HLCAs and, if so, by what amount? If he is suggesting that the two are directly and inexplicably linked, we should be told what the figure would be. Unless the Minister is now assuming a continual devaluation—a creeping devaluation—of the pound, the rise is one-off and is irrelevant to the long-term future of these areas.

It is extremely important that we view every calculation as a continuation to the factors that can turn the tide. The tide is not currently being turned in the hill areas. What is especially difficult to understand, given the background of Government support from both major parties, is why the Minister chose now to target the cuts on the hill areas—the most vulnerable of all the disadvantaged groups in farming. The cuts should either be spread equitably across all sectors or they should be targeted at other, less vulnerable areas and less disadvantaged groups, or the benefits of indiscriminate improvement in prices should be narrowed so that help can be concentrated where it is most needed.

The latest announcement of a ewe premium supplement for LFAs, made in the past few days, was obviously helpful; but it is important for the Minister to explain why he intends always to link the ewe premium with HLCAs. Surely there should be no such direct link. The one cannot simply be substituted for the other. Moreover, that is yet another one-year adjustment. The hill farmers will want to know what is to happen next year.

The most anger and resentment was caused by the lack of consultation. Conservative Members nod: they must be well aware that the way in which the decision was leaked in the farming press, the subsequent announcement just before the Christmas recess and the back-tracking statements that followed it caused immense damage to the reputation of the Minister, his team and the Government as a whole. That is evident from the number of contradictions in the statements that we have heard in the past few days.

Real offence was caused by the lack of consultation. The National Sheep Association—again, not a radical socialist group—said:

"It would have given the sheep industry more confidence, and the Government more credibility, if they had consulted more fully with the industry and explained in more detail their change in direction."

The proposal to cut HLCAs is an attempt to undo the good work of successive Governments who have tried to protect and enhance the economic viability of the hills and hill farming. There has been a steady decline in the past 10 years; given the devaluation of the green pound, this was a good opportunity to reverse that trend. We hope that Conservative Members who have been critical of the Government's decision will carry their criticism into the Lobby and that—instead of being present at this late hour simply at the behest of their Whips—they will vote for their hill farmers.

1.6 am

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I think you will recall, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I first raised this matter on the Floor of the House some nine weeks ago, on the motion for the Christmas Adjournment. I think it significant that, on that occasion, my hon. Friends the Members for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson), for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) and for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) spontaneously supported what I had to say. I do not recall much interest being expressed by Opposition Members. I doubt very much that many of them understood what we were talking about, and some of the interventions that we have heard tonight—this applies less to the speeches—suggest that, nine weeks later, not many of them understand it now.

I felt at the time that we could draw three clear conclusions. First, farmers in the uplands were deeply angry and upset by the decision: I said that forcefully at the time. Incomes had shown some improvement, but from a very low base. Secondly, it was clear to me that the HLCA settlement must be part of the overall public expenditure round, in which agriculture generally did extremely well. We all knew, I think, that we were unlikely to get much additional money from the Treasury, if any. We must face the inevitable fact that, when public expenditure is extremely tight, we cannot pick and choose which parts of an overall settlement we like and which we do not.

Mr. Foulkes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Greenway: No; many other hon. Members wish to speak.

My third conclusion was that something must be done. The position, as it stood nine weeks ago, was not sustainable: in some way, income would have to be made up. Lo and behold, within a week my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food came back from the Farm Council and announced that the EC would help with a 1·5 ecu increase in the rural world supplement. The question of what that was worth was extremely complicated, as was the arithmetic involved in sorting out the effect of the green pound devaluation. My right hon. Friend then suggested that it was worth £1·41 per ewe. I made some inquiries and did some sums. Some weeks ago, I suggested to my right hon. Friend that the total value was understated by about 80p a ewe. It transpired that it was 79p a ewe. I am happy to settle for that.

We have deducted £2·25 for hardy ewes under the HCLA payments and only £1·35 for the less hardy ewes, but both will get £2·20 more as a result of the rural settlement. In addition, as the Minister pointed out, there is a green pound devaluation that will provide a much-needed boost to hill farmers. I look forward to talking to mine again when they get the money. Will the Minister please ensure that they get it on time?

In all the circumstances, we have to accept the position now arrived at for this year. I am tempted to suggest that, had we been in this position nine weeks ago when this first leaked out and the Minister had to make a formal announcement, we might have avoided a lot of fuss, but such a facile view underestimates the difficulty that the ministerial team had in Brussels during the negotiations. Opposition protests are due to their lack of experience in these tough negotiations. We must now concentrate our efforts on the future. I have already said that the payments need to be on time. There is also a need for stability.

Can the Minister confirm that in the case of the rural world supplement, initially proposed by the Council of Farm Ministers to be for one year, the agriculture committee of the European Parliament has reported that, in its view, it should be for two years. That would provide welcome stability. I hope that the Minister will fight for that and get it.

There has also been criticism tonight of the fact that EC funding might not be as advantageous as United Kingdom domestic support. I do not accept that. I have talked at length to my farmers. They seem to think the exact opposite. We have a very tight United Kingdom public spending round. Although I do not underestimate the difficulty of getting money in Brussels for our farmers, the fact remains that there is greater certainty of payment. I accept that the value of sterling is a factor, but all that has to be taken into account in future reviews. Whether it is the HLCA mechanism, or whether it is the rural world supplement, the plain fact is that both mechanisms are income substitution. For that reason, they can be negotiated and agreed only on an annual basis.

I welcome also the fact that the Agriculture Select Committee is to look in detail into this matter. One of the points that I made during the Christmas Adjournment debate was that we needed to get rid of some of the mystery that surrounds the true figures. There should be a much more open review of the hill farm position.

We need also to consider the environmental dimension. Those of us who represent hill farm areas understand just how important hill farming is to the environment. We have some important caveats—particularly that there should be no over-grazing and that we need to conserve the landscape. That must be worth a price to the farmers. We have environmentally sensitive areas in some hill farm areas. We have the north York moors farm scheme in my constituency. We have the Department of the Environment stewardship scheme. It is time that all this was rationalised so that farmers know just where they stand.

Finally, and above all, it is very much now a case of restoring confidence among hill farmers in the future of hill farming. The events of the past nine weeks demonstrate that, while it is possible to make a lot of hot air and fuss about the issue, it is Conservative Members who have seen fit to take a very close interest in it. That is what we do week in, week out, month in, month out. That is why I believe that we should continue to support the hill farmers. Then they will continue to support us.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It must be extremely difficult in the Chair for you tonight. During a very short debate of an hour and a half, it is difficult for the many hon. Members who want to support the hill farmers in this campaign but who have not had the opportunity to make their views known. It is an extremely short debate for a very important matter.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Chair does not decide the length of the debate.

Mr. Mallon: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I realise the difficulties that you face, but the measure is much more punitive in Northern Ireland than it is in England, Scotland or Wales because of our agricultural structure. Unfortunately, because the debate is to last only for an hour and a half, no one from Northern Ireland has been able to make that case. I realise that it is not within your competency or ability at this stage to ensure that the case is made, but it is regrettable because of the terrible punitive effect in Northern Ireland.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It will not have escaped your notice that the measure applies only to Great Britain, not to Northern Ireland. Therefore, if the Opposition would care to table another prayer on a Northern Ireland order tomorrow, we could have a further hour and a half's debate.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Minister made certain remarks about the statistics pertaining to Northern Ireland, but it should be put on record that the statistics that he gave were misleading and a slander on the hill farmers of Northern Ireland.

1.16 am

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Hon. Members will have noted that the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has failed to attend the debate. We are bound to ask whether he intends to vote—perhaps he is still filling envelopes with hill livestock compensatory allowance payments.

We have had an interesting debate, once again characterised by the Government's questionable use of figures. We believe that the Government stand accused of an inexcusable error of judgment only partially offset by the convenient reconsideration of rules, which has enabled Ministers to pull a rabbit out of a hat in the form of an

[Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours]

extra 79p. I am afraid that the House will not be fooled. The Government have sought to justify their original error with a spray of statistics which, when tested, misrepresented the truth. Farmers, the Opposition and a large number of hon. Members rejected them.

Who in their right mind could argue that a 25 per cent. reduction in the ewe price between 1988 and 1992 was in fact an increase, and then have the cheek to suggest that the worst year in living memory in the less-favoured areas be used as a baseline for calculating income growth? Who in their right mind could argue that special sheep annual premium payments offset HLCA cuts, without admitting that SAPs are variable payments which can be reduced as readily as increased? Indeed, we need a guarantee that if SAPs are ever reduced, HLCA payments will be increased to compensate.

Hon. Members have given innumerable examples challenging the Government's statistics on farm incomes. I commissioned some interesting research from the National Farmers Union in Cumbria. We took six farms and analysed incomes from 1983 to 1992. A representative sample of the research showed that in the period studied, on a farm of 500 breeding ewes, where livestock sales remained static in cash terms at just over £11,000, the net profit after subsidy, depreciation and interest on a £5,000 loan rose from £5,000 in 1983 to £7,000 nine years later in 1992. That farmer has been running a charity. No one else could have farmed more efficiently. He was and still is doing society a favour managing that land in the heart of the Lake District. We have exploited his good will.

David Keddie's work at Swansea university confirms that the position is the same in Wales. He shows in his detailed and exhaustive research of 400 households in several regions that farm incomes are miserly and far too dependent on peripheral activity. He shows that the more precarious the income the greater the pressure to increase stock levels. The fear of indebtedness is dominant.

The reality is that, despite all the evidence, the Government have sought repeatedly to hide the truth. The truth was never an argument about offsetting national subsidy with European subsidies and green pound devaluations. It was a decision born in Whitehall to save money on the back of hard-pressed hill farmers.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Campbell-Savours: It is not possible this evening.

In evidence of that I quote a letter from the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury dated 6 November 1992 which says:

> "Cuts in the HLCA rates will inevitably provoke strong criticism from the farming industry. The farming unions have made very clear to us that the industry's confidence will be dealt a severe blow if the recovery of incomes is undermined by Government action. They have pointed out that real hill incomes remain below their levels of a decade ago. And even following the recovery hill farm incomes remain at very low levels in absolute terms."

Then the Minister says:

> "There is undoubtedly merit in the union's case."

That was a clear admission by the Government of the collapse in hill farm incomes in the United Kingdom. The letter proves that the Government desperately wanted the cuts and they did not care a damn if the hill farmers paid the price.

I come now on a more constructive note to the wider issue of farm incomes. There is, without doubt, throughout the farming community, a developing consensus that farm incomes should not be over-dependent on public subsidy. That is the Opposition's view. Farmers have another option open to them and that is to secure a higher price for their products in the market place.

Lamb prices in the United Kingdom at auction are grossly depressed. British lamb is nearly the cheapest in Europe but the retail price of lamb throughout the Commuity is grossly inflated. Dead-weight United Kingdom prices are often half and less what they are in other parts of Europe, particularly in southern Europe.

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I am sorry, I do not have time. Perhaps the hon. Lady can intervene next week on the Agriculuture Bill.

The explanation is not only to be found in the demand for smaller lambs and seasonal buying, but equally in the nature of a meat trade in Europe which loads the lamb price at retail on the basis of it being a specialist product. Within 200 yards of the European Commission's offices in Rue de la Loi in Brussels three weeks ago, I found lamb being sold at £11·50 a kilo. The United Kingdom dead-weight carcase price on the same day was £1·80 a kilo.

British lamb producers must break the stranglehold of a highly restrictive retail meat distribution network in Europe. That network, in the absence of real competition, is denying the European consumer cheap meat. United Kingdom meat exporters must rise to that challenge. United Kingdom lamb production must become far more market oriented. In a more buoyant market, arguments over subsidy will inevitably recede in importance.

The Government should take a far more hands-on approach to the development of United Kingdom meat exports. Exhibitions and the impressive work of the Meat and Livestock Commission are not enough. We need a meat export strategy which positively carves out a major proportion of EC markets for United Kingdom producers. If we cannot work through the existing retail networks, British multiple meat retailers should expand overseas. The Government can take the lead. The answer to this whole question is to be found not only in public subsidy, but in the wider European market place. In the absence of such a strategy, hill farmers will unfortunately need more and more help. That is why HLCA payments at this time are critically important to their survival.

The whole strategy has to change. Hill farmers need Government help. The Government must take the lead. The disequilibrium in the EC sheep market must be brought to an end.

Tonight's debate has been objective and constructive. Hon. Members of all parties have recognised the difficulties. We all want the industry to survive. In that light, I invite all hon. Members to support our motion. The hill farmers need our support. It will enable Ministers to bring back an order. If we win the motion tonight, that would be the radical, tactical and popular position to take.

1.25 am

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I call Mr. Curry.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You have an obligation to protect minorities in the House. You are aware that hill areas are concentrated in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Yet there have been no speakers from Scotland or Northern Ireland. What is more, the Ministers for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have sat silent like stookies throughout the debate. We are about to be misinformed for the second time by the English Minister. This is abuse and I invite your protection and intervention.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that this is a 90-minute debate and that the Chair cannot control the length of speeches. I made a plea and I regret that hon. Members did not totally respond to it.

Mr. Foulkes: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it not the case that the Minister of State can speak only with the permission of the House? He has already spoken and since we have here the Secretary of State for Wales, the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland and the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, all of whom deal with agriculture, they could adequately reply. I object to the Minister of State speaking again and I do not think that he has the permission of the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. May I formally check that the hon. Member is objecting to the Minister of State responding?

Mr. Foulkes: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Then the leave of the House is not granted. The debate may continue. I call Mr. Bill Walker. *[Interruption.]* Order. The House has requested an hon. Member from Scotland to speak and I have called one.

1.28 am

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Mr. Deputy Speaker, you can be assured that I speak for a part of Scotland that has uplands, mountains, and lots and lots of sheep. There is no doubt that my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) illustrated the humbug and hypocrisy that we often see in the House. *[Interruption.]* In the debate before Christmas, which I, my hon. Friend and others attended, we noted the absence of all those caring faces that I see tonight. What has brought about the transformation? I believe that it has been brought about because there is a three-line Whip: all these individuals who in the past have shown their enormous interest in the problems of my hill farmers by their absence are here tonight because the Labour party saw an opportunity to put on a three-line Whip. That was in the hope that they could exploit a situation that had developed, as is often the case where negotiations are required in Europe, so that agreements can be made in Europe and payments——

Mr. Llwyd *rose*——

Mr. Walker: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman if he is patient.

They saw an opportunity to exploit it, but they were mistaken, because when they tabled the motion they failed to realise that negotiations were continuing and that figures had been arrived at which were different from what they thought they would be.

Mr. Llwyd: I do not know whether the hon. Member recalls that I am not a member of the Labour party, but it was in response to my question that the Minister made his statement about the HLCAs. We in Plaid Cymru and the SNP are concerned about what is going on and I dare say our Labour colleagues are as well. It is not good enough to say that it is convenient for all of us to worry about it. It is a great worry in the whole of Britain and it is time that the Conservative party grew up.

Mr. Walker: Where was the hon. Gentleman when we took the opportunity to debate this matter late last year? He was not showing his care then.

Miss Emma Nicholson: In support of my hon. Gentleman, does he agree that the Opposition spokesman knew nothing about what he was saying? He was reading from a brief which did not bear any resemblance to reality. He was talking, for example, about the dead carcase weight price of lamb in English markets, and I assume in Scottish markets also, without realising that the point about hill-farmed lamb is that it is exported live and on the hoof, killed in the importing countries, such as Spain and France, and then stamped Spanish or French lamb and sold at a premium price.

Mr. Walker: I thank my hon. Friend for that helpful intervention. One of the great tragedies in the House is that often Members speak who have no background or experience. I do not accuse the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) of that, because I recall standing with him in the Falkland Islands, when we looked out at a sheep farm. The hon. Gentleman said that it could be his constituency and I said that it could be mine, because we both represented hill farm constituencies. So I do not charge the hon. Gentleman with not knowing what is happening in his constituency, because he has always impressed me as knowing that.

Mr. Wilson: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will recall that on many occasions in my six years in the House the issue of HLCAs has been raised at Question Time and during debates by hon. Members who are deeply concerned about the population and agricultural communities in the upland areas. On every one of those occasions there has been cross-party support for the concept of maintaining HLCAs, because everyone who cares about this subject realises that when we start eroding the HLCAs, we are eroding the ability to sustain populations in those areas. Does the hon. Gentleman realise that the only thing that has changed tonight is that Opposition Members are still saying what we have been saying throughout the years and that Conservative Members are having to find reasons to rationalise a complete change of position?

Mr. Walker: I thank the hon. Gentleman, because he is quite right. But——

It being one and a half hours after the motion was entered upon, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Order [12 February].*

The House divided: Ayes 245, Noes 283.

Division No. 155] **[1.35 am**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*

Armstrong, Hilary
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Dr John *(C'p'l'nd)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek *(B'p Auckland)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tipping, Paddy
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jack Thompson and
Mr. Jon Owen Jones.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ruclif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob

Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sidney Chapman and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

Question accordingly negatived.

Gamston Airfield, Nottinghamshire

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

1.45 am

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): I am glad that at this late hour I am joined by many hon. Friends, and in particular by my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell), who is a Nottinghamshire Member.

Gamston airfield is a small, privately owned airfield in the Newark constituency. It is about one and half miles from the major county town of Retford. It is surrounded by several quiet villages, each with 100 or so inhabitants. Since 1967, the airfield has been used for light aircraft on business. No club flying and no tuition was ever permitted. The permitted weight was raised to 5,700 kilos in 1979 and again in 1987 to 12,500 kilos. That was still the weight of a small, twin-engined executive business plane.

In the granting of each consent, Bassetlaw district council made specific reference to the fact that in the district plan for east Bassetlaw, Gamston was designed as a conservation area. Since the increase in permitted weight in 1987, there has been an awareness of some nuisance. However, the limit of flying hours to between 6.30 am and 9 pm Mondays to Fridays, and 8 am to 9 pm Saturdays and Sundays, together with the limit of 10 take-offs and landings, meant that the position was tolerable.

On 29 January last the owner of the airfield applied to the district council to amend the conditions of the 1987 consent. That application was to introduce flight training for professional and private commercial purposes, pleasure flying and charter flights. The weight limit was to be increased to 50,000 kilos—a fourfold increase of the previous limit of a few years past. There were to be an additional 20 aircraft movements a week outside the operational hours. Those hours were to be extended to 10 pm Mondays to Fridays and 9 pm Saturdays and Sundays.

The clear implication to the local residents—I make no personal judgment on it—was that the application paved the way to Gamston becoming a regional airport. The incremental process over the years has certainly given them grounds for believing that. One can understand the anxiety of local residents in not only the village of Gamston but all the surrounding villages and much of the residential area of Retford, over which many of the flights would pass, particularly when descending.

However, my purpose is not to list the arguments why planning permission should or should not be granted; that is not for me and it is not for my hon. Friend the Minister who will reply. I am here to argue that the way in which the application was determined by the local council left a great deal to be desired. I argue that the matter has wider effects beyond the immediate locality.

I alerted the then Secretary of State to the widespread local concern on 5 March 1992. I understand that the local authority received more than 200 letters of objection. The Nottingham office of the Department of the Environment was clearly concerned and alarmed at the extent of those objections. Before the district council could deal with the application the Department issued an article 14 direction. The effect of this was that, although the council could hear the application, it would not implement it, or allow it to be implemented and put into effect, until the direction was withdrawn.

I come now to the first point of grave concern about the handling of this contentious application. On 16 December last the planning sub-committee of the council's development services committee met to consider the application formally. Despite the contentious nature of the application, despite the existence of the article 14 direction, despite the huge local implications of a much larger airport, the council left the matter to a sub-committee. The full committee—let alone the full council, where councillors could have had a proper say and a proper vote—played no part at all. The matter was left to a small group of 10 people, three of whom, including the leader of the council, were ex-offico members.

On the day of decision, following the discussion, all the Retford-based councillors, including members of the majority Labour party, voted against the application. Five councillors—all of them from an area away from Retford: the Worksop area—voted in favour. That meant a tie in the sub-committee. The Worksop-based chairman, who had already voted in favour of the application, used his casting vote, and the matter was passed. What a way, irrevocably and without appeal, to change the face of an area and disrupt the lives of thousands of people for ever.

During the discussion the chairman said that the sub-committee had had the benefit of two expert reports suggesting that there would be no adverse effects if the application were granted. A representative of one of the expert companies sat at the table with the councillors and participated throughout the discussion of the agenda item. The committee knew that Gamston parish council had commissioned another expert report, but that council's expert was refused permission to speak. The parish council chairman was given a few minutes to state his objections. So that decision was reached not only without the full council's having its say but also without the admission of expert evidence that would be contrary to the majority's preconceived conclusion on the application. Half of the sub-committee, therefore, approached the application with totally closed minds.

Immediately this travesty took place I protested to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 21 December and 4 January, urging that, in view of the way in which the decision had been made, he should not withdraw his article 14 direction. I was saddened and, indeed, astonished to receive on 27 January from the Minister who is to reply tonight a response declining my request, on the ground that the council had obtained specialist advice. I assume that the council had not told my hon. Friend that there was in existence equally eminent specialist advice giving the council a contrary opinion. Did my hon. Friend, when he wrote to me, know of this contrary advice? If so, perhaps he will explain why he did not refer to it in his letter. Legal moves to apply for a judicial review of the decision are already under way, and I do not ask my hon. Friend to make any comment on those. The legal representatives were amazed when they heard that the article 14 direction had been lifted. I hope that the local people will not have to go to the expense of a judicial review and that, at the least, the Minister will explain the grounds on which he took that decision.

I was saddened in reading the Minister's response to note that, because there was already an existing airfield in operation, there was in this case no more than local impact involved. He mentioned that, almost by definition, any airfield activity may be regarded as having more than local impact, and I agree with him.

I stress that my object today is not to list the reasons why planning should or should not be granted. I am drawing attention to the cavalier way in which local objections were dealt with locally and to stress why the matter should proceed to a public inquiry. No environmental impact assessment was called for by the district council before it made its decision. The high-minded intentions of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 ring hollow in the ears of some of my constituents.

The application gives cause for concern over a much wider area than that of the airfield. I remind the House that it would involve a fourfold increase in aircraft weight. It would mean that charter aircraft the size of early versions of the Boeing 737 would be descending rapidly over houses in Retford at below 200 ft., falling to 100 ft. over Ordsall and to almost ground level when passing over the village of Eaton.

The end of the runway is only 200 yds. from the A1, which is shortly to be upgraded to motorway standard. A whole range of permitted flying activity must have adverse effects over a much wider range and area than has been the case previously.

I urge my hon. Friend not to be content to leave this major decision to a sub-committee and the casting vote of its chairman. That is unsatisfactory. I urge the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend to call in the application before it is too late. Let us have a proper public inquiry, with a full environmental impact assessment. No development of such magnitude and importance should occur anywhere without a public inquiry, and, on behalf of my constituents, I urge the Government to ensure that a public inquiry is held in this case.

1.58 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tony Baldry): My hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Mr. Alexander) raised issues of concern to his constituents and himself. He dealt with two main issues, and I will deal with both of them.

The first was about the way in which the planning application before the district council was dealt with. The second—they were clearly related issues, according to the way in which he argued them—was that, partly as a consequence of the way in which, he claimed, the district council had dealt with the application and partly for broader reasons, the application should be called in.

I will deal first with the way in which the application was considered by the local planning authority.

If a local planning authority in any way conducts itself not in accord with the law or with its statutory responsibilities, the Secretary of State does not act as a court of appeal. A planning permission which is granted by a local planning authority is a valid planning permission until it is challenged and deemed to be otherwise by the courts.

I appreciate that, because of local controversy, many of the residents who objected to the proposal attended the meeting on 16 December of the planning sub-committee of Bassetlaw district council when the application was formally considered. Subsequently the Secretary of State and the Department received letters complaining about the way in which the meeting was conducted. It was alleged that the chairman was not impartial and that the meeting was not conducted in a democratic manner, especially in that the council's consultants were allowed to present their views, but the objectors' consultants were denied any opportunity to challenge the basis of their findings or to present contrary views. The use by the chairman of his casting vote, when members were evenly divided over the application, was also criticised.

While I appreciate the concerns of the local people who feel that their views have not been fully and fairly considered, those are not of themselves matters for the Secretary of State to consider. If any person believes that there has been maladministration by the council, that the council has not acted in accordance with its statutory powers, or that other matters warrant further investigation, that person may wish to consider reference to the local ombudsman or to seek judicial review. Either route is available.

My hon. Friend has said that it is possible that some local people will wish to consider judicial review. That is entirely a matter for them to take forward, if they so desire. But it is not for the Secretary of State for the Environment to seek to put himself into the position of the court in those matters.

The second concern of my hon. Friend is that, largely because of local controversy and other concerns, the application ought to be called in. Because of the representations by my hon. Friend and the way in which he argued his case to Ministers, we were aware of local concerns. In addition to the forceful representations made by my hon. Friend, and the objections of large numbers of local people—about 120 objections were received by the Secretary of State requesting that the application be called in—the matter was given careful consideration.

If people feel that their legitimate concerns and interests have not been taken fully into account or, worse, have been ignored by the local planning authority, it is understandable that they turn to the Secretary of State and press him to use his powers under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to intervene by calling in the application for his own determination.

However, it is important to explain that Parliament has made it clear that planning is essentially a local matter. The Act provides for applications for planning permission to be made to the local planning authority, and for that authority to determine them. Local planning authorities every day have to determine sizeable applications, and often applications which involve local controversy. That is a duty which Parliament has placed upon local planning authorities. The vast majority of applications are dealt with in that way.

About 532,000 applications were made in 1990-91 and the figure for 1991-92 was 511,000. Only 132 were called in in 1990-91 and, in the subsequent year, only 140. That gives some indication to the House of how sparingly the Secretary of State exercises his powers under the Town and Country Planning Act to intervene by calling in applications for his determination. Of those 132 and 140, less than one fortieth of 1 per cent. were called in for determination by him.

My right hon. Friend and I believe that it is wrong to interfere with the jurisdiction of the local planning authority unless it is clearly necessary to do so. Our policy on calling in planning applications, therefore, continues to be very selective. Each case must, of course, be considered on its merits, but my right hon. Friend will generally only call in planning applications if planning issues of more than local importance are involved and if those issues need

[Mr. Tony Baldry]

to be decided by the Secretary of State, rather than at local level. We have given as examples of cases where call in may be considered those development proposals which could have wide effects beyond their immediate locality, those which give rise to substantial regional or national controversy which may conflict with national policy on important matters, and those where the interests of national security or of foreign Governments are involved.

I assure the House and my hon. Friend that we considered carefully whether to call in the case. The decision not to intervene was taken only after careful consideration of the issues related, as well as all the representations received, including that from my hon. Friend.

Having regard to all the issues, we concluded that the proposed development did not raise planning issues of more than local significance, or issues that needed to be decided by the Secretary of State, and that it was right to leave the local planning authority to determine the application. The power is exercised by the Secretary of State, and if any party feels that he has not exercised his discretion in accordance with the powers that Parliament has given to him, it is possible for any person who feels aggrieved to seek to refer that matter to the court by way of judicial review.

We have considered the matter extremely carefully. We have already decided not to call in the planning application. As far as Ministers are concerned, that is where the matter rests. If any individual or individuals feel concerned, either about the way in which the local planning authority has determined the planning application, or the way in which the Secretary of State has exercised his statutory powers to decide not to call in the application, those are matters that they will have to refer to the courts.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eight minutes past Two o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 17 February 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Two-stroke Engines

1. **Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action his Department is taking to ensure that the United Kingdom benefits from new two-stroke and orbital two-stroke engine technology.

The Minister for Industry (Mr. Tim Sainsbury): The Government believe that two-stroke technology could deliver significant commercial and environmental benefits. It is one of a number of alternative vehicle technologies which are being studied by the Department of Transport.

Mr. Ainsworth: Does the Minister agree that the once-ailing French motor industry has dragged itself forward by taking a technological lead in diesel development and that it is important that we do not allow ourselves to fall behind again? The French industry advanced through the Government working actively with industry to ensure that development. Will the Department have the necessary input into this new and exciting sphere of technology to ensure that this time round British industry takes advantage of it when it comes on stream in a few years' time?

Mr. Sainsbury: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will recognise that the British vehicle industry is extremely competitive. Of course, like every other industry, it could improve, but it is definitely competitive with the French. I hope that he is also aware of the work done by the United Kingdom Engine Emissions Consortium, which has been substantially supported by my Department. Valuable work is also being done through a review by the Transport Research Laboratory, all of which will contribute to the industry. The vehicle industry spends substantial sums on research and development and it is the best judge of where R and D expenditure should be directed to the best commercial advantage.

Mr. Adley: Does my right hon. Friend agree that if we take advantage of the developments in orbital two-stroke engine technology we need to be able to do so within the stable framework of the European Community? I recognise that there may be short-term disadvantages for other countries with our social chapter opt-out, but does my right hon. Friend agree that, in the long term, our membership of the Community and our ratification of the Maastricht treaty is essential for that technology, its exploitation and all the other industrial and commercial aspects of British life?

Mr. Sainsbury: I very much agree with my hon. Friend and find that there is near-universal agreement among business leaders in all sectors of the industry and all sizes of business that our continued membership of, and role in, the Community is vital for our prosperity—certainly for our vehicle industry.

Mr. Beggs: Will the President of the Board of Trade undertake to ensure that his Department and British industry are fully aware of the outstanding achievements in two-stroke technology of Professor Gordon Blair and his team at Queen's university? Will the President of the Board of Trade seek to ensure that the benefits of that research and development create jobs in the United Kingdom and do not, as has happened in the past, export jobs elsewhere?

Mr. Sainsbury: I am happy to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the work of Professor Gordon Blair and Queen's university, Belfast, where there is well-recognised expertise in such technology. I think that I am correct in saying that my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade, in a previous role, was able to support the valuable work done by the team.

European Regional Development Fund

2. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the total value of grants allocated to England from the European regional development fund since its inception.

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Michael Heseltine): The total value of ERDF grants allocated to England since 1975 is approximately £3,900 million at 1993 prices.

Mr. Knox: Does my right hon. Friend agree that those grants make an important contribution to strengthening the British economy? Is he satisfied that the public are aware of the scale of those grants?

Mr. Heseltine: I agree with my hon. Friend that those grants provide important help to many parts of the country. I hope that the public are aware of them. The Government consistently represent Britain's case in achieving the maximum amount of grants to help the areas that need them.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: What proportion of those grants is used to assist British industry with the development of technology? Many of our competitors receive Government assistance and various forms of grant to help them to develop their technologies and industry. I am sure that the Secretary of State will also bear in mind the fact that, in manufacturing, development costs represent a high proportion of overall costs.

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman will recognise that one has to be extremely careful about following the logic of that suggestion, because other countries may be using the grants to subsidise or support their companies. That would put our companies at a significant disadvantage.

Mr. Mans: What action has my right hon. Friend's Department taken in relation to the ERDF or any other funds that might be available from Europe or from the British Government to help the survival of Leyland DAF in Lancashire?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend will realise that these grants apply to specific regions. We make representations to ensure that Britain maximises its entitlement. The case of Leyland DAF is still under close attention by my Department. We are watching and assisting—wherever appropriate—the actions of the receiver.

Intervention Fund for Shipbuilding

3. **Mr. Byers:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what further discussions he plans to hold within the EC on the intervention fund for shipbuilding; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: None at present, but I am keeping the situation under review.

Mr. Byers: Will the President of the Board of Trade explain how the United Kingdom Government can agree to a 36 per cent. subsidy from the intervention fund for shipyards in Germany and yet deny access to the intervention fund for shipyards in this country? Does he agree that warship builders should have access to the intervention fund to help them to diversify into the merchant sector? Is not it about time that the Government put the British shipbuilding industry first and took positive action so that we can win new orders and keep jobs in our communities?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that those arrangements were entered into as part of a reduction in capacity and it was decided in 1985 that the grants would not apply to warship manufacturers on privatisation. Their cost structures, with very high overheads because of the highly sophisticated products that they make, would not make them easily capable of competing in the merchant ship sector. In any case, there is already significant overcapacity in that form of construction.

Mrs. Browning: In putting the interests of British shipbuilding first, will my right hon. Friend not make the mistake that the Labour Government made—of subsidising shipbuilding to the extent that ships were sold off cheap to Poland, thus flooding the marketplace? We were then unable to be competitive.

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend makes a most important point. I am also aware that once the Labour party had nationalised the warship builders, we secured no further export orders.

Mr. Cousins: Is the President of the Board of Trade telling us that in no circumstances would he contemplate stepping forward to protect the interests of the 50,000 workers in naval shipbuilding at Lowestoft, Southampton, Belfast, on the Clyde and the Tyne, and at Barrow, or to obtain access to intervention or any other sort of funding permitted by the European Community?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman obviously did not hear my reply—that I am keeping the matter under review. I do not believe, however, that access to the intervention fund would solve the acute problems of low demand that these companies face.

Standing Charges (Pensioners)

4. **Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals he has in relation to the paying of gas, electricity and telephone standing charges by pensioners.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs (Mr. Neil Hamilton): Government legislation has provided the regulators with full powers to regulate utility prices for supply to household customers and a duty to protect the interests of consumers. Utilities may decide on the form and scale of their charges, including standing charges, but must satisfy their regulator.

Mr. Chisholm: Is the Minister aware that a large number of pensioners have difficulty with their electricity, gas and telephone bills, and that standing charges often represent 50 per cent. or more of those bills? Does he realise that the profits of the privatised utilities have exceeded £35 billion during this unending recession? Will the Government therefore follow the example of the Irish and other European Governments by ensuring that a small part of those fat profits is used to abolish pensioners' standing charges?

Mr. Hamilton: Of course, under nationalisation we were used to industries making not profits but losses, which were paid for by the community generally. If the hon. Gentleman wants to protect the interests of those on lower incomes, he has got the wrong end of the stick. Of those in the bottom one fifth of the income scale, only about 30 per cent. are pensioners. If, having phased out standing charges, we were to recoup that revenue by increasing prices, the poorest in society would be the losers.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my hon. Friend agree that nothing is for free and that standing charges are part of the charge made for having and using any service that is available? If there were no standing charges, other charges would have to be adjusted accordingly. The question is, on whom would those adjusted charges fall and who would be most greatly disadvantaged?

Mr. Hamilton: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. Some standing charges have diminished over the years. Since privatisation, British Gas standing charges have reduced by 32 per cent., which reflects that company's success in paying its way by being efficient. That is a great British company, as many companies that were previously nationalised have become—earning income abroad which contributes substantially to their increased profits, from which tax revenue is paid rather than consumed.

Mr. O'Neill: Does the Minister agree that the most effective way of alleviating fuel poverty is to increase the housing stock's energy efficiency and to assist the funding of such work? Is he prepared to instruct the electricity regulator to introduce an E factor similar to that employed by British Gas, whereby it is prepared to fund environmental improvements and conservation? *[Interruption.]* If the Minister has finished consulting his colleagues, perhaps he will give the House an answer.

Mr. Hamilton: I prefer to ask those who know about the subject—unlike the hon. Gentleman, who prefers to rely on his colleagues' ignorance—and my hon. Friend the

Minister for Energy is the Minister principally responsible for such matters. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that we have no power to instruct the regulator in such terms. The regulator's powers are set out in Acts of Parliament. He is obliged to consider a variety of factors, which are all defined in legislation.

Trade Missions

5. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many trade missions abroad will be supported by Ministers in his Department in the foreseeable future; which countries they will visit; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Richard Needham): Ministerial participation is provisionally planned for at least 14 missions to 17 countries in the next year. It is likely that others will be arranged through the year.

Mr. Tredinnick: Given the spectacular success of the visit by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to Saudi and Oman, when he secured 20,000 jobs—many in Labour-held constituencies—does my hon. Friend agree that the highest priority should be given to Minister-backed trade missions? Will he confirm that his highest priority is to get out and back British business abroad as well as at home?

Mr. Needham: Of course, it is the highest priority of Ministers in the Department of Trade and Industry to get out and sell. It is also vital that those who go out and sell know how to do so and the markets to which they go. I would not advise Opposition Members to go on Cook's tours because when they have set out their stall, 18 million potential customers have invariably said no.

Mr. Bennett: Does the Minister agree that manufacturers of mining equipment, such as Oldham Batteries in my constituency, have regularly co-operated in trade missions, but that they want help from the Government to ensure that when they win orders they have the credits to fulfil them? They also need a home-based mining industry to support their export drives.

Mr. Needham: That is why, in the autumn statement, we increased Export Credits Guarantee Department cover by £700 million and, during last year, reduced the premium rate. That is also why we are continuing to review the cover available to support our capital goods industries, to achieve our objective of doubling sales over the next five years.

Mr. Thomason: Will my hon. Friend arrange an early visit to Japan, so that he can emphasise the importance of inward investment from that country to Britain, we can remain the principal recipient of Japanese inward investment among all the European countries and we can continue to talk up the enormous advantages of British industry—contrary to Labour, which always seeks to destroy its character?

Mr. Needham: My hon. Friend will be pleased to learn that my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) and I are going to Japan next month—along with two hon. Ladies from the Opposition—to achieve precisely the objective that he wants.

Mr. Robin Cook: Did the Minister note that the business men who accompanied the Prime Minister on his trade mission to India complained that the premiums charged by the British Government for export credits are still double those charged by the Governments of our competitor countries? Why does the Department's budget for next year show that it is to stop subsidising export credits and start making a profit from them? How does the Minister expect British exporters to win in the world market if they are saddled with the only Government in the world who are using export credits as a source of profit?

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman knows that that is nonsense. He knows that the ECGD has paid out in almost every year of its existence to top up the interest rate to which he referred. It so happens that, because interest rates in this country have fallen below the OECD average, it is possible—indeed, probable—that the ECGD will start to recoup some of the money that it has paid out. The hon. Gentleman is talking through his hat—or would be, if he were wearing one.

As for the premium rates in India, given the losses suffered by the ECGD, we must accept the need to make a reasonable effort not to waste the taxpayer's money. If one compares British premium rates with those in Germany, one sees that one reason why we did so well in Hong Kong, in the face of German competition, was that our premium rates were lower.

South-east Kent

6. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he next expects to visit Dover, Deal and south-east Kent to discuss opportunities for trade and industry.

Mr. Sainsbury: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade and I both visited east Kent last year. We both look forward to further opportunities to do so.

Mr. Shaw: I thank my right hon. Friends for the tremendous interest that they have shown in Dover and Deal and in the problems faced by the area. I am also grateful for the support given by the Department and the European Commission in allocating moneys to help customs clearance agents and freight forwarders.

May I remind my right hon. Friend of our application for assisted area status? It is especially important, because the decision by all political parties in the House to proceed with the channel tunnel project will lead to tremendous change in my constituency. Some short-term help, along the lines of assisted area status, will be necessary if Dover and Deal are to succeed during that process of change.

Mr. Sainsbury: I assure my hon. Friend that we shall take careful account of the points that he has made, including the one about the short-term implications of the channel tunnel. I hope that he agrees, however, that the tunnel will also bring great opportunities to the area. I am happy to confirm that my Department is currently talking to the British International Freight Association and the east Kent initiative, with the aim of co-ordinating a United Kingdom bid for funds from the customs agent regulations that the European Commission has made available.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Having arrived in Dover, will the Minister board a ship and travel up to Tyneside? Will he tell the people there what his Department is doing to ensure the survival——

Madam Speaker: Order. Most ingenious; I rather expected that one. Let us move on to question 7.

Assisted Area Status

7. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received in connection with the Bolton/Bury assisted area status; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: My Department received a joint written submission from the metropolitan borough councils of Bolton and Bury and one from Inward, the North West Regional Development Organisation. Several letters of support were also received from local businesses. My noble Friend Baroness Denton met a deputation of council representatives, business leaders and local Members of Parliament on 27 October 1992.

Mr. Sumberg: I appreciate that many new friends are knocking on my right hon. Friend's door—from Deal and Dover, from the mining communities and from London. Will he bear it in mind, however, that withdrawing assisted area status from Bury and Bolton would send entirely the wrong signal to the business community in my constituency?

Mr. Sainsbury: As my hon. Friend knows, I cannot anticipate the outcome of the review, but I assure him that I have taken careful account of what he said.

Mr. Lewis: I welcome the conversion of the hon. Member for Bury, South (Mr. Sumberg) to the idea of intervention.

While the Minister is considering his hon. Friend's remarks, may I point out that, over the past nine years, 72,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost in the Bolton and Bury travel-to-work area and four manufacturing closures have been announced over the past seven days? Assisted area status is needed and I add my support for it.

Mr. Sainsbury: I cannot add to what I said earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, South (Mr. Sumberg). I know from our many conversations that he could not be more energetic in pursuing his constituents' interests.

Magnox Nuclear Power Stations

8. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether he will make a statement on the future of the Magnox nuclear power stations.

The Minister for Energy (Mr. Tim Eggar): My hon. Friend will be aware that my Department's coal review is nearing completion. The review is considering, among other issues, the impact of nuclear generation on the electricity market, including the position of the Magnox power stations.

Mr. Whittingdale: As the Magnox nuclear power stations have the lowest avoidable costs of any form of electricity generation, does my hon. Friend agree that it makes sense, economically and environmentally, to keep them in operation for as long as it is safe to do so and that this applies in particular to Bradwell power station in my constituency, which has just passed its long-term safety review with flying colours?

Mr. Eggar: I agree that nuclear stations, including the Magnox stations, offer considerable environmental benefits and, as the recent Ernst and Young study showed, have the lowest avoidable costs. Bradwell has performed particularly well and since the completion of its inspection has been available for 97 per cent. of the time—a high record of availability indeed.

Mr. Cunliffe: As the hon. Gentleman has probably now been convinced by his political colleagues that intervention is necessary to assist the 31 pits that are in jeopardy, does he believe that a genuine transfer of about half the nuclear levy for Magnox stations would help most of the collieries to survive? In the long term, if all the £1,270 million nuclear levy were transferred, it would assist all the 31 collieries to maintain production until supplies were exhausted.

Mr. Eggar: Those issues are among a number that are being considered by the review. The hon. Gentleman's proposition makes sense only if one assumes that the liabilities that rest on Nuclear Electric are not genuine liabilities, which has not yet been established.

Mr. Page: In supporting my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale), may I ask whether my hon. Friend is aware that the avoidable costs of the Magnox stations are the lowest in the nuclear industry and that comparisons with other forms of energy production show that they are considerably cheaper, at 1·2p per unit? Has a calculation been made of the costs of production of CO_2 by other sources of electricity and the effect on our environment?

Mr. Eggar: My hon. Friend is right about the avoidable costs of Magnox stations, which are low. Their environmental impact is one of the factors that will be considered in the review.

Dr. Kim Howells: Does the Minister recognise that many of the Magnox stations are situated in some of the most remote areas of the country and are centres of high-paid employment in those areas? If he is going to announce the closure of Magnox reactors, will he ensure that he does not do so with the same ineptitude and thoughtlessness as he announced the pit closures?

Mr. Eggar: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman is in favour of or against closing Magnox reactors, but he makes a valid point: employment is associated with nuclear stations in much the same way as it is with mining.

Inward Investment

9. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps his Department is taking to encourage inward investment.

Mr. Heseltine: My Department's Invest in Britain Bureau runs a comprehensive programme for promoting the United Kingdom overseas. Lord Walker, who advises me on inward investment, is helping me to consider how we can step up our efforts to make them as effective as possible.

Mr. Riddick: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the OECD has forecast that Britain is likely to increase its share of world trade this year? Is not one reason for that, as Jacques Delors said, that Britain has become a paradise for overseas investment and is not that because the Government have tackled the excessive power of the trade unions and refused to sign the job-destroying social chapter? Is not that in stark contrast with the union-dominated Labour party, which seems to believe that only the state can generate economic growth—a view which not even the Russians believe nowadays?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend is right on that specific point, but, of course, there are many other reasons why this is now the most attractive part of the single market in which to invest. It is because of the Government's policies that 36·1 per cent. of American and 40·9 per cent. of Japanese direct investment in the European Economic Community comes to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Eastham: Although it is essential to encourage investment from abroad, may I impress on the Secretary of State a recent document produced by the Engineering Employers Federation? It is a most scathing report about the lack of support from the Government. Is it not about time that we also encouraged our industries so that they can participate and benefit, thereby increasing manufacturing in Britain?

Mr. Heseltine: That is a travesty of the views of the EEF with which I had a lengthy discussion last night. If the hon. Gentleman genuinely wants to encourage inward investment into this country he should persuade his party not to put the costs of the social chapter on British industry.

Mr. Streeter: Is my right hon. Friend aware that inward investment in the far south-west is largely dependent on the critical Plymouth-Heathrow airlink? Is he further aware that the airlink is increasingly under threat because of the increasing squeeze on regional services at Heathrow? Will he confirm that his Department will take whatever action is necessary to protect the Heathrow slot?

Mr. Heseltine: I know how important that issue is to my hon. Friend. I have no doubt that on my visit to the south-west later this week I shall hear more about it. We are in touch with the Department of Transport, but, as my hon. Friend will be aware, in the end much of the decision making lies with the private sector.

Mr. Gunnell: Does the Secretary of State agree that Japanese companies that come to this country in general bring with them very good working practices, usually including a negotiated agreement with a trade union and agreed conditions of work which far exceed those laid down in the social chapter? In those circumstances, will the Secretary of State explain how the social chapter can possibly be a deterrent to companies that, at home, implement working conditions of a higher standard?

Mr. Heseltine: It is not the working conditions but the working costs imposed by the social chapter which will be the deterrent.

Assisted Area Status

10. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will give a report on the progress of the application for Weymouth and Dorchester travel-to-work area to have assisted area status.

Mr. Sainsbury: The application for assisted area status for the Dorchester and Weymouth travel-to-work area is, together with all such other applications received by my Department, still under consideration.

Mr. Bruce: Surely my right hon. Friend and I have a community interest in ensuring that the minimum number of places need assisted area status. Could not action by the Department of Trade and Industry, in talking to the Ministry of Defence about moving thousands of jobs from an area of high unemployment to those of lower unemployment, ensure that we do not need to have assisted area status in Weymouth but can preserve the jobs and economy of that area?

Mr. Sainsbury: My hon. Friend does, of course, know that these are essentially matters for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence who, I know, will take my hon. Friend's views carefully into account. We shall also take carefully into account any implications for employment opportunity in the Weymouth and Dorchester travel-to-work area of any proposed moves by the Ministry of Defence.

Industrial Strategy

11. **Ms. Coffey:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to meet the Association of British Chambers of Commerce to outline his industrial strategy.

Mr. Heseltine: I and my officials regularly meet the Association of British Chambers of Commerce. We share the same interests in providing quality service to business. The association has involved my Department closely in the progress of its five-year development plan, and we are also working together on my one-stop shops initiative.

Ms. Coffey: I wonder whether the President of the Board of Trade is aware of increasing concern about the disadvantages faced by British businesses—small, medium and large—in competing against industries from other countries for export contracts, because of higher levels of support given by their Governments? That support is shown in a variety of ways. What proposals does the right hon. Gentleman have to rectify the situation for the benefit of British business?

Mr. Heseltine: It is extraordinary that, at every Question Time, Opposition Members seek to misrepresent the achievements of British industry in the export market. The hon. Lady's question is simply not compatible with the fact that exports of manufactured goods, excluding erratics, are now at a record level—5 per cent. higher than in the last quarter, and 6·5 per cent. higher than a year ago. Why cannot the Labour party say how well Britain is doing, rather than run it down?

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Does my right hon. Friend accept that I have considerable sympathy with the views that have just been expressed by the hon. Member for Stockport (Ms. Coffey), who, with me, is a panel member of the new manufacturing and construction industries alliance, which is to be launched in just under a fortnight's time on 2 March? Does not my right hon. Friend accept that the national chambers of commerce believe that the country needs a new strategy to regenerate our manufacturing base? Will he therefore continue to advance the interests of this sector, which generates the only non-inflationary growth—the type of growth that this country needs?

Mr. Heseltine: I have come increasingly to recognise that my hon. Friend often finds himself in agreement with the views expressed by Opposition Members. I notice that, in his support for our manufacturing base, he seems to be prepared to vote more often against than with the Government whom he was elected to support.

Mr. Robin Cook: Why does not the President of the Board of Trade admit that his response to the collapse of DAF has shown up his lack of industrial strategy and the contrast with the industrial strategies of the countries of Europe? Is he aware that the Dutch and Belgian Governments are actively intervening to save jobs in their countries by agreeing to invest in the factories there? Can he explain why, when I met the Dutch Minister for Finance as recently as last week, there had been no ministerial contact from Britain in the nine weeks during which the Dutch had been working on a rescue package? Does not he understand that if Leyland DAF goes down, it will take with it scores of suppliers and thousands of skilled jobs? Cannot he see that if he does not even talk to the Dutch Government he will make it more likely that the axe will fall on British jobs?

Mr. Heseltine: Last week the hon. Gentleman was trying to undermine the British banks; now he is undermining the credibility of what the British Government are doing in these circumstances. He must know full well that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry has been in touch with his opposite number in the Dutch Government. He must know that we are in constant touch with the receiver and that we have kept in touch with the banks involved. If he searches his conscience he will find that he is aware that the best way to save parts of Leyland DAF is to give all possible support to the receiver, who is trying to do exactly that.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: Is it part of my right hon. Friend's industrial strategy to put an end to the iniquitous Arab trade boycott? If so, can he explain to the House why he did not raise that very important matter at his important meeting yesterday with the Middle East Association?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. and learned Friend will realise, from his knowledge of the issue, that it is extremely complex and controversial. It is a matter of which the British Government are very conscious, but I did not think that it would be appropriate to bring it up in my speech yesterday.

Small Businesses

12. **Mr. Simpson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to meet the Federation of Small Businesses to discuss projects for the small business sector; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Technology (Mr. Edward Leigh): My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has no plans to meet the Federation of Small Businesses. My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Consumer Affairs and Small Firms has frequent meetings with the federation and with all the major small firms organisations to discuss a range of issues.

Mr. Simpson: Is the Minister aware that in my city of Nottingham small business bankruptcies over the past year have risen by a record 70 per cent? When he extols the growth of new firms, does he realise that of the 4 million that grew last year almost one third—1·25 million—had a turnover of less than £15,000 per annum? Typically, such firms consist of a man with a van and bag of spanners, and they are no substitute for the good firms that the Government have driven into bankruptcy. Does the Minister now accept that this country needs a manufacturing strategy for the growth of small businesses, not the car boot sale that the Government currently offer?

Mr. Leigh: In fact, the number of small firms grows by about 400,000 each year, and has increased by more than two thirds since 1979. That has happened because we have created a culture of enterprise with low interest rates and low inflation. The hon. Gentleman might ask his own Front-Bench spokesmen how small firms would be helped by the tangle of no fewer than 284 quangos that would have overseen every small business in the country and tangled them up in red tape so that audits of the social cost of every business decision would have had to be made. That is Labour party policy, and it would have driven small businesses out of business.

Mrs. Peacock: Is my hon. Friend aware that some small businesses that go into receivership leave individual creditors who are not helped by the receivers? In the case of Acres of Wellswood in Torquay the receiver seems hell bent on protecting those who have gone bankrupt rather than helping the creditors who are about to lose their homes.

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend raises an interesting point. The official receivers have adequate powers to investigate company directors and, if there is any evidence of bad conduct, the courts have the power to disqualify directors from serving again. But some companies go out of business for genuine reasons, and once the receivers have investigated their past it is only fair that, in time, the directors should be able to start new companies.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Does the Minister accept that if and when the economy comes out of recession small businesses will provide the basic engine room of growth? From 1985 to 1987 small businesses employing fewer than 20 people created a million extra jobs, while large businesses created only 20,000. Does the Minister therefore accept that we now need a strategy to ease the burden on small businesses by cutting uniform business rate, raising the threshold of VAT cash payments, and recognising in numerous other ways that jobs and economic recovery will come from small businesses, because big businesses cannot provide that employment?

Mr. Leigh: The hon. Gentleman is right to emphasise the key role that small businesses play, and will continue to play in the economy. That is why the deregulation initiative by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is so important. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary

Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs is considering the 7,000 regulations presently imposed on small businesses, and he will examine each and every one of them to ensure that the burdens on small businesses are reduced where possible. We shall continue our drive to reduce the general burdens on small businesses and to ensure that, whether it be in terms of low inflation, low taxation or low interest rates, they operate in a culture of enterprise. That is what we should aim to do.

Mr. Oppenheim: In connection with industrial strategy for businesses of all sizes, does my hon. Friend recollect that about five years ago his Department robustly resisted the entreaties of the boffins, the space buffs and the Opposition, and refused to take a large stake in the European Space Agency's Hermes project, which the then Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster described as a frolic in space? Is my hon. Friend aware that that project is now 40 per cent. over cost and running late, and that the Germans are threatening to withdraw? Does not that bear out our decision not to get involved? Is not the project exactly the type of grandiose industrial project into which the Opposition would pour billions of pounds if they ever got the chance again?

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend makes a fair point. The Minister then responsible for industry made a correct decision not to get involved in the Hermes project, which is hundreds of millions of pounds over budget. We have concentrated our space resources into earth observation, putting space to work and ensuring that British companies secure the orders and lead the world in environmental and space technology. That, rather than Opposition proposals for grandiose schemes about which they know little, is what is meant by a good industrial strategy.

Package Travel (EC Directive)

13. **Mr. Denham:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what concerns have been expressed in the further representations he has received from the Association of British Travel Agents, the Consumers Association and trading standards officers in respect of the EC package travel directive.

Mr. Leigh: The Association of British Travel Agents and the Consumers Association have made clear their preference for a licensing system for all organisers of packages. The Government have rejected such a system as unnecessarily expensive and bureaucratic. My officials have been discussing with ABTA and with trading standards officers the interpretation of the directive and enforcement of the implementing regulations.

Mr. Denham: The Minister must be aware that last year 40,000 people, including many of my constituents, lost their holidays and their money through the collapse of the Land Travel Company. Given that the majority of reputable travel operators and consumer organisations believe that the bonding system which the Government support is an utterly worthless protection against unscrupulous cowboy operators, why does the Minister refuse to introduce a licensing system to protect holidaymakers against dubious and dodgy companies?

Mr. Leigh: The reason why we have rejected a licensing system, after careful thought, is that upwards of 30,000 small operators would be embroiled in the system; therefore, the unit cost would be extremely high for those small operators and it would put up costs to consumers. We believe that the bonding and insurance arrangements that we have put in place are adequate protection for the consumer. Indeed, the consumer is protected for the first time. We do not believe in imposing on business unnecessary burdens which drive people out of business and put up costs to consumers.

Mr. Allason: Is my hon. Friend aware that in many parts of the country trading standards officers are regarded as the enemy of business and that they are imposing intolerable burdens on small businesses? Is he aware also that in my constituency, for example, hoteliers are obliged not just by trading standards officers but by others in the local bureaucracy, such as environmental health officers, to clean and paint the ceilings of their kitchens with disinfectant twice a day to ensure that they are completely free of contamination? That is the kind of burden which is driving small businesses out of business.

Mr. Leigh: Trading standards officers have an essential role to play in society and they perform their duties with great skill and diligence. We in the Government pay tribute to their work. At the same time, it is important that, as part of my hon. Friend's deregulation initiative, we look at all 7,000 regulations which are imposing burdens on business and that we ensure, particularly with regard to European directives, that we do what is necessary to carry out the spirit and the letter of the law. We should not go over the top and overburden business with burdensome regulations.

Mr. Faulds: On a technical point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order. I can take neither a technical nor any other point of order in the middle of Question Time. I am sorry; the hon. Gentleman will have to bide his time.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: What assurance will the Minister and the Government give that another Land Travel type of collapse will not happen this year when ABTA says that his weak laws and lax supervision put thousands of holidaymakers at risk?

Mr. Leigh: As usual, the hon. Gentleman grossly overstates his case. He knows that, whatever directives are in place, whatever laws are laid down and however many burdens are imposed on business, it is impossible to ensure that there will never be another Land Travel in future.

We cannot regulate against people acting corruptly or lying to trading standards officers and to overseers of their business. That is fact. In the directive we have created a balanced measure which provides protection to consumers for the first time. It provides a proper bonding and insurance scheme. At the same time, we have resisted a burdensome over-regulatory licensing system which would have covered no fewer than 30,000 small operators, including even those who provide fishing weekends in Scotland. The licensing system that the Opposition would impose on business would push up costs for all consumers. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. It seems that not all hon. Members on the Opposition Back Bench can hear. Perhaps something can be done about that.

Mr. Dykes: Does my hon. Friend have the same objection to licensing for business and incentive travel operators?

Mr. Leigh: We have tried to keep a fair balance for business travel. Business travellers are as entitled to protection as ordinary consumers are and that is why we have decided, after considering all the arguments, that business travel should be covered by the directive.

Regional Assistance

14. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the future geographical boundaries and funding of regional assistance to industry.

Mr. Sainsbury: We are carefully considering the many representations put forward on the review of the assisted areas map.

Mr. Morgan: Does the Minister accept our concern that, as well as having no industrial strategy, the Government do not appear to have a regional strategy? Or does he mean us to accept that the Government have sneaked out an unannounced regional policy of devastating the economy of the south-east of England so much that the old smoke-stack areas of Scotland, Wales and the north are made to look not quite as bad by comparison? Will there be a budget for regional policy when the review, which is three or four months late, is eventually announced or has the Chief Secretary to the Treasury persuaded the Minister that we do not need a regional policy or a regional budget any more?

Mr. Sainsbury: The hon. Gentleman is as wrong about regional policy, as he is about industrial strategy. If he looks at the many documents available on the Government's expenditure plans, he will see plenty of evidence of a budget to support industry regionally.

Mr. Knapman: Is there a danger that regional assistance will distort trade? Will my right hon. Friend confirm that business should always be based where it is most efficient?

Mr. Sainsbury: I very much agree with my hon. Friend that it must always be in the interests of business to seek to make itself as efficient as possible, including when it takes location decisions. When we consider applications for regional selective assistance, we take into account any possible displacement of activity elsewhere.

Mr. Fatchett: With unemployment just about to go above 3 million and with once prosperous areas in the south-east and the south of England now facing record levels of unemployment, is not it clear that the Minister is unable to draw a map for regional assistance simply because his Government's economic failures have hit every part of the country? Is not that the reason why Conservative Members, who were previously against Government intervention and who used to call regional aid "Government handouts", are now crawling to his Department asking for assistance for their constituencies?

Mr. Sainsbury: We believe that regional selective assistance should be targeted accurately to where it is most needed. In determining where it is most needed, we should take account of a wide number of factors, including long-term and current unemployment and peripherality. We are considering the matter carefully and we shall not be rushed into making decisions that might mean that the map is less accurate than it should be.

Mr. Barry Field: Does my right hon. Friend understand that the reason he has heard so much today from hon. Members representing constituencies from Dorset to Dover, including the Isle of Wight, about assisted area status and the Government's regional policy is that we are fed up with having businesses hijacked to Wales and to Scotland, which get a disproportionate amount of British taxpayers' money? What we want is somebody to speak for England.

Mr. Sainsbury: My hon. Friend speaks most effectively for the Isle of Wight.

Mr. Wigley: May I speak for Wales? Does the Minister agree that the drawing of the map for regional purposes in the United Kingdom can have a critical effect on the eligibility of certain areas for finance from the European Community? Will he confirm that his Department has made direct representations to the European Commission in Brussels to ensure that whatever the outcome of the map, areas that have been dependent on European finance will not miss out in future?

Mr. Sainsbury: We are waiting for the proposals from the Commission for the review of the objective 2 areas. They are expected later this year. We have made representations to the Commission with regard to objective 1 status.

Deregulation

15. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many regulations the deregulation unit has *(a)* approved and *(b)* abolished in each of the last three years.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The deregulation unit, unfortunately, does not possess arbitrary powers, as my hon. Friend seems to imply in his question, to approve or to disapprove particular regulations. Our role is to drive forward the deregulation initiative in government. My job is to crack the whip over my colleagues and to ensure not only that we make good progress, but that we have a good time while doing do.

Mr. Steen: The Under-Secretary may be slightly too young to remember this, but some 10 years ago, the then Prime Minister said that we would get the Government off the backs of the people by having fewer rules and regulations. In fact, we have never had so many rules and regulations as we have had in the past 10 years. What am I to say to hoteliers, those in the construction industry and retailers to make them believe that the country will change dramatically under the leadership of the new Prime Minister and my hon. Friend's Department and that they will get rid of some of those rules and regulations, which are crippling small businesses, hoteliers, the construction industry and everyone else?

Mr. Hamilton: The difference is that, this time, the initiative is being taken by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade and me. We have the full and enthusiastic support of the Prime Minister. Having recently completed an audit of all the regulations currently in force, we have set up a series of task forces of business men to involve the private sector—those whom my hon. Friend mentioned—which will be able to put the case for business.

I agree that when business is saddled with excessive costs, those costs are felt not only by businesses themselves but in lost jobs and reduced economic prosperity. On this occasion, therefore, we intend to proceed by requiring cost compliance assessments and risk assessments to take fully into account the cost to British business of any regulations that we introduce or allow to continue. Only where the benefits to the public at large outweigh those costs will the regulations survive.

Mr. Cryer: But is not the reality that the Government, who are supposedly pledged to take regulation off the people's backs, produced 3,439 statutory instruments in 1992? That is more delegated legislation than has ever been produced and forced through Parliament by any Government at any time. Is not that situation compounded by the fact that the self-same Government continue to deny the Opposition opportunities to debate prayers against such instruments? Is it not a mark of a centralised elected dictatorship that that torrent of legislation is turning Parliament into a sausage machine?

Mr. Hamilton: Many of the hon. Gentleman's Friends have spent much of the past few decades supporting unelected dictatorships in other parts of the world. I might add that the hon. Gentleman makes a most unconvincing apostle of laissez-faire. I appreciate the fact that the hon. Gentleman's knowledge of the statutory instruments procedure is profound and that he has played an important part in the constitutional affairs of the House in ensuring that many such instruments are debated. I share his zeal—if that is what it is—to reduce the quantity of legislation with which we have to cope. It is certainly not in our interests to saddle our businesses with more and more costly regulations of the kind that the Opposition even now are seeking to advance through the social chapter, which would impose—if we were to give in to it—enormous costs on British business, so reducing the employment-creating potential of the economy that the Opposition affect to want.

Exports

16. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what initiatives his Department is taking to promote exports.

Mr. Needham: The United Kingdom exports £400 per person per year more than Japan. I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that that is very good, but it is not good enough. That is one of the reasons why I launched a comprehensive policy last year, a copy of which I have sent to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Evennett: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. Does he agree that export insurance cover is a component part of any export strategy? Will he confirm that his Department will continue to encourage exporters and to give them all the help and assistance that they need to do a good job for Britain?

Mr. Needham: Yes. That is why, as I said in an earlier answer, we announced a further £700 million in the autumn statement, and why the Government are determined to support our capital goods industry in its effort to double its sales over the next five years.

Mr. Bell: The House will welcome the Minister's statement that we are to try to double our exports of capital goods over the next five years, but how does he expect the House and the country to accept his claim that he supports exports when Leyland DAF, which exports £1,000 million-worth of products a year, faces closure, with 5,000 jobs in that industry and a further 15,000 jobs in subsidiary industries at risk? Does the hon. Gentleman suppose that the House will believe him?

Mr. Needham: As far as capital goods exports are concerned—which I was talking about—if one looks at power generation, airports, upstream or downstream oil and gas exploration and the whole range of industries, the United Kingdom has an endless number of companies of the highest quality, many of which are in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. Conservative Members and Ministers spend most of their time supporting those industries, and Opposition Members spend most of their time denigrating them.

Mr. Gallie: Is the Minister aware that a Scottish company won a contract in March 1992 for the supply of boiler tube to Taiwan, an export licence was rejected in April, an appeal was launched, and nine months later that appeal has not been answered? Is he aware that the Spanish have supplied the boiler tube in the mean time? Will he note that a larger contract and more jobs for Scotland are at stake? Will he do whatever he can to expedite the appeal?

Mr. Needham: Of course I will look into my hon. Friend's comment. It is the first time that he has brought it to my attention. Clearly, when it comes to export licensing, it is absolutely crucial that investigations take place to ensure that the export licence is appropriate.

Points of Order

3.32 pm

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You may not be aware, since you were forced to change your seating arrangements in the House, that there are many places in the Chamber where the system for letting Members listen to the little loudspeaker on the back of Benches no longer works. That is primarily probably due to the fact that the enunciation of most Members is appallingly poor. They do not know—*[Interruption.]* You can hear me, laddie.

There are two other possibilities. One is that the technical competence of the people who service the little things on the back of the Benches——

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I am not a little thing. *[Laughter.]*

Mr. Andrew Faulds: This is serious for those of us who are elderly and short of hearing.

It may be that their competence is somewhat lacking. The most likely explanation is that, since the malign introduction of radio and television into the Chamber, these little speakers on the back of the Benches are turned down so that they do not interfere with the output of the radio and television transmission. Could you please examine the problem? Otherwise, I might as well sit at home holding my wife's hand and having a cup of coffee. I would hear the proceedings of the House much more easily if I relaxed in that fashion.

Madam Speaker: It could also be that the noise in the Chamber often makes it difficult for Members in various parts of the House, as well as the Speaker, to hear what is going on. I have noted what the hon. Gentleman said and it will certainly be attended to.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In view of the flagrantly inaccurate, dishonest and inadequate response to my supplementary question——

Madam Speaker: Order. *[Interruption.]* Order. I can deal with this matter. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman used a word which he will withdraw. I do not wish it to be used in the House. No one is dishonest here.

Mr. Winterton: If you feel, Madam Speaker, that it is unparliamentary, I can only say that my right hon. Friend knows that what he said was inaccurate. If that is not dishonest, I do not know what is.

Hon. Members: Withdraw!

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is a long-standing parliamentarian and a member of my Chairmen's Panel. I am sure that he will rephrase what he has to say.

Mr. Winterton: Madam Speaker—[HON. MEMBERS: "Say 'economical with the truth'."] I am being helped by hon. Members on both sides of the House. I believe that my right hon. Friend, on mature consideration, will realise that in responding to my question he was being very economical with the truth. As a result, if I say that a response was dishonest, I am honourable enough—and, indeed, I have been here long enough—to accept the advice which you give from the Chair. I will withdraw the word "dishonest" in respect of his comments, which were clearly totally and flagrantly inaccurate.

Madam Speaker: I am obliged to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): Would you, Madam Speaker, give guidance to hon. Members as to the propriety of any hon. Member releasing to the press the contents of a speech intended to be made during debates in the Chamber and allowing it to be published as if it had been made, although it was never made? Would it be reasonable for the hon. Member or hon. Members involved to provide follow-up press releases stating that the speech was not made?

Madam Speaker: If what the hon. Gentleman says is correct—I have no reason to believe otherwise—I hope that the practice will cease forthwith. I caution the House that any speech which is not published in *Hansard*, although it may be published elsewhere, is not a parliamentary proceeding and is therefore not privileged. All hon. Members should be made aware of that.

Mr. Tony Banks: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. As you know, I am not one of life's whingers, even though I have to sit next to my hon. Friend the Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds) and translate for him during the proceedings, but you may recall that this is the second day running that my question has failed by one to be reached. I wonder whether you would consider abolishing Prayers. They are clearly not a popular institution, and they deprive me of the opportunity to raise important issues.

Madam Speaker: I have never thought that the hon. Gentleman has been very much deprived in his public life.

Cycling Safety

3.36 pm

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make further provision for the safety of cyclists on highways; to encourage greater use of the bicycle; and for connected purposes.

For the benefit of the hon. Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds), I shall attempt to enunciate properly.

Outside the House, traffic is crawling up to Parliament square. The rush hour is building up, and millions of citizens throughout the country will waste millions of hours sitting in their cars on their way home. That position is unlikely to improve, because the long-term forecasts for traffic growth are horrendous, as the House will know.

Those millions of vehicles will pump more carbon monoxide and pollution into the air of our cities. In the past two years, we have seen smog return to London. It may not be like the old pea-soupers, but it is a potent and unpleasant mix. Carbon monoxide and exhaust emissions go up into the atmosphere to contribute to global warming. In Britain, as elsewhere, we are committed to reducing carbon emissions.

The life of all those who live near roads is further degraded by the incessant noise of traffic—*[Interruption.]* —and by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). Traffic and congestion continue to increase. Cycling can help ease the congestion and pollution. More than 60 per cent. of journeys by motor car cover a distance of less than five miles—well within the range of most cyclists.

Already, approximately 200,000 bicycle journeys are made each day by commuters into and out of London. Cycling is clean, non-polluting, cheap and accessible to all. Cyclists rarely cause traffic jams. Cycling is an excellent option for short journeys: it is quiet; it can be relaxing and therapeutic; it can be healthy and it is recognised as an excellent form of aerobic exercise. It is a popular form of recreation in the lanes of Leicestershire and in my constituency. Indeed, I can find little disagreement with the idea that we would be wise to encourage cycling, especially in urban areas, but also for recreation.

The traffic management chairman of the corporation of the City of London was quoted on Monday as saying:

"We are keen to encourage cycling as an environmentally and economically sound way to travel around the City."

I have mentioned the City of London for the benefit of those on the Opposition Front Bench, to show that cycling is hardly a fringe activity of relevance only to those poor people who cannot afford cars, or to weirdos who for some strange reason prefer to battle through wind and rain rather than sit in a warm and comfortable car.

My county of Leicestershire has an excellent cycling strategy, which has the objective of increasing significantly the proportion of trips made by cycle in its urban areas. The Department of Transport, which wishes to encourage cycling, does not disagree. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Mr. Carlisle), the Minister for Roads and Traffic, understands the value of cycling as a means of local transport. His Department has been encouraging local highway authorities to provide safe and convenient cycling facilities.

The benefits of increased cycling are obvious: there is little disagreement about them. There has been an encouraging increase in the sale of mountain bikes, but sadly there has been no marked increase in cycling—indeed, there is anecdotal evidence of cyclists abandoning two wheels for four, especially in urban areas. The perception of danger is the main reason, and it is a very real danger. A Department of Transport study claimed that cycling is between 16 and 18 times more dangerous than driving over a given distance. Although those statistics do not tell the whole story, they point to a real reason for not getting on one's bike.

My brother, who cycles to work from Clapham to Westminster, has been knocked off his bicycle three times, yet to the best of my knowledge he has never had an accident in a car. The problem is not merely the reality of danger but the threat of it. Anyone who has cycled recently knows how much more intimidating and aggressive drivers have become as the amount of traffic on our roads has grown. A friend told me this morning how a double-decker bus had squeezed him into the pavement on Regent street and forced him off the road. That happens far too often when cycling in our cities.

I fear that most hon. Members have not cycled much since they were children or students.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): What about tricycling?

Mr. Robathan: Yes, perhaps some have tricycled.

Instead, hon. Members perhaps share the worries of most parents and grandparents about allowing children to go out on the roads on their bicycles. There are other dangers, as we have all too sadly witnessed this week, but the fear of traffic has led to a marked decrease in children cycling to school, which means that parents drive them there by car, thus causing even greater congestion.

A long time ago, when many hon. Members had more hair and it was perhaps somewhat darker, most of them would have taken their driving test at a time when the highway code suggested:

"All drivers should give a pedal cyclist a wide berth of at least six feet."

I wonder how many Members have been able to do that when driving recently. The highway code has now dropped that advice.

As further evidence of increasing intimidation on our roads, one might look no further than the House of Commons Cycling Club, which I am told used to have upwards of 50 members. The club folded in 1983, largely due to the increasing danger on our roads.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): No, it was because they did not get enough free trips.

Mr. Robathan: It may also have been because they were intimidated by the hon. Member for Bolsover.

The increasing volume and speed of traffic leads to drivers cutting up cyclists, cutting in front, squeezing past, trying to nip through where there is insufficient space. It is depressing to note that more and more cyclists are being hit from behind—a sign that drivers are not giving them enough room. That is an example of drivers showing lack of due care and attention, for which they are now likely to be charged with careless driving.

However, any motorist who has already struck a cyclist has endangered life—if it was the motorist's fault. As a parallel, any driver who has drunk a certain amount automatically loses his or her licence, if caught. Although I applaud that, the driver may not even have seen another road user and may not have been able to endanger life.

I propose that a special measure should be introduced so that, after any accident in which a driver, through his or

[Mr. Robathan]

her bad driving, hits a cyclist, he or she will be charged with dangerous driving. If found guilty, the driver would automatically be disqualified from driving.

The purpose of the Bill is to change attitudes on our increasingly crowded roads. The current attitude was illustrated this morning by one hon. Member who told me that he would ban all cyclists from the streets of London. That is not a constructive policy or one that is shared by any political party as far as I know. We need to change that negative attitude, of which we are all guilty when we hide behind the wheel of a motor vehicle. That attitude usually means that any vulnerable road user—be he pedestrian, equestrian or cyclist—is judged an obstruction, a nuisance or a problem, whereas, on the contrary, the problem is that there are too many cars being driven badly and too fast. Very few motorists are killed by cyclists, but the converse, sadly, is not the case.

The Bill recognises the need to encourage cycling and to encourage people to get on their bikes, and to discourage selfish driving by motorists. I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Andrew Robathan, Mr. Peter Bottomley, Mr. Harry Greenway, Mr. Simon Hughes, Mr. Keith Mans, Mr. David Nicholson, Mr. Anthony Steen, Mr. Gary Waller and Ms. Joan Walley.

CYCLING SAFETY

Mr. Andrew Robathan accordingly presented a Bill to make further provision for the safety of cyclists on highways; to encourage greater use of the bicycle; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 12 March, and to be printed. [Bill 138.]

Orders of the Day

Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Bill

Order for Third Reading read.

3.47 pm

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The Bill has been debated for 56 hours in Committee and for seven hours on Report. I have no doubt that the amendments that the House has accepted on Report will improve and strengthen the Bill. The great majority of the amendments that the House has accepted over the past two days are a direct response to points raised by the Opposition when the Bill was in Committee. I am happy to pay tribute now to the vigilant and serious way in which the Opposition approached many parts of the Bill in Committee. It is in large part because of the constructive spirit of the debates in Standing Committee that we can say that the Bill which goes to be debated in another place is an even better Bill than the one that we debated on Second Reading.

The Bill is, above all, a Bill that creates new rights for people at work. It gives every woman in employment a right to 14 weeks' maternity leave, regardless of the number of hours she works or the length of her service. It gives every woman the right not to be dismissed because she is pregnant or because she exercises her statutory right to take maternity leave. It gives every employee who works more than eight hours a week the right to receive a written statement explaining his or her basic terms and conditions of employment. It gives important new rights in relation to health and safety: it provides protection against dismissal for safety representatives carrying out their duties and for employees who have to leave their work because of imminent risks to their health and safety.

The Bill also gives important new rights to all trade union members. For the first time, the Bill gives employees the right to join the union of their choice—not the union chosen for them by a Trades Union Congress committee. For the first time, it gives trade union members the right to a postal ballot, before a strike, and the right to have that ballot independently scrutinised. It gives all union members the right to decide for themselves how they pay union subscriptions. It gives all union members new protection against mismanagement of their union's finances and new protection against fraud and abuse in union elections.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): As the right hon. Lady knows, we believe that the Bill undermines existing rights in many respects and jeopardises people's rights in certain occupations. Does she recognise that, at a time when, on the official figures, it will shortly be announced that more than 3 million people are unemployed—the true number is probably nearer 4 million—she should come to the House with measures to give rights to our fellow citizens who are denied the right to work? Instead, she is today dealing with largely irrelevant matters at the expense of the crucial issues for the economy.

Mrs. Shephard: We do not think that the rights of workers and trade union members are ever irrelevant, and I am extremely sorry that the hon. Gentleman should give the impression that he and his hon. Friends take a different view. Later in my speech, I shall make some points about employment and unemployment; but I remind the hon. Gentleman that the stance adopted by him and his hon. Friends on some of the issues covered by the Bill does not suggest that they believe that employment will come from reducing burdens on employers.

The Bill will increase the safeguards against the damaging effects of strikes. It will help to preserve the remarkable transformation in this country's industrial relations record, which has seen the number of days lost through strikes fall to an all-time low. In future, trade unions will have to give employers at least seven days' notice of their intention to call a strike. That will help to overcome the damaging effects which strikes called at short notice can have on business, on jobs and on the life of the community. Also, of course, the Bill gives every citizen an entirely new right to seek the protection of the law if he or she is the victim of unlawful industrial action. No longer will customers be defenceless in the face of unlawful strikes that deliberately seek to cause disruption to services on which people rely.

When I introduced the Bill in the autumn, I made it clear that there was another important theme, as well as that of increasing individual rights. The Bill also includes important measures to increase the competitiveness of the economy and to remove obstacles to the creation of new jobs.

Much debate on the Bill in Committee and last night focused on the proposal to abolish the remaining wages councils. We heard further predictable speeches by Opposition Members during the debate on Report, and doubtless we will hear more this afternoon. But to force employers to pay wages that they cannot afford—whether via the wages councils or via a misconceived national minimum wage—will simply destroy jobs. We do not need to establish a Commission on Social Justice to demonstrate that.

Ms. Angela Eagle (Wallasey): Is the Secretary of State saying that it is acceptable for the state to subsidise employers who pay poverty wages instead of deploying some minimal protection to ensure that workers—often vulnerable workers—are not exploited by bad employers? Is it right that the taxpayer should pick up the tab for that sort of behaviour?

Mrs. Shephard: It is extraordinary that, when faced with a proposal that will help to bring about greater flexibility in the labour market and remove an unnecessary barrier to the creation of new jobs, Labour Members should oppose it.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): What research has been carried out into companies that have become insolvent to show whether they went bankrupt because of the high wages being paid to their employees?

Mrs. Shephard: I am not clear whether the hon. Gentleman was present for last night's debate. If he was, he will have heard my hon. Friend the Minister of State make the point that 90 per cent. of employers who made representations were in favour of the abolition of wages councils. Those who oppose their abolition ignore the evidence that they inhibit the creation of new jobs, and refuse to accept that regulation and red tape can only hinder enterprise. They fail to notice that 90 per cent. of industry successfully negotiates wages without the need for statutory interference.

I am sorry that seems to be the face of the modern Labour party. Is it still wedded to binding statutory regulations and to armies of Government inspectors? Is it clinging to the belief that Labour could run businesses better than business men and women? Is it still in hock to the vested interests of trade unions?

My hon. Friend the Minister of State blew the gaff on the Opposition's policy on wages councils almost before the debate began, on the Bill's Second Reading last November. He challenged the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) to say whether Labour would re-establish wages councils after they had been abolished. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] We had to ask that question, because we had not received an answer.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras struggled then to provide a coherent answer.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras) *indicated dissent.*

Mrs. Shephard: Three months later, all we have is a form of words to which, to be very complimentary, a weasel would not put its name. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras shows that he is still a bit sensitive about the matter. Perhaps he will tell the House his latest policy. Perhaps he will confound the commentators by explaining how a national minimum wage can possibly create jobs. If he does, let us hope that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) is listening.

Mr. Dobson: As I said on Second Reading and several times in Committee, and as I made clear in a letter to the Secretary of State—when she employed public officials to peddle lies about Labour party policy, for which she has still not apologised—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] I am not accusing the hon. Lady of lying but saying that she permitted public officials to peddle lies, and that comment is not out of order.

We said that, if the Government achieved the abolition of wages councils, the incoming Labour Government would be faced with no existing wages councils. Our first priority will be to establish a national minimum wage. As I made clear all along, we are consulting people working in industries, their representatives, and various organisations throughout the country that have, over the years, shown a deep and abiding interest in the welfare of the low paid to see whether further special machinery may be necessary to protect the special interests of those who have been most exploited.

That ought to be clear. There are no weasel words there. If the hon. Lady does not understand that statement, I do not know why. I hope that, in future, public officials will, at the taxpayers' expense, make it clear that that is Labour's policy—not the lie that they have peddled to date.

Mrs. Shephard: The hon. Gentleman merely confirms the impression that he gave on Second Reading—that Labour does not have a policy in that respect.

Wages councils have long outlived their usefulness. The Bill will bring their activities to an end, and let us hope that

[Mrs. Shephard]

we never have the opportunity to discover whether the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras would try to bring them back.

The Opposition claim to care about the level of unemployment and the fate of people who are unemployed. They continually urge the Government to provide more assistance and support, while ignoring or denigrating the wide range of employment and training measures already in place

The Oppposition have opposed every training programme and every measure to help unemployed people introduced since 1979. The conversion to the merits of training demonstrated today by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) was an amazing U-turn even for Labour. The Opposition continue to claim that they care about the unemployed but on radio last Sunday, when asked what Labour would do, the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras had no answer. He wishes to woo the unemployed; he wants to win the favours of people facing the problems of world economic recession. What does he do? He insults business men. No doubt he would describe those who come here from Japan, America or France to build factories, create jobs and increase our prosperity not merely as incompetent scum, but as alien incompetent scum.

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): The Secretary of State knows very well that the Norfolk and Waveney training and enterprise council, which is in her area, is unable to provide the level of training that is needed in her constituency and mine, particularly for young people. A number of representations have been made to the right hon. Lady, but she has done nothing about them. She has shown no sympathy for the plight of the young unemployed and untrained.

Mrs. Shephard: The hon. Gentleman knows that my Department's budget is increasing in real terms, and that fewer young people are applying for youth training because of the welcome increase in the staying-on rate. He may not know that I have taken a great personal interest in youth training in Norfolk, and that, by tomorrow, every young person will certainly have been offered a place. The hon. Gentleman likes to pretend to take a close interest in such matters. If that interest is genuine, it is a great pity that he has not informed himself of the facts.

Mr. Dobson: I am not in the habit of intervening unless I am referred to personally. Can the right hon. Lady produce chapter and verse for my description of any foreign investors as "alien"? If she is going to quote what I said about millionaires who want to line their own pockets even more by driving down the wages of some of the worst paid, she should note that I did not describe them as thieving incompetents; I described them as thieving scum.

Mrs. Shephard: I am grateful for that elucidation—as, I am sure, are all hon. Members and all employers and business men. I am also delighted that the hon. Gentleman rejects the TUC's description of people who come here offering inward investment projects as "alien".

At a time of high unemployment, the hon. Gentleman would sign up to the social chapter that the Prime Minister rejected at Maastricht. I wonder whether he has calculated the number of jobs that that would destroy. As an incentive to training, he proposes to place a levy on employers—to put a tax on jobs. How many jobs would that destroy? His latest idea is to subsidise jobs by taxing the utilities—to place a tax on success. That is a really positive message for business!

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Given her great knowledge of these matters, can the Secretary of State give an example—any example—of an EC measure that could be moved under the social chapter but cannot be moved under existing Community legislation?

Mrs. Shephard: In view of my hon. Friend's persistent opposition to the social chapter, I am sure that he agrees that it would destroy jobs, strangle the creation of employment and place crippling burdens on business. I have always understood that to be his position.

During the Bill's passage, Opposition Members have not demonstrated that they understand how jobs are created. Jobs result from firms competing in world markets, and delivering the goods and services that customers want and will buy, on time and competitively priced. Government's role is to create a sound economic climate, in which businesses can grow and jobs can be created. Part of that climate is the good industrial relations that the Bill will help to maintain, building on our previous reforms.

Mr. Winnick: The Secretary of State says that the Opposition's policies would destroy jobs. Is she not aware that, when her party came to office in 1979, a total of 1 million were unemployed? As she knows only too well, even the official figure is now 3 million—and, had not the system of calculation been changed, it would be nearer 4 million. Who are destroying jobs? Are they not being destroyed by the right hon. Lady's Government, and is she not directly responsible for policies that destroy jobs and small businesses day in, day out? She owes us an apology, rather than a lecture.

Mrs. Shephard: The hon. Gentleman knows well from our exchanges in the House that I am extremely concerned about the plight of anyone who is unemployed. He ignores the fact that we are in a world recession and that we share the problem of rising unemployment with every other major industrialised country, among which we had the best possible record, as corroborated by the OECD, for job creation in the 1980s. Curiously, Labour Members find it convenient to forget that fact.

I was disappointed that the Opposition chose to vote against clause 34 in Committee, which means that, in future, arrangements will be made for careers services to be provided by whomever can best and most successfully do so in each area. I had hoped that they would have welcomed the greater freedom and flexibility that this will bring for services to respond effectively to the needs of local communities.

The principles underlying the provision of the service will remain unchanged. There will, of course, be a free service delivered by professional staff to a core client group of young people, but there is no doubt in our minds that the overall quality of the service can be raised. The high standards achieved by the best should be available in all parts of the country.

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): What assurances will the Secretary of State give the House that there will be a quality threshold to ensure that the quality that she says she seeks is maintained? No assurance was given in Committee about any form of quality threshold, and any Tom, Dick, Harry or Harriet could now set themselves up as a careers officer.

Mrs. Shephard: The hon. Gentleman is right to ask about quality, which is important and which was fully discussed in Committee. He will know that we have undertaken to consult about how to prepare the guidance that will be issued on setting up the new services. We must be committed to the provision of high-quality and responsive career services, because much depends on them. We want to see careers services develop so that they are well placed to meet the needs of potential clients and customers in a dynamic economy, which is what underlies this important reform. Once in place, they will bring rich rewards.

When I moved the Second Reading of the Bill, I reminded the House that the Labour party claimed at the last election that, if elected, it would keep the trade union legislation of the 1980s, despite the fact that it had voted against every trade union Bill since 1979. I said then that many people doubted whether its conversion to the cause of trade union reform was genuine, but that I was prepared to keep an open mind until we learned what attitude it would take to the Bill.

I urge Labour Front-Bench spokesmen not to make the same mistake as all their predecessors by voting against the Bill, only to admit in a few years' time that the reforms that it introduces are here to stay. I urge them to break out of the cycle of unthinking opposition followed by embarrassment and half-hearted acceptance. That has been their record on such vital issues as strike ballots and the closed shop. They did not take my advice, and voted against the Bill on Second Reading, and they may vote against it tonight.

We have heard much recently about the Opposition's conversion to the cause of the individual. We have even heard that they have discovered the importance of small business, but there has been little sign of that in our debate.

Let us examine the Opposition's commitment to the individual in some of their amendments. They would give a worker the right to join a trade union of the TUC's choice. They would give an employee the right to be paid a minimum wage, which many employers could not afford to pay, even if that meant people losing their jobs. They would give a consumer—for example, a commuter—the right to be left stranded and helpless if the service on which he depended was disrupted by an unlawful strike.

Is that how the Opposition believe that the interests of the individual are best served? How can they possibly claim to believe in the individual when they would deny people the right to choose and decide for themselves? How can they claim to support the interests of small business when they have lost no opportunity to press for new burdens and new regulations to be imposed on employers? That is why they have opposed the ending of wages councils, despite the fact that the previous Labour Government abolished 11, which covers about 600,000 employees, and despite the fact that we do not know what their future policy on wages councils is.

In their attitude to these important parts of the Bill, the Opposition have, I am afraid, revealed a tired old face, that of socialist dogma. The truth is that the gap between the Opposition and the Government on industrial relations and trade union reform is as wide as ever. While the Government have advanced step by step in reform, the Opposition have been reduced to a grudging step-by-step retreat.

In the Bill, the Government are looking forward to the industrial relations and employment needs of the rest of the 1990s and into the next century. We shall continue to create a climate in which business can compete effectively and in which employees as individuals have the opportunities and protection which they are entitled to expect.

The Opposition are still looking backward, back to the days when the rights of the individual employees and trade union members were subordinate to those of the trade union bosses, and back to the time when initiative and individual responsibility was stifled by over-regulation and collective organisation. We all know where that led us.

This evening, the Opposition have another chance to shake off the shackles of the past. I urge them to vote on behalf of the individual employee, the individual trade union member and the individual citizen, rather than on behalf of the vested interest groups which have so often dictated their damaging policies in the past. Let them use the opportunity to show that their new-found concern for the individual is more than empty rhetoric and more than bluster.

I commend the Bill to the House.

4.11 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): One way or another, we have been considering the Bill for three and a half months. Perhaps uncharacteristically, I begin by thanking the Minister of State and the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Derbyshire, West (Mr. McLoughlin), for their helpful and constructive responses to a number of suggestions that we made in Committee, which resulted in the Government undertaking to make about 20 distinct improvements to their original proposals. Seventeen of those improvements were delivered by way of amendments on Report and three, I am assured, will be delivered by way of amendments in another place. I am grateful to the Government for that.

I also wish to thank my colleagues who served on the Committee that debated the Bill. Having served on Committees where we have lost arguments, I must say that it was a pleasure to serve on a Committee where I do not think that we lost a single argument. Indeed, it must be said that the Government proffered no arguments on the issue of wages councils.

We dealt with the Bill in detail in Committee and in further detail on Report yesterday, so it behoves me to concentrate on a limited number of aspects. The first is low pay; the second the way in which the Government have knowingly robbed people of their rights for the past 10 years; the third is the Government's failure to introduce comprehensive maternity cover and to take the opportunity to get rid of the current shambles; and the fourth is their proposal to sell off the school careers service.

Those four aspects cannot be separated from two general matters. One is the general employment situation, which especially affects the low paid, and the second is the general economic situation. It is worth reminding the House that, since the Bill was printed, the general

[Mr. Frank Dobson]

employment situation can only be said to have got worse. Even without tomorrow's figures, more than 130,000 of our fellow citizens have lost their jobs since then.

We all know that the official unemployment total to be announced tomorrow will either break or come very close to the 3 million barrier. No doubt the Secretary of State has the figures; perhaps she could let us have them. Perhaps seasonal adjustments will achieve the miracle of avoiding a breach of the 3 million barrier this time. If so, the next total will certainly be above 3 million. In reality, as has been pointed out, the number is already more than 4 million. There are indeed 4 million people in this country who need a job, but the Government are doing nothing to provide them with work. There are 27 people chasing every job. Indeed, there are 60 people for every vacancy in London.

In my adult lifetime the people of the west midlands made things for the rest of Britain. Indeed, articles manufactured in that area were sold right round the world. Half of the people who were in manufacturing industry in that great manufacturing area when Mrs. Thatcher became Prime Minister are no longer making things, and we are all suffering as a result.

Mr. Winnick: My hon. Friend has referred to the region that I have the honour to represent. Does he know that in pre-war days, as well as after the war, when there was nearly full employment, people came to the west midlands to find work? No one would do so now. One of the reasons for our balance of payments difficulties is that items that used to be made in the west midlands are now imported. Since 1979 many industrial concerns, including some of the largest, have gone out of business entirely. In my constituency, there are many people who never for one moment thought that they would be out of work, or that if so it would be for only a matter of weeks, but who have now been unemployed for years on end and may well never work again. That tragedy has been largely brought about by the wretched Conservative Government.

Mr. Dobson: I agree with every word that my hon. Friend says. No fewer than one fifth of all the manufacturing jobs that have disappeared have gone from the west midlands. As my hon. Friend has pointed out, even when—possibly if—we come out of the recession and people start buying more goods, many more of those goods will have to come from abroad as they are no longer made in the west midlands. Even if there is a resurgence of manufacturing industry, it will not alter the fact that a large proportion of manufacturers in the west midlands and in other areas now depend on foreigners to make their equipment. If we do not make the stuff ourselves, we have to buy it abroad; and if we buy abroad, we do not have a trade surplus; and if we have a trade deficit, we have difficulty in running our economy.

All these job losses have a direct effect on the low paid. They weaken their bargaining position. Unemployment also diminishes our economy and reduces the funds available to make Britain a decent place in which to live. The Secretary of State had to admit to the Select Committee on Employment that unemployment also hits every taxpayer in his pocket or her handbag. It costs the taxpayer £9,000, in benefit paid and in tax not taken in, to keep a person unemployed for a year. Thus the level of unemployment that is likely to be announced tomorrow costs the taxpayer £27 billion a year—£1,225 per family. And it does not stop there. When people are not working, they are not producing. We used to hear from Conservative Members a great deal about the number of days lost through strikes. We never hear a word now about the number of production days lost through unemployment.

There are, as near as damn it, 3 million people out of work. That means that we lose 3 million days' production every day because of unemployment—and 3 million working days lost every day is 15 million working days lost every week. If the present level of unemployment lasts for a year, 780 million working days will be lost to the British economy—780 million working days with people not working and not producing the goods and services which contribute to the national wealth.

I estimate that the cost of that is more than £50 billion. If those people were at work they would produce goods and services worth at least £50 billion. Shared out equally —I know that in this country nothing ever is shared out equally, but for statistical purposes let us assume that, for once, that happens—the loss is £2,275 per family. If we add that to the loss to the taxpayer, we see that the Tory tax to pay for unemployment amounts to £3,500 for every family in the land.

That is the economics of the madhouse—and in the middle of the madhouse the Secretary of State turns up to abolish wages councils. Wages councils set the minimum wage for 2·6 million of the worst paid people in the country, 2 million of whom are women. We are not talking about princely sums; the highest minimum wage set is £3·10 an hour. But apparently rich Tory business bosses think that £3·10 an hour is too much. They have been writing letters to the Secretary of State saying, "You must get those wages down, otherwise I shall not be able to pay myself £584,000 a year." Business bosses say that they cannot compete if they pay those wages.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dobson: Not for the moment, but I shall later.

I want the Secretary of State to consider the hotel trade, which to some extent is an international trade. Why do London hotels have higher prices and lower wages than Paris hotels? If our hotel chains have to compete by bringing down wages, how can the French afford to pay their hotel staff more, yet charge guests lower prices? I suggest that somebody somewhere is pocketing the difference. It is not the taxpayer, or the guests in the hotels, and it is not the people working there; it is a lot of rich Tory business bosses who are trousering the money.

The Government's argument is that there should be no Government interference in the market. The idea is that every worker should strike a bargain with his or her employer. I return to the quotation from Churchill. I know that it upsets Conservative Members, and that they have heard it often, but what Winston Churchill said in 1909 when he introduced wages councils is good sound stuff. [HON. MEMBERS: "He was a Liberal."]—He was a Liberal but—[HON. MEMBERS: "Where are the Liberals?"]—I do not care where the Liberals are now.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham) *rose*——

Mr. Dobson: No. I shall not give way for the moment. I shall give way later, if the hon. Gentleman can hold himself back for a minute.

I should mention that not only the Liberals and the Labour party but the Tory party, too, supported the measure in 1909. There was no Division on the introduction of wages councils. Everybody agreed with what young Winston said:

> "Where . . . you have a powerful organisation on both sides . . . you have healthy bargaining which increases the competitive power of industry and enforces a progressive standard of life. But where . . . you have no organisation, no parity of bargaining, the good employer is undercut by the bad and the bad employer is undercut by the worst".

I return to my original point——

Mr. Jacques Arnold *rose*——

Mr. Dobson: No, I shall give way in a moment.

I return again to the question which we have posed to Tory Members. If this morning the Secretary of State had come with me to the place where my constituency borders with Westminster, she would have seen people sleeping in cardboard boxes.

The Minister of State, Department of Employment (Mr. Michael Forsyth): The hon. Gentleman has made that point before.

Mr. Dobson: I have made the point before, but it is valid today because they were in the cardboard boxes this morning, just as they were when I raised it before, but the hon. Gentleman has never answered the question. Let him answer the question. After sleeping in their cardboard boxes, those people who live in cardboard boxes go to the jobcentre for the hotel trade on the edge of my constituency. In London there are 60 people chasing every vacancy. What parity of bargaining have they with the giant hotel chains which have assets of thousands of millions of pounds? Where is the parity there?

Mr. Michael Forsyth: What the hon. Gentleman fails to tell the House, although he has made the point repeatedly, is how he would help the people who seek those low-paid jobs when hoteliers tell us that the wages council is preventing the jobs being created and being available. What service is the hon. Gentleman doing to those people if there are no jobs for them? Why does he think that what was appropriate for 1909 is appropriate for the 1990s?

Mr. Dobson: A truth remains a truth, whether it is an old truth or a new truth. It was a truth then and it is a truth today. If there is parity of bargaining, people stand a chance of getting a living wage. If there is not parity of bargaining, they have no chance of getting a living wage. It does not matter that that was said in 1909; it was true then and it is true today.

Mr. Forsyth *rose*——

Mr. Dobson: If the hon. Gentleman is about to say that it is not true, he is even dafter than I thought.

Mr. Forsyth: If the hon. Gentleman is saying that people cannot get by because they do not have parity of bargaining with big employers, how does he account for the fact that, as wages councils cover only 10 per cent. of the labour force, the other 90 per cent. can get by without such protection?

Mr. Dobson: For a start, they do not get by in any reasonable sense. I make no apology for it, but the Labour party takes the view that if society was run properly and if the economy was run efficiently, everyone who wanted a job would have a job. If people had that job, they would be paid what their ambition is to be paid—enough money to pay their own way and to bring up their families without depending on benefits or handouts.

Under the Government one eighth of the work force are out of work and another eighth cannot afford to pay their way but have to go begging and scraping for benefits to make up lousy amounts to live on.

Mr. Riddick: In his intervention in the speech of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, the hon. Gentleman appeared to say that a future Labour Government—if there ever were such a thing—would not need to reintroduce wages councils because they would have a statutory national minimum wage. The OECD has said clearly that a national minimum wage in France has led to increased unemployment. Will the hon. Gentleman comment on that?

Mr. Dobson: My only answer is a further question. What has the OECD said about how the Government have managed to achieve the amazing unemployment levels which we have without a national minimum wage? There is no parity of bargaining. The idea that there is parity of bargaining for those who are badly off is not true. We have to have parity of bargaining so that people may have a reasonable chance.

Ms. Eagle: Does my hon. Friend agree that wages councils were set up in 1909 deliberately to deal with the dynamic effects of a free market in labour? If pay is undercut, wages can carry on going down potentially to zero. In a free labour market the competitive effects of a systematic reduction in wages lead to the impoverishment of large numbers of the work force. Surely everybody but the most fanatical followers of free market dogma accept the argument that there must be a minimum below which wages cannot fall so as to prevent bad employers undercutting better employers and impoverishing the work force.

Mr. Dobson: I entirely agree with the eminently sensible point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms. Eagle).

There is a further aspect to the abolition of the wages councils.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: The hon. Gentleman has just sneered at the British hotel trade, and he has said that it could not compete with, for example, the French hotel trade. When the hon. Gentleman was doing his homework, he might have asked our own British Hotel, Restaurants and Caterers Association what it thought. It says:

> "The current system imposes constraints on flexible remuneration packages."

That is precisely the point. The hon. Gentleman supports inflexibility which would not allow us to compete properly.

Mr. Dobson: As the wages councils set only minimum wages, the element of flexibility needed must be the flexibility to pay below the present minimum. There is nothing to stop most employers paying above the minimum. Most do and they always have, right from the first days of the wages councils.

DAMAGED ORIGINAL

[Mr. Dobson]

Another problem that will arise from the abolition of the wages councils is the effect on women's pay. The Secretary of State for Employment has been given the duty within Government to promote equal opportunities. By backing the Bill, she is giving 2 million women the equal opportunity to be paid less than they are being paid now and the equal opportunity to see the gap between their pay and men's pay widen. The pay gap in wages councils industries is narrower than it is in other industries. That cannot be gainsaid unless the Government try to undermine their own statistics.

The abolition of the wages councils appears to be part of the Government's obsessive hatred of any form of employment protection. They cannot stand the idea of the social chapter. They do not like this form of protection for our people. At the beginning of the week, the *Financial Times* produced an analysis of employment protection across Europe. From careful reading, one can see that if the analysis was turned into a Eurovision song contest, a voice would say, after listening to the British entry, "Grande Bretagne, nul point." In other words, "Great Britain, no points." Our job protection laws are undoubtedly the worst in Europe.

The Conservatives say that the whole economy is endangered by people being paid as little as £2·59 an hour, which they claim costs jobs. That simply is not true. As we all know, employment has been declining sharply for the past three years. Nobody disagrees with that as a statement of fact. If the Government's arguments are correct, employment in the wages councils industries should have been in steeper decline than in other industries. Since 1989, the number of people in employment has fallen by 2 million. The number of people working in wages councils industries has risen by 90,000. Wages councils industries, with their minimum wages which are supposed to threaten jobs, are a group whose employment is expanding while there is a catastrophic decline in industries not covered by wages councils. That makes nonsense of every point that the Government have made but they are paying no attention because they are introducing the measure solely as a pay-off to the paymasters who paid their general election expenses in exchange for the abolition of the wages councils.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dobson: No. I have given way enough already.

The next item may even affect the pay-off that has been received by a number of Tory Members. European law was introduced with

"the object of guaranteeing the rights of employees"

whose job was shifted from one employer to another. The British Government introduced some regulations that purported to establish that protection. Right from the start, however, they set out to exclude from that protection employees affected by privatisation and compulsory competitive tendering.

We discovered from some Treasury minutes that we laid hands on that, as early as 1983, Law Officers of the Crown—we heard about them and their famous European interpretations earlier in the week—had secretly advised:

"the limitation in the Regulations to commercial undertakings was not a satisfactory implementation of the United Kingdom's Community obligations."

Now, we all know that the Law Officers' word is law and Parliament's is not—since Monday, at least—but, in this case, despite the view that the Law Officers held, the Department of the Environment and the Department of Health issued advice to local councils and health authorities saying that the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations did not apply to them.

Then the European Commission caught the Government out. Certain cases heard in the European Court demonstrated that the regulations did, indeed, apply, which is why the Government are having to sort things out now. Their method has been to introduce provision in the Bill and try to pretend that nothing has changed.

Hon. Members who were not on the Committee will be familiar with the idea of a new opinion—a late wire from the course—from the Attorney-General. We had that on Maastricht on Monday. Members of the Committee were privileged enough to receive such treatment as early as January, when the Attorney-General came along, it was said, to clarify the law. To hon. Members who did not serve on the Committee but who were in the Chamber on Monday, his advice will have a familiar ring. Basically, he said, "We are introducing changes in this Bill but it does not really change the law as all these things were always intended to be covered: the rights are there and we have always intended people to enjoy them."

That was the Attorney-General's message, but it is simply not true: the rights of certain people were deliberately excluded and they are now having to be included. We welcome their inclusion and we expect the Government to compensate the people who were knowingly defrauded by Ministers of the Crown of the money to which they were entitled—when those Ministers had been secretly advised by Law Officers and when the British Government knew that they were breaking the law and were robbing a lot of badly-off people. We hope that the change will go through, even if it costs a number of Tory Members of Parliament some of the ill-gotten gains that they have made from having their hands in the compulsory competitive tendering process.

Sir Teddy Taylor: As this is obviously an important issue, as the arrangements could effectively kill off most privatisations, which some people think are good and others think are not so good, may I ask the hon. Gentleman whether he ascertained in Committee whether the Government appeared to have fought the infraction proceedings? Did they, for example, take any of the issues to the European Court? Or did they simply accept what the Commission asked them to do?

Mr. Dobson: The hon. Gentleman had better address his questions to those responsible for giving answers on such matters. To be fair to the Government, my impression was that they had fought a long hard rearguard action to retain their right to defraud British citizens in a way in which citizens of other countries were not being defrauded. But Ministers will no doubt answer for themselves.

The next matter to which I should like to refer briefly is the improved maternity provisions. To the extent that they are improvements, we welcome their inclusion in the Bill. Any improvement is welcome.

I should remind hon. Members of the genesis of the rules. They came to us courtesy of the European Community Fisheries Council because the British presidency was conducted so incompetently that no other Council of Ministers could get to a formal vote before the deadline so the Fisheries Council had to provide some maternity rules. It must be recorded that the Fisheries Council did not actually vote for the rules; we just accepted them.

The present maternity provisions are confused and unsatisfactory. We believe that the provisions in the Bill are more satisfactory but considerably more confused. I am sure that the Minister will probably agree with me on that. The Labour party said—we made it clear that we would have facilitated this—that the whole arrangement should have been taken apart and put back together in an orderly and simple way for employers, the Department of Social Services and women and their partners to deal with. That would have been the best way. We regard this as a wasted opportunity to clarify important maternity rights in the United Kingdom.

It must be said that the Government intend to take one opportunity. They intend to privatise the schools career service. The Department of Employment sold the professional executive register to Mr. Robert Maxwell and that went bust. It also sold the skill centres to various other people and about half of them have now closed. Goodness knows, the country could do with a bit of skill. The Department of Employment disposed of the assets in that way and now intends to dispose of the schools career service which, until the Bill was introduced, was not its asset to dispose of at all.

Like every other institution in the world, the schools career service is imperfect. Until now, it has been run for the benefit of the children and young people who were being advised. The Government's alternative is to hand parts of the service to private companies, training and enterprise councils or Uncle Tom Cobbleigh. Will private companies put the interests of young people first in the same way as the schools career service has until now? Let us examine the service as though it were being run by a private company. Private companies will be interested in maximising their turnover. It is easy to envisage that, to maximise their turnover, they will enter into a cosy relationship with one or two local employers who might well be dodgy. Those companies would guide young people to work for those employers, rather than give them the career guidance to which they are entitled and which they had in the past.

I would say to anyone in the private sector, "If you think that you are any good at running a schools careers service, why not set up shop and do it? Why not try to compete, invite people in and say that you are offering a better service?" That is not how organisations that are supported by the Tories prosper these days. Companies which the Tories think are great grow by takeover: they do not grow by efficiency and expansion of their activities.

Some people have set their eyes on the careers service and decided that there are a few bob to be made there. They think that it would be a lot easier to do that job than the one which they do at present.

The priorities of the training and enterprise councils are not the same as those of the individual children and young people with which the careers service deals. It is possible that a training and enterprise council or a TEC bureaucrat who is given a quota to fill can see an easy way of shoving a few kids who have not had much advice in that direction to fill his quota within the set time probably so that he will get some sort of productivity bonus if he deals with them quickly. We do not think that that is the right way to do it.

We are concerned—I know that the Government have agreed to re-examine the matter—that such privatisation may pose problems for handicapped young people and children with learning difficulties because they will not be a paying or profitable proposition for a private company and they will not be high in turnover from the point of view of the TEC bureaucrat who wants to get on with the job quickly and get his bonus.

We believe that there are dangers in the proposition. Under the Government's scheme, there is no guarantee that young people will continue to be the first priority for the service. That is typical of this Bill and the Government. We do not believe that the Government give top priority to ordinary people.

Everything has been sacrificed to market theories. When someone points out that the market theories do not appear to be working, the new ideologues blame something that they call externalities. What the ideologues call externalities turn out to be what the rest of us call the real world. When theory clashes with the real world, externalities are blamed. It is the real world which we are here to represent.

It is a real world in Britain where 4 million people are out of work. It is a real Britain where there are 57 million people in the country and only 4·3 million of them are making anything. In the real world, no less than a quarter of our population are either out of work or depend on benefits to make up their pay and get a decent income. In the real world, British people want work. They want jobs which will enable them to pay their own way, earn their keep and bring up their families. The Bill has not done a damned thing in getting any of them a job or decent pay at the end of it.

4.45 pm

Mr. John Sykes (Scarborough): As a member of the Standing Committee that examined the Bill, I am delighted to have the chance to lend my support to the Third Reading. In doing so, I pay a tribute to my hon. Friends who spent many long hours during the winter debating the contents of the Bill. To quote my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, West (Mr. McLoughlin), the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, we had an "interesting debate". It was a debate in which the vexatious litigant of the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) jockeyed for position alongside the golden thread of the Minister's arguments.

One of the most pleasurable aspects of the Committee is that at least I shall be able to tell my grandchildren, when they arrive, how, in the first autumn of my parliamentary career, I, along with several colleagues, was able to witness the old trade union machine rolled out of the knacker's yard. There they were every Tuesday and Thursday in Committee Room 9, some of the big guns of the trade union movement. They were short on ammunition, rather like the guns of Singapore—and anyway facing the wrong way. Not to mention the odd assortment of peashooters from the new intake in the Labour party, a wondrous thing, with so many of them, day after day after day, blatantly and, to their credit, proudly expounding the

[Mr. John Sykes]

philosophy of their ancient and discredited creed. But then we know, at least on this side of the House, that the little Clintons opposite, with that veneer of market economics will never change. We know that because they have told us so. Let met quote some lines:

> "Trade unions anchor themselves into the real lives of the ordinary people."

I suppose that that was true in the 1970s.

When the archaeologists are sifting around the debris of Walworth road in 20 years or perhaps 10 years—we hope—that is what they will find under a stone in the office of the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). Those words are from the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, whose ideas are almost as old as that famous station in his constituency.

The Bill is the threshold towards the Prime Minister's avowed goal of making the United Kingdom a paradise for investment. I am fed up with trade unionists and Opposition Members constantly talking this country down, even in the face of proven success stories. Their silly arguments run along the lines that provisions such as the social chapter and regulations that the Bill seeks to remove help to increase productivity because everyone is happy. What nonsense! And when the opposite is proved to be the case—for example, the recent decisions of international companies to relocate in Great Britain—they whinge and moan about Great Britain being the Taiwan of Europe. I am a member of a family company which was established in 1845. The measures contained in the Bill are designed to give new freedoms to trade and industry which will lead to more jobs and greater prosperity.

I received a letter recently about the wages councils from a leading hotelier in my constituency. The company is family owned. He is not a rich Tory boss by any means. He is just an ordinary man trying to run an ordinary business on a day-to-day basis. He said:

> "At last the Government have seen fit to abolish the Wages Councils, a nonsense that had its part to play in history but no part now. This measure will give employers more flexibility and we will be better able to award staff according to their performance and productivity.
>
> All payments should be between employer and employee to work out, bearing in mind local conditions, qualifications etc. etc. and are the better for being so—and I write as one who has never stooped to the minimum wage level with any employee!
>
> With the abolition of Wages Councils we can get on with running our businesses with a little less paperwork and spend the time saved on seeking the customers whose patronage produces the employment, with the consequent effect on local economies of workers with good pay packets!"

That is just one letter.

I now have to talk a little about Labour's proposals for a minimum wage. When I spoke to the jobcentre in Scarborough I was horrified to see that of the 75 jobs on offer, 50 were below the minimum wage that Labour would impose. Worst of all, in Whitby all the 42 vacancies were below that level. That means that each of those potential employers would have to decide whether to become less competitive by increasing their prices or to withdraw the job.

Labour must have a death wish for companies and people. Its minimum wage would either drive businesses to the wall or lose more people their jobs. Labour could not have invented a package which would do more damage to trade and industry. It is no good Labour telling us that that would not happen when the vast majority of experts disagree. I find it unbelievable that, at a time when creating new jobs should be a priority, the Labour party proposes a policy which would lose more people their job. It would especially affect the most vulnerable in our society.

The Bill is part of the process that takes Great Britain towards the millennium. It is part of the process that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister set in train when he torpedoed the social chapter a year last November. Jacques Delors acknowledged that by doing so my right hon. Friend had made Britain a paradise for inward investment.

Forget Labour's Europe. Labour's Britain is there for all to see in places such as Sheffield, Liverpool and Birmingham. As we head towards the 21st century, this is a Bill for more investment, more employment, more business, more output and more exports. It is a Bill for Great Britain. It is a Bill which is relevant to the 1990s and which consigns the alien practices such as we saw in Dundee, along with the Labour party, to the dustbin of history.

4.52 pm

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South-East): I was interested in the comments of the hon. Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes), especially on the Prime Minister's paradise for investment. I do not see much investment when I look at the unemployment figures. The recession is becoming a nightmare for the unemployed and low paid. That is what the Bill is all about. As I have listened to the speeches of Opposition Members, I have wondered what is the relevance of the Bill to Britain's economic situation.

In areas such as the west midlands, one of the powerhouses of the British economy, unemployment is about 11·5 per cent. If that is paradise, I do not know what hell is. When one considers the unemployment figures one wonders about the relevance of the Bill to the erosion of our industrial base. Companies such as Leyland DAF are going to the wall without the Government doing anything about it. At the same time, great companies such as GPT and Rolls-Royce make systematic redundancies. One can only conclude that the Government have a phobia of trade unions and their relevance to society.

It is worth reminding the Government that in the 1930s in Germany trade unionists found themselves in prison or concentration camps for their defence of freedom. I do not accuse the Government of treating trade unionists in that way, but they should be careful about the way in which they treat trade unions.

Even if wages councils fix the wages of only 10 per cent. of workers, any modern society that cannot provide legislation to defend that 10 per cent. cannot be called a fair or democratic society. Between 900,000 and 1 million young unemployed people are living in despair. When they turn to officials in the Department of Social Security they are told that they can live on a cold meal. They cannot obtain a loan for items such as a cooker. A cold meal in the middle of winter? I wonder where we are going in this fair and democratic society when we treat people in that manner.

The Government have made no provision for one-parent families. Provisions should have been included in the Bill for creche facilities to enable mothers or fathers to pick up their careers again and seek employment. Yet the Government provide subsidies through the social security system to employers who pay low wages. That is an indictment of the Bill.

Let us consider how far trade union rights have been eroded in Britain. Organisations such as Legal and Incomes Rights have to provide advice to trade unionists because an horrendous amount of legislation is increasingly complex. Certainly a democratic society must have a certain amount of legislation to provide a framework of law. But the Government should not create draconian laws to hinder individuals in freely negotiating to fix the wage that they want for selling their labour.

Yesterday and today I listened to Conservative Members talking about the abolition of the wages councils. They are going for a low-wage economy. Has it never occurred to them that some of our competitors are high-wage, high-investment, high-quality economies? Britain now compares with the third world and, in some respects, the former Soviet Union, where the importance of quality has deteriorated. If bodies such as wages councils are abolished, quality can be affected. It is affected if one is not prepared to have high investment and productivity, coupled with technological advance.

For the reasons that I have given, I oppose the Bill. I do not wish to be negative, but it is interesting that in major recessions the Tories always turn the clock back. When they quote Adam Smith they turn the clock back 100 years. When they repeal Churchill's legislation, they turn the clock back 80-odd years. That legislation stood the test of time. It has not affected the efficiency and welfare of the British economy. The Bill has taken people off on a tangent into a debate which should never have taken place. The Bill should never have been introduced. A Bill should have been introduced to improve the British economy, improve people's living conditions and improve education.

I also oppose the Bill because it abolishes the Bridlington agreement. It is interesting that the Government seem to take their advice from smaller employers, not major employers of labour. Any experienced employer or trade unionist knows that abolishing the Bridlington agreement and introducing competition between trade unions is a recipe for chaos in industrial relations.

Most people would say that industrial relations is the relationships of human beings in an industrial environment—in this case, one that produces goods. At times, relationships will be under stress as human beings do and say things that they do not mean. With all due respect to the Government, the trade unions and employers, not the House of Commons, have to pick up the pieces.

To achieve our economic ends, we need less legislation. We must allow employers and employees to set rates of pay and productivity levels, through trade unions and organised labour. That is the way to improve our economic situation and that is why the abolition of the wages councils should have no part of any Bill laid before the House, as we should seek to protect the weak by strengthening such organisations.

5 pm

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): I must start by declaring my interest as a parliamentary consultant to MinOtels Great Britain Ltd.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Cunningham) was right to concentrate on the abolition of the wages councils, as that is clearly the issue that will preoccupy us on Third Reading. I say that because the measures in the Bill fall into two distinct categories. The first is the items ritually opposed by the Labour party, including the various trade union reforms; the abolition of the Bridlington agreement, to which the hon. Gentleman referred; the fact that a member of the public will be able to challenge unlawful industrial action; and improved safeguards for trade union members.

Labour Members oppose those measures today, but history has a way of repeating itself, and they will not do so next year. In three or four years' time, the Labour party will have the public believe that it was always in favour of them. That process contains an element of ritual. The Labour party is always in favour of any trade union reform that we passed three or four years ago, and that sums up its position on the Bill.

On Second Reading, in Standing Committee and today, we have heard about the Labour party's total opposition to the abolition of the wages councils. Anyone who speaks in favour of their abolition starts off on the defensive, because wages councils to protect the low paid sound such a good idea. If the Chamber was about the mere recital of good ideas, the wages councils must obviously be a good idea, because they sound like one. The trouble is that it is not like that. I shall refer to evidence that, while it is a good idea to try to protect people who are without work or who are in low-paid employment, wages councils are not the way to achieve that good end.

In justification, hon. Members ask, "How can you say that? The wages councils must be a good idea, because Winston Churchill was in favour of them."

Mr. Hanson: That is right.

Mr. Nicholls: We have just heard it again, and I must place that inane remark on the record. The hon. Gentleman said, "That is right."

Even in a packed House like this, I do not think that it will have escaped the attention of hon. Members that I am by nature a traditionalist. I am what is called a Conservative, and I take a great pride in my country's history. Very often, I look backwards for help when formulating policies. However, if I formulated legislation on social policy in the House on the basis that, if it was okay in 1909, it must be a good idea today, hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber would say that I was on this planet but not necessarily of it. The year 1909 is so long ago that even the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) was probably not alive, although, as usual, he said that, as old Winston was in favour, it must be a good idea.

Ms. Eagle: Conservative Members are very ready to quote my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). Has the hon. Gentleman read the latest Durham lecture by my hon. Friend, which points out that income distribution is back to the same level as in 1886? So the Government have taken us even further back in history than 1909.

Mr. Nicholls: The hon. Lady obviously still has the mentality of saying that she believes in social democracy when she believes in a far more primitive version of socialism. If she thinks that the average family can pay their food bills by looking at the gap between the rich and poor, her attitude to life is bizarre. If the hon. Lady thinks

[Mr. Nicholls]

that the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) can usually be quoted on her side of the argument, I shall have to disabuse her in a moment.

Before we leave old Winston, let us remember that, although Labour Members quote him, they would not want to know if we asked them about Tonypandy or the Dardanelles campaign. The folk memory within them rises up if one asks them about Gallipoli. However, if one asks about that one pre-Sarajevo aspect of social policy, they will know about it and say that old Winston was a good person.

With all the insincerity at my command, I find that just about as convincing as a Conservative Member quoting Keir Hardie as being on his side, or Bruce Kent putting in a good word for Attila the Hun. It is complete nonsense. If the only support that can be found for the policy is that old Winston was in favour of it, I do not find it convincing.

There is a sort of mad corporatist logic in that argument, but if one takes it to the full extreme and believes that one can help the low paid and unemployed through a wages council structure, one should say that that structure should extend over the entire country. A wage would be laid down for every industry and process by a Minister or a bureaucrat in Whitehall. The Labour party is not in favour of that. Although it would be crackers, it would be logically so.

The Labour party is a great destroyer of wages councils —I accept that they are not all bad. If one casts one's mind back to when Labour was last in office, between 1974 and 1979, one remembers that it abolished wages councils at the rate of one every six months. Even the Opposition are prepared to question the validity of their existence.

The Opposition oppose the measure because they are looking at the wrong target. We constantly hear that low-paid employment is the worst evil that can befall anyone, but a condition called "no job" is worse than low pay. On Second Reading, in Committee and today, the Labour party has failed to explain how the wages councils contribute to people being in low-paid jobs.

Many people start their careers in low-paid jobs. If one has a time-warped, corporatist view of life, in which everything is a fixed entity and can never expand, and we can never make progress, people in low-paid jobs will be there for ever. That is a marvellous picture of history, which will appeal to people who have never read a book other than "The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists". That picture has no claim on reality. Many people start off in low-paid work and move on. It is a time in their lives.

Anyone who is unemployed knows that it is immensely harder to get a job if one is out of work, and that it is easier to make progress and move up the economic ladder if one has work.

If we tell employers that they will not be allowed to offer jobs, we will destroy work possibilities and the possibility of job creation. As we approach the 21st century, the idea could only be suggested by people who do not realise that employment happens when an employer has a service, or a product to be made, and it is worth his while to pay someone a rate to do it. That is the essential ingredient of a job and what it is all about. If a bureaucrat or Minister steps in to intercede on the judgment of the person offering a job, work is destroyed—it is as simple and straightforward as that.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): I have only just entered the Chamber and I did not have the opportunity to hear the earlier part of my hon. Friend's speech, but I think that he is speaking a great deal of sense. Does he agree that wages councils act as a sort of conspiracy between the employed and employers against the interests of the unemployed? If we want to find jobs for the unemployed, we shoud listen to them. I was on the Select Committee on Employment which considered the matter some years ago, and I am pleased that I then voted for the abolition of wages councils.

Mr. Nicholls: My hon. Friend is entirely right. There are industries and processes where the fixing of a minimum wage is something on which employers and unions actively work together, and there is an element of conspiracy.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras said that he would not give a pledge to restore wages councils, because he was in favour of the national minimum wage. I like to find points of agreement in the House. I accept that the Opposition are as genuinely concerned about the fate of the unemployed and the low paid as Conservatives are. However, when I hear the national minimum wage proposed as a remedy for that condition, I begin to wonder how on earth the sincerity for one policy can match up to the commitment for a national minimum wage.

A policy for a national minimum wage is another way of stating the attitude that leads to support for wages councils. The extraordinary fact is that the thoughtful contributions from those on the left as well as the right of the argument who know what they are talking about show that not one of them supports the national minimum wage.

The Guardian stated:

> "Labour has a problem with the national minimum wage . . . it will cause extra unemployment . . . it will increase inflation".

A thoughtful Opposition Member, the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), said:

> "the employment consequences . . . would be little short of disastrous".

As for the trade unionists' view, Eric Hammond has said that the minimum wage would

> "create more unemployment and chaos and conflict on the shop floor".

Gavin Laird has said:

> "It's never worked in the past, there's no logic for it, it doesn't work in any other country and it certainly will not work in Great Britain".

If anyone feels that those comments from the left of the argument are too highbrow, I can give a lowbrow view from the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott)—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I hope that *Hansard* will place on record the support being expressed for that hon. Gentleman. When asked to give the consequences of the national minimum wage, the hon. Gentleman said:

> "I knew the consequences were that there would be some shake-out—any silly fool knew that".

When the hon. Gentleman says "silly fool", we should take his word.

Outside the House, and sometimes even within it, those on the left of the argument know that the national minimum wage is not the panacea that they would like it to be. However, the Labour party's policy is to forget about the views of its trade union sponsors, the hon. Member for Birkenhead and the left-wing press. It ignores all that evidence and experience, and goes for the national minimum wage policy.

Mr. Sykes: Is my hon. Friend aware that even the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), the Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition, concedes that the minimum wage would cause joblessness?

Mr. Nicholls: I am sure that he would concede that. It is curious that the policy still remains Labour party policy. Perhaps the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) prefers to be in opposition, not government.

The saddest comment on the idea that people can be helped by a national minimum wage was stated many years ago by the late Vic Feather. He once said—I am sure with great sincerity—that he did not think that the Labour party should rest until everyone was earning above the national minimum wage. If one considers those comments, made in all sincerity, one realises that they represent the economics of the madhouse. Everything that underpins the argument is all about ensuring that, one day, everyone earns more than the national minimum wage.

If we are in the business of wanting to help those who are unemployed and those who earn low wages, we can do it in three ways. First, we can ensure that, when people are out of work, they are cared for and looked after properly. Secondly, we can ensure that there are training opportunities to help people get back into work when there is work. We cannot achieve it by opposing every training scheme that the Government have introduced since 1979. Finally, we should deliver an economic climate in which the employers who provide jobs are in a position to do so.

It is one thing to do as Opposition Members do, and say, "We care for the unemployed." I am sure they do, but the country is entitled to balance against that expression of good intent the adoption of policies that are the policies of the madhouse. That is why the Bill deserves its Third Reading.

5.15 pm

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): During the past few months in Committee, I have been having a small bet with myself as to who would win the prize for being the most right-wing member of the Committee. At the outset, I thought that the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), might win it. The hon. Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes) made a late bid this afternoon, but the winner has to be the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls), who has never failed to surprise us in Committee with his right-wing comments.

I enjoyed discussing the Bill in Committee, which was a good learning experience for me—I have emerged wiser than before. However, my fundamental objections to the tenets of the Bill have remained, and even grown, during our deliberations. The Bill addresses all the wrong issues —a failing that was apparent from the first day of our deliberations.

Unemployment in the United Kingdom is rising. This is the 33rd month in a row that it has risen in my constituency in north Wales. However, the only proposal in the Bill to bring back employment to our community is to make the poorest people pay for the price of the high level of unemployment by reducing their pay. Low pay and poverty are increasing throughout the United Kingdom, and my region of Wales remains one of the poorest paid districts. But the Government's only proposals are to reduce the employment conditions, pay and standard of living of one in 10 of the work force of my community.

Women, who need our support to stay in the employment market, and who, in the late 20th century, demand and need decent levels of maternity pay, are granted only the basic minimum in the Bill. The Government opposed even that level during our discussions in Committee. Privatisation, which has been a fetish of the Government ever since they were first elected in 1979, is now to be extended to the careers service, which the Government do not own or control and which they have no right to hand over to the private sector.

The Government's proposals in the Bill remain objectionable. It is not a Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Bill but a Trade Union and Removal of Rights Bill. That comes as a surprise to me, because, in Committee, we were told that the Conservative party was the party of the individual, and of the promotion of the individual. The Bill flies in the face of that aspiration. It shifts power away from individuals who live, work and spend their lives in communities, and transfers it to bigger forces over which people have no control.

What rights in their daily lives will individuals in my constituency have if they have no individual choice over matters controlled by larger forces? What rights to negotiate pay and conditions will a low-paid worker in a wages council industry have in a non-unionised environment? How have we stengthened those employees' rights by removing the basic minimum wage? We have not strengthened individuals' rights, but diminished them. The Government will pander to the forces of strength against the forces of those who are weaker. They have shifted the balance of power.

What rights will women have when they are pregnant, and seek support and decent maternity rights? Women in other European countries will consistently have greater rights. Under the Bill's provisions, to what degree will women be able to extend their rights when an employer does not wish them to do so? Once again, individuals are being challenged by forces bigger than themselves. What rights do people have to organise freely and fairly in trade unions so as to counterbalance these powers and develop their freedom?

The proposals in this Bill are all squalid; they will lead to a diminution of rights, not an extension. The abolition of the wages councils, the imposition of basic maternity pay, by contrast with what happens in the countries of our European partners, and the privatisation of the careers service are all retrograde steps. They have nothing to do with quality, fairness or justice and everything to do with the power of big business, of privilege and of capital—all at the expense of the public good. We should not forget that when we vote this evening.

Yesterday, we spoke at length about the wages councils and maternity rights, and I do not propose to cover them in detail today, but I should like to ask some questions about the proposals to privatise the careers service. In Committee, the Government failed to answer many of our questions about the effects of these proposals. I hope that the Minister will respond to them today. Why are we trying to change the careers service operation? The Government do not own or control these services in any case; they are run by local government. What has been wrong with their operation? Have queues of employers been knocking on the Secretary of State's door claiming

[Mr. David Hanson]

that they have been failed by the careers service? Have millions of parents done that? Neither I nor my hon. Friends have had any correspondence to that effect.

Is the careers service failing our young people? No; I see no need for change——

Mr. Beggs: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is easy to attack our well established careers services at this time? They are run by professionally committed people with a great deal of experience, but the advice and guidance that they have given young people cannot be put into practice because—this is the real failure—there have simply been no career opportunities for most. Most employers would confirm that most of the posts that they have to offer are in any case filled by people who are over-qualified for them.

Mr. Hanson: That is a valid point, and I intend to return to it towards the end of my speech.

Who will provide the new services? What will the quality threshold be? We have as yet heard no definitive answers.

In this age of subsidiarity, I would welcome the Government telling us why the Secretary of State for Employment believes that she can provide a better service for my constituents in north Wales—250 miles from her office in Whitehall. At the moment, those services are provided two miles down the road at shire hall in Mold, by local people who are accountable to local councillors. What objectivity or impartiality will there be in the new services? It may well turn out to be a profit-oriented service, bidding for niches in the market that bring in the best returns for an investment.

In short, the proposals on careers services are not about improving them or making them more accountable, or about meeting the needs of young people and others who use them: they are about continuing to implement the Government's dogma of privatisation.

What representations have the Government received about these changes—or for the maintenance of the status quo? If the Secretary of State and the Minister give us the factual details of the responses that they have had, I believe we will discover that they have had more representations in favour of maintaining the status quo than in favour of changing it.

What assessment have the Government made of careers services nationally? I suspect none. They have not even bothered to assess the success or failures of the services, and that is beyond me.

The careers service provides a free, fair, impartial local and accountable service. Long may it continue to do so. Under the new arrangements, however, what accountability will there be? In Committee, the hon. Member for Derbyshire, West (Mr. McLoughlin) said in answer to one of my questions.

> "Anyone who wishes to complain about the service will have the same recourse to their Member of Parliament, who will be able directly to ask questions of the Secretary of State."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee F*, 2 February 1993; c. 706.]

Does that represent an improvement in accountability?

At present, if I do not like my service, I can walk three streets from where I live and knock on the door of the local councillor. I do not have to write to London or take part in a delegation. I could also drive or cycle—or walk—two miles to shire hall and complain there. This accountability will be lost under these proposals. In an age of subsidiarity, the Government are removing local accountability, not enhancing it.

There are no assurances of quality thresholds or of improved services. The service will fragment and come under central control, and it will become profit oriented. All these ideas should be rejected.

The provisions in this Bill are horrendous. The abolition of the wages councils and the privatisation of the careers services, not to mention the parsimonious attitude to maternity rights—these ideas too should all be rejected. I look forward to coming to the House on some future occasion and voting for a minimum wage to raise basic salaries for the poorest people in society. I look forward to voting for improvements in maternity leave and to increasing it to a minimum of 18 weeks. I look forward to improving antenatal standards of care and introducing paternity care so as to recognise that women alone are not responsible for bringing up families.

I want to come here and vote for fairness for the unions and for fairness as between workers and those who employ them. I want to vote for improvements in the careers service that build on what is good but do not destroy, just for the sake of dogma, what does not need changing.

We need a programme to rebuild Britain, to create jobs, to build services and to improve the lot of everyone in society. Every Government proposal this evening will magnify injustice and bear down on the poorest. That is why I will be proud to vote with the Opposition against this Bill.

5.27 pm

Mr. Michael Bates (Langbaurgh): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this important debate. I should have been a great deal more sympathetic to the Labour party had it not indulged in one of the greatest ever endeavours to abolish wages councils. The Labour party abolished 10 of them between 1974 and 1979. Those councils covered about 600,000 people. It is therefore a little rich of Opposition Members to speak as they have done in this debate.

Opposition Members fail to recognise the importance of the measures that we are adopting to remove wages councils, which are wholly out of date in the present labour market. It is interesting to note the names of some of the wages councils that are to be abolished, and their relevance to today. One of them is the coffin furniture and cerement-making council, covering about 200 employees. Then there is the cotton waste reclamation council, covering 300 people. The list gets better. The next is the ostrich and fancy feather and artificial flower wages council, covering about 500 employees. Of course, the Labour party may argue that these councils are absolutely necessary to tackle unemployment in 1993. Perhaps the Opposition will explain the relevance also of the perambulator and invalid carriage wages council, which covers 2,000 employees. Clearly, such councils are out of date—Labour recognised that, but for very different reasons.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): My hon. Friend listed a number of wages councils, but while it is commonly accepted that about 2 million or 3 million employees are covered by them, he accounted for only around 3,000. Can he say what is to happen to the other 2 million employees?

Mr. Bates: I should be happy to list all the wages councils, if time permitted. The point remains that eight out of 10 employees are not covered by them. If wages councils are such a good idea, as the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms. Eagle) suggested, and if the argument is one of accountability, as was said by the hon. Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson)—of popping round to a local county councillor—why are Labour not proposing to cover the entire working population with them?

Labour abolished many wages councils because of the cosy link that existed between that party and the unions. Labour came under pressure from the unions, which said, "Wages councils are doing us out of a job. Employees are seeing wages councils negotiating their pay and conditions when that should be done by trade unions."

I like to think that the trade union reform legislation that Conservative Governments introduced in 1979, 1980, 1982 and 1986 brought about a trade union movement that—apart from the calls sometimes made by Labour—takes a responsible approach to inward investment. It is a great pleasure to see that constructive attitude taken at a time when we are trying to attract investment to the United Kingdom, to create real jobs.

The issue of concern to the 5,789 people in my constituency who are out of work is not low pay but no pay. A survey by the local Employment Service office into attitudes and characteristics of unemployed people in Cleveland county involved asking people the minimum wage that they would require to go to work. Some 62 per cent. of those living in Cleveland required a minimum weekly wage of £91. We are not talking about choice—wages councils would prevent those people from seeking employment when they are quite prepared to do so. That is an amazing infringement of a civil liberty and a basic right—to be able to go to work and to ply one's trade for an acceptable income. Who are we to legislate against people getting work and providing an income for their families?

Much was made of the situation in 1909—this debate seems to be going back further and further in time. In 1909, today's extensive social welfare and social security system did not exist. A Conservative Government introduced family credit and income support—both sensible reforms which targeted help at those on low salaries, while allowing them to enjoy the dignity of continuing in employment.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bates: The survey showed that 80 per cent. of the work covered by wages councils produces a second income. The benefits system takes account of a households's total income, responsibilities, and levels of expenditure, and then provides a sensible, means-tested top up to the individual's salary. That is a much more beneficial method of protecting the low paid in our society.

Another survey showed that 70 per cent. of foreign-owned companies in the United Kingdom acknowledge the improvement in its industrial relations over the past 13 or 14 years. That is a tremendous achievement. The number of days lost through strikes fell from 3·5 million in January 1979 to 500,000 for the whole year to August 1992. That point may be lost on the Labour party, but it is not lost on the hundreds of businesses in America and Japan who are flooding into the United Kingdom to invest. Inward investment to the north-east amounted to £2·7 billion, creating or establishing 35,000 jobs.

The United Kingdom's industrial relations record has transformed it from being the sick man of Europe to the country that attracts 60 per cent. of all foreign investment made by America and Japan. I am delighted that the vast proportion of it comes to the north-east.

Ms. Eagle: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bates: Never mind harking back to 1909 and to wages councils, because they are hugely removed from present events. Today, I took leaders of the oil and gas industry in Teesside to meet my hon. Friend the Minister for Energy, who kindly received us and listened to the points that were made. We were able to tell him about the great plans for investment that those leaders have for Teesside and of the thousands of jobs that they intend to create. That was music to my ears at a time of high employment—real jobs coming to my constituency. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] As the Member of Parliament who represents Langbaurgh, I am right to focus attention on those new jobs.

Ms. Eagle: Will the hon. Gentleman give way now?

Mr. Bates: Those companies are coming to this country because they see it as the place in Europe to locate because of its industrial relations and the skilled work force that it can offer.

Mr. John Spellar (Warley, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bates: No, I will not.

Those jobs are vital to my constituency and we would do well to focus our attention on freeing the market, creating responsible trade unions and creating employment opportunities for people who are out of work—rather than making outdated arguments from the past.

5.38 pm

Ms. Angela Eagle (Wallasey): Thank you for calling me, Mr. Deputy Speaker—especially at this moment, to follow the contribution of the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Bates). He is the first hon. Member I have encountered who fails even to acknowledge a request to give way, but instead ploughs on as if nothing is happening. His grasp of reality is about as advanced as his manners.

It would have been more honest of the Government not to have called this the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Bill, which is a perverse description of it. I have a couple of suggestions for alternative titles. It could, for instance, be called the Labour Market (Deregulation) Bill—or, perhaps, the Trade Union Bashing and Removal of Employment Rights Bill. *[Interruption.]* The reaction of Conservative Members is very revealing: it shows their real motives.

Mr. Sykes: Perhaps the hon. Lady would have liked to be in the position in which I found myself during the "winter of discontent". A grown man was sobbing in my office: his wife and family had received death threats because he had crossed a secondary picket line to deliver

[Mr. Sykes]

oil to a hospital. It is because our Government have outlawed such alien practices that they have been returned to power four times in succession.

Ms. Eagle: I can only reply that, after 14 years of this Government, there is a good deal of fear and insecurity in the country. That is due to poverty, unemployment, homelessness and the many other social effects of the Government's appalling economic policy, and their ideological obsession with deregulating the labour market.

When we examine what has happened over the past 14 years, we begin to perceive the general ideological thrust of the Government's policy and to realise that the Bill is a further example of that. It will redouble the effects that we have already seen. The Government's policy is, as I have said, to deregulate the labour market: the reaction of Conservative Members when I suggested alternative titles for the Bill suggests that they agree with me.

By definition, people at work—both unions and individuals—are bound to have less power over their employers and less power to protect themselves against arbitrary treatment of any kind. Over the past 14 years, the labour market has been deregulated pretty viciously, in several ways. First, employment protection legislation has been systematically dismantled: that has been a central theme of the Government's labour market policy since they came to office in 1979. We have seen, for example, the lengthening of time limits applying to full-time and part-time workers' access to protection against unfair dismissal; the abolition of various rights to arbitration; the cutting of benefits; and the breaking of links between earnings and benefits, especially in regard to those who are rendered unemployed. All that helps to make the prospect of unemployment more devastating now than it was before the Government came to power.

The weakening of trade unions has been perhaps the most explicit aim of the series of Conservative Governments who have been in power since 1979. When we examine their record and analyse the rhetoric that they have used in boasting about the devastation that they have caused, we find that all that the Conservatives can really boast about is the so-called weakening and taming of the unions. They seem proudest of that. Certainly they cannot be proud of the current level of unemployment, or our success in the world: we now face massive public sector borrowing requirement debt and a vast balance of payments deficit owing to their inefficiency and incompetence. They have been successful in no other area of economic life, but they have succeeded according to their values.

The Conservatives have produced six pieces of legislation designed to remove workers' protection by weakening the unions. The Bill is just another step down the road towards the achievement of their aim—to make trade unions as ineffectual as possible. If we strip away the rhetoric about individual trade union rights, we find that it is all about power in the workplace. The Government have reduced the unions' power in the workplace and that, in turn, has reduced their ability to look after the interests of individual members.

The Government have ensured that the everyday lot of working people is not just insecurity and fear of unemployment—unemployment, of course, is now massive—but the experience of a much more arbitrary and dictatorial style in the workplace. I have always called it macho management. Many more people now suffer from such authoritarian behaviour as a result of the Government's policies, but the Government seem pleased with their achievement.

Another factor that has helped to deregulate the labour market is the unprecedentedly high unemployment levels that we have suffered over the past 14 years. As we heard earlier, the official figure is now 3 million, but we know that the way in which the figures are calculated has been changed 27 times. By fixing the figures, the Government have lost 1 million unemployed: that has been their most effective job creation scheme. I wish that they would show the ingenuity that they appear to have displayed in the manipulation of official statistics by securing real jobs and prosperity for our people.

It all boils down to the Government's ideological obsessions. We returned to that time and again in Committee. The Government believe that market forces should be allowed a free rein, whatever the consequences. Opposition Members have been keen to point out the devastating social effects of a completely unregulated market—a labour market, or any other economic market—on the social fabric of the nation. The result of the Government's worship of the god of market forces has been 4 million unemployed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) drew attention to the economic madness of that policy in his excellent speech. He pointed out that carrying the present unemployment level wastes £27 billion—money which could be put to a more productive use. As the Secretary of State admitted, that amounts to £9,000 per person. Moreover, lost production is costing us £50 billion. Given such a level of loss and incompetence, it is hard to imagine that Britain's problems revolve around the flexibility between a rate of £3·10 an hour—the current highest level of wages council remuneration—and zero.

We should remember that £3·10 an hour works out at £120 a week gross, which is hardly a startling sum. Conservative Members, however, are asking us to believe that, if only that flexibility existed, all our problems would be solved and massive employment would be created. They must know that that is nonsense. I do not know how they can say such things with a straight face: I commend them for being able to do so, time and again, without placing their tongues firmly in their cheeks.

Unemployment is especially devastating in the north-west. We are seeing the same pattern—mass unemployment, at a higher level than we experienced since the 1930s. Two aspects in particular give cause for concern: the number of long-term unemployed—more than 1 million—and the number of young unemployed. We have failed a whole generation of young people by our neglect.

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): In France, Spain, Greece and most other European countries that have introduced minimum-wage legislation for young people, youth unemployment is far higher than it is here. Would the hon. Lady care to comment on that? She keeps saying that the Government in this country are failing people. Have not those other Governments failed people by introducing minimum-wage legislation that has destroyed jobs?

Ms. Eagle: The hon. Gentleman should stop barking up the wrong tree. He should consider youth unemployment in Germany, which is known for its high-tech industries and high-quality employment, and see whether that supports his argument.

In May 1979, unemployment in the north-west was 5·1 per cent., but in December 1992, after 14 years of "success" under this Government, it was 10·9 per cent. The Government, uniquely among western Governments, have managed to manufacture two recessions. We are in a world recession and, although Britain went into recession before the rest of the world, it seems that it will come out of it later. The hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald) failed to recognise that we had our own recession between 1980 and 1982 thanks to the Government's monetarist obsessions, which destroyed one third of manufacturing industry.

I want to spend a little time considering the poverty that has resulted from deregulation of the labour market, which was part of the strategy that the Government decided to pursue on taking office. Under this Government, we have seen the largest redistribution of wealth to the rich. That was achieved partly through tax cuts, on which I do not want to spend a lot of time because they are not relevant to the Bill, but plummeting rates of pay have been caused directly by deregulation. The Bill further deregulates and impoverishes and will, therefore, increase poverty.

Part III of the Bill sits uneasily with the Tory party's labour market philosophies. Part III would appear strange to someone who was unaware of its background, because, however grudgingly, it grants some employment rights of a limited and technical nature. Somebody reading the Bill without background knowledge could be forgiven for wondering what is the purpose of part III, given the ideological obsessions of Tory Members.

The Secretary of State tried to take credit for all the rights in part III, but they result either from the Government failing properly to apply previous EC directives or from new directives that they fought tooth and nail, weakened, held up and introduced grudgingly at the last possible moment.

The Library research note on the Bill confirms my view. It says that improvements in the statutory protection in part III are

"almost entirely inspired by EC directives."

Would not it be nice to have a Government who had the wit, generosity and commitment to introduce employment protection instead of deregulating, impoverishing and endangering the work force?

Another aspect of the Bill that worries me is that it will widen the equality gap—the gap in employment rights between men and women—and the pay gap.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I apologise for interrupting the hon. Lady, but I cannot let her get away with that remark, which implied that provisions in respect of women who become pregnant while at work follow solely from, and are driven by, the directive. The amendments that were made last night go beyond the terms of the directive. Will she confirm that the rights included in the Bill go beyond matters covered by European directives, and would she like to withdraw the rather scurrilous allegation that she made?

Ms. Eagle: I thank the Minister for his intervention, but I do not agree with his analysis. Some of the amendments were proposed by Labour Members to make something awful slightly better, which is why we consider Bills line by line in Committee. If the Government had been truly committed to introducing meaningful rights for women at work—maternity and various other rights—they would have considered the ramshackle and piecemeal structure of equality law much more enthusiastically. They would not have introduced a third tier of employment rights in the most technical and most difficult way to implement. I would be much more willing to believe the Minister's commitment to creating meaningful maternity rights for women if the Government had been willing to consolidate women's employment rights in one simple and easy-to-use Act so that employers and employees were aware of their rights. I am not willing to withdraw my observations. The Government have been dragged kicking and screaming by EC regulations into granting minimum employment rights.

The Bill runs the risk of widening the pay gap between men and women, and the Equal Opportunities Commission shares my view. One of the mechanisms that will widen the pay gap, which is against the beliefs of those who favour equal pay for work of equal value and the equality legislation that has been on the statute book for 20 years, is the abolition of wages councils. Analysis shows that the pay gap between men and women in wages council industries is considerably narrower than in unregulated sectors. I suggest that that is so because wages council rates are unisex and apply equally to men, women, workers from ethnic minorities and people with disabilities. People do not suffer from discrimination because of their gender, colour or disability.

Yet another deplorable aspect of the Bill is that it widens that gap. It is a sad day for hon. Members who are committed to achieving equality at work to have to stand by and watch that happen.

The Bill is another rehash of the Government's tired dogma. It does nothing to deal with Britain's economic situation, which is at crisis level with massive poverty and unemployment and no prospect that anyone can see of getting out of recession. It does nothing to equip a modern work force to face the 20th century, but instead looks back to the 19th century. Therefore, it should be opposed.

5.58 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): I usually try to avoid debates on trade union reform or labour relations, because they have a bad effect on my blood pressure. I do not like to hear Tory Members—a small minority—hurling abuse and contempt at trade unions, because when I worked on Clydeside I found more integrity and good will among trade unionists than in certain sections of the Conservative party.

It worries me hugely to hear Labour Members expressing great concern about poor people, because they voted huge extra sums of money to agriculture, which is the biggest protection racket that has ever existed and which does massive damage to poor people in Britain, as they well know.

I want to say a few words about clause 26, which has rarely been mentioned in our debate and is rarely mentioned at all. It gives the impression that there has been a conspiracy of silence about a massive change in British law which will effectively undermine the issue of privatisation.

[Sir Teddy Taylor]

The Government's practice with regard to EC measures has been to say, "This doesn't really matter at all. It is hardly a change. In fact, the Law Officers have told us that everything is going very well." However, this morning I received a letter, which I shall be glad to give to the Minister, from the managing director of the Clause 26 group. It stated:

> "Companies are facing financial ruin as a direct consequence of the confusion brought about by the inclusion of clause 26 in the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Bill."

He may be exaggerating, but members of the Committee are well aware that something serious has happened, which will have a significant effect on our economy.

Let us consider what is involved in privatisation. Refuse collection and street cleaning contracts had a value of about £448 million, the cost of ground maintenance was about £141 million and for building cleaning about £191 million. I have gained the impression—

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I know about the concern expressed by the Clause 26 group. I have spoken to the group, as it lobbied the Committee. There is nothing in clause 26 that changes the terms of the acquired rights directive. The concern expressed to him relates to the provisions of that directive. My hon. Friend's knowledge of Community institutions is second to none, and he will know that there is nothing that we can do in the Bill to change the terms of that directive.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I note that the Minister says that the directive has not changed, but, as someone who has studied these issues, I hope that he is aware that we are changing the law. I hope that he is aware that the House passed a law after the EC had issued the directive. After that, infraction proceedings were taken against us for three years. As far as I am aware, that was not made known to the House or to the industries directly involved.

The Commission said, "Please change your interpretation of five aspects of our directive, which is a splendid directive." The Government apparently accepted four changes. I am sure that they accepted a battle of correspondence but not a real battle. They did not go to court over one single aspect. Is that not the case?

Mr. Forsyth: Four of the points were taken on board, and one is still subject to dispute. I reinforce my point: it is the terms of the directive which matter. If the Government did not comply with infraction proceedings and if we did not change the law, it would still be open to people to look to the courts to enforce the terms of the directive. That is the key issue which my hon. Friend needs to take on board.

I agree that we need to consider the terms of the acquired rights directive and that, in line with the principle of subsidiarity, it is a matter which can best be determined by national Governments, but because the pass was sold by the Labour Government as far back as 1977, we are not in a position to do so.

Sir Teddy Taylor: The Minister talks about legal points and what happens if we do not conform to infraction proceedings. That is the most astonishing interpretation of European law that I have ever heard. Infraction proceedings result in our being written a letter. If the Commission says that we are not applying the directive properly, it will take infraction proceedings, which means sending us a letter, and we must send one back. If we feel that it is a battle worth fighting and something about which we feel sufficiently strongly, we can go to the courts.

The Government accepted four proposals. The Minister says that it is a matter of interpretation of the law, but it is a significant interpretation. It is disappointing that, when a significant change is made to United Kingdom law or, as the Minister would say, our interpretation of the European directive, no one wants to talk about it or to consider the implications.

I feel strongly about this, because Southend-on-Sea started the business of municipal privatisation. Some people may not agree, but we believe that we were the first. We made a big change in our cleansing department by saying that we would get rid of a lot of people. We decided to start again and do it differently. We were attacked for many reasons: people said that we were trying to cut costs and slash wages, but now wages are higher and we have an efficient service which has saved a great deal of money. It has now happened all over the country, as the Minister is aware. Conservatives usually think that privatisation is a good thing. A huge amount of money has been saved across the country—the estimate is about 20 per cent.—by saying that we want to try all these exciting things.

I submit that, under the new interpretation which the Government accepted following infraction proceedings, privatisation will be severely undermined. The Minister might doubt that, but I shall cite an example. Privatisation is about to take place on the Fenchurch Street line, which goes to Southend-on-Sea. I wrote to my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Transport, who usually tells me the truth, because, as the Minister knows, he is a decent guy. He does not talk about such things as the social chapter or unusual interpretations; nor does he talk a load of rubbish on television like other Ministers. I asked him what would happen. He wrote:

> "we understand that under TUPE all staff employed wholly or mainly on the passenger service operations of the LT&S at the time will transfer when a franchise is let for those operations. Their wage rates and other employment terms and conditions will be maintained, and the recognised trade unions will have to be consulted"—

meaningfully. As Members of the Opposition Front Bench are aware, if we do not have meaningful consultation—the word "meaningful" must also be interpreted by one of the bright tribunals—the employer will be fined the equivalent of two weeks' wages. Basically, that is a huge change, which has had dramatic consequences.

A firm called Thamesway, one of our great new privatised bus companies, said that it wanted to be involved in the Fenchurch Street privatisation. It believed that it was a great idea and wanted to run the train more efficiently in a new spirit of private enterprise. The company knew that it might have turned out to be a disaster or a great success like our cleansing operation. What happened? When the Bill was published, Thamesway said that it was no longer interested.

Hon. Members will remember the great prison privatisation that was to take place. A firm called McAlpine was going to do exciting things so that people would jump up and down far more efficiently at less cost, prisoners would be happier and would get coffee in bed in the morning. I do not know how the firm was going to do it, but it proposed to do it more cheaply and better. However, I understand that the firm has now abandoned the idea.

The Minister may say that it is all a question of how we interpret the law, but the plain fact is that a massive change has occurred. The evidence is there. Time will tell if I am wrong. The Minister might believe that firms are going to rush to become involved in privatisations. If they do, he can say, "Taylor is a clown", but the change is big, and it is happening.

I do not object to the fact that the EC acted when there was a Labour Government. What worries me is that we are not being told about a massive transfer of decision-making —the facts are being deliberately hidden. Is that merely Taylor's view? Far from it.

The Clause 26 group consists of employers, the people who want to become involved in privatisations and have spent a fortune trying to get them off the ground. The group is saying that, if it had been told about infraction proceedings, it could have saved a great deal of money and time:

> "If contractors had been aware that Brussels was seeking to enforce the Acquired Rights Directive on public service contracts, they would have viewed the new market opportunity in an entirely different light."

If the Minister wants the letter, he can have it. This is not me telling stories; it is what the Clause 26 group said. It said that, if it had known about this, it would have approached the matter in an entirely different way.

Then there is the famous social chapter, about which we have been given all kinds of nonsense. Ministers told us that it would cost British firms millions of pounds, but now the Foreign Secretary tells us that it will not apply to Britain at all.

It is time for the Government to face up to the fact that these things are happening. People should be told what is going on. Things ought not to be hidden. We could, as usual, blame problems on the Labour party and the trade unions by saying that they were in power when the original directive went through. However, mighty things are happening, and it is very important that we should face up to that fact.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth (Coventry, North-East): The hon. Gentleman probably does not know that, throughout the Committee stage, Conservative Members referred to concern about creeping competence, about matters in respect of which the European Community was slowly eroding the rights of the British Parliament. Surely it must seem strange to ordinary working people that some Conservative Members should be so animated by the question of the right to continue to exploit working people. We have before us a Bill that removes workers' rights in a most profound way, yet the hon. Gentleman and some of his hon. Friends seem to be concerned only by the fact that Europe is taking more powers from this Parliament.

Sir Teddy Taylor: If people agree with the hon. Gentleman, if they think that Tories are a bunch of scum doing everyone down, they can change the Government, and therefore the policies. What worries me about EC directives is that people can do nothing about them. The hon. Gentleman may agree with those people who say that privatisation is wrong, and bad for working folk. I happen to think that it is good for workers—by, for example, keeping costs down. If private enterprise were to sweep through agriculture, for instance, the living standards of working people in Britain would be infinitely higher. It is a question of different approaches. The hon. Gentleman may be right, and I wrong. If he can persuade the people of Britain that laws of the type of which he is in favour should be brought in, that will be fantastic. Sadly, however, rights are being taken away.

The really bad thing is what would happen in privatisation generally. All workers would have to be kept on, wage rates maintained, and working conditions protected, and there would have to be meaningful consultations with the unions. Having said that, I want to put three simple questions to the Government.

First, do they regard this as a serious matter? That is a simple question, requiring the answer yes or no. The Government may say that nothing has changed, that what we are faced with is simply the interpretation of a directive, but there is a huge difference of interpretation. I am referring not to what we have heard from the Law Officers but to the desire of the Commissioners to take proceedings, to which we have been told we must agree. I happen to think that that is a very serious matter.

Secondly, have there been any signs that industry and commerce are giving up their interest in privatisation? Recently, I have given two very specific examples, and there are many more—a huge number, the Clause 26 group says. Are the Government aware of any such cases?

Thirdly, what is the reason for the row about one of the five measures that the Government are not conceding to the EC—a measure in respect of which we may go to court? I refer to the granting of recognition to trade unions or other employee representatives for the purposes of these meaningful negotiations. I can assure the Minister that I have a real problem in Southend-on-Sea—a railway line that is to be privatised. I do not know what to tell workers, friends and neighbours. Until now, I have urged people to rejoin trade unions fast, on the grounds that they need representation in the meaningful consultations. This is a matter of great importance and real significance.

People in the Department of Employment work very hard and late to do the best for the working people of Britain. Let them concentrate on telling people what is happening. We know that there has been a mighty change in the interpretation of the directive. There is no point in saying that nothing much has happened. Let people be told what has happened; then a decision on what to do about it can be made. Some people say that we cannot go on like this, that change is necessary. Others say that private legislation should be tried. What is happening in this case has happened in many others. A major change is being made in the rights and liberties of the people of Britain.

We should be able to go for privatisation if we think that it is a good thing. However, people are not being told what is happening. Things are being swept under the carpet. There is pretence that the law is unchanged or that there are only a few minor changes. People in Britain should be told to wake up. Firms should not be deprived of information. We must realise that something nasty and serious has happened—and, sadly, it is something over which we have no control.

6.15 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): I should like to begin by apologising for my absence at the beginning of the debate. I do not have the good fortune to have been a member of the Standing Committee that dealt with this Bill, but those who were on the Committee will probably

[Mr. Alex Carlile]

remember the measure as the one that did away with the wages councils. It seems that that is the impact that the Bill has had on the public. Yesterday we had a full debate on the issue of the wages councils. The Tea Room round by the Whips has been a little more successful today. Yesterday, during that focus debate, we did not have the advantage of hearing any Conservative Member, apart from the Minister, support the abolition of the wages councils. Today we have heard some such support from the Government side.

I should like to put to the Minister a question that I would have put to one of his hon. Friends if he had chosen to give way to anyone during his speech: what do the Government regard as the lowest acceptable rate of pay? Do the Government believe that it is right that very large numbers of people should have to rely on social security benefits to support their income? If so, how does that accord with Tory philosophy? It seems to me to contradict entirely the philosophy that private enterprise should not only exist but prosper. I cannot believe that part of Tory philosophy is that private enterprise should be founded upon a situation in which bankruptcies and liquidations increase every year, in which more and more people find that their employers have gone bust without even making proper PAYE payments, and when more and more people are forced into low-wage employment.

I should like the Minister to deal with a particular problem that affects rural areas such as my constituency of Montgomery. A reality of life in rural mid-Wales and, I expect, in similar rural areas is that opportunities for work in agriculture are beginning to diminish as fast as in some heavy industries, such as coal and steel, in the past. As a result, we have an increasingly low-wage economy, in which people are looking increasingly for jobs that do not exist. What do the Government intend to do to ensure that people who find work in the tourist industry and in the residual industries in rural areas are not paid at abominably low rates?

I have visited factories in my constituency where wage rates, particularly for women, are extremely low. For example, two or two and a half years ago, women packing cosmetics were being paid less than £2 an hour. I am very pleased to say that the rates were raised shortly after my visit, and I hope that was not a coincidence. In many factories around the country women in particular are greatly disadvantaged in terms of wages. As was said yesterday, women—especially single parents and others in similar positions—will be particularly affected by the removal of the wages councils. The Government cannot be proud of that. *[Interruption.]* Would the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) like me to give way to him? I think that he muttered something about my having missed out the ethnic minorities. I do not know whether that was intended to be a constructive contribution to the debate; in my view, it was a pretty disgraceful one. Does the hon. Gentleman want me to give way? I see that he does not. In that event I shall continue.

The Bill missed the opportunity for Government Departments to combine their resources, and the considerable talents of those who work in them and who can produce imaginative schemes at the drop of a Government pencil, in an attempt to produce a real strategy for employment in this country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. The hon. and learned Gentleman well knows that a Third Reading debate must encompass what is in the Bill, not a future employment strategy.

Mr. Carlile: I was going to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that it was a disappointment that the speeches made both on the Floor of the House and in Committee revealed that the Department of Employment had done little to ensure that the Bill contained at least some of the opportunities that could have been included if a strategic approach had been adopted.

There are other disappointments as well as the provisions concerning the wages councils. In the context of employment rights, it is disappointing that the Government did not allow those who go before industrial tribunals to have legal aid. Few Labour Members here now were Members of Parliament when industrial tribunals were introduced. I am confident that Labour Members would now disagree with the deal that was done between the unions and the Labour Government. The unions did not want legal aid to be available for industrial tribunals because that might have reduced union membership. That was not a creditable deal.

Most Opposition Members, whether they belong to the Labour party, to my party or to any of the other Opposition parties, would agree that the rights of people who lose their jobs through redundancy or dismissal are not fairly protected when the employer can use solicitors and counsel to appear before the industrial tribunal but the employed person is rarely able to do so. Many employed people are extremely well represented by trade union representatives at industrial tribunals, but at some tribunals I have had the feeling that the employee has not had the resources to enable him to present his case with all the investigative and evidential resources available to the employer. In omitting to give legal aid to employed people going before industrial tribunals the Bill represents a missed opportunity.

I regret, too, that the maternity and paternity rights proposals discussed in the debates on the Bill have found favour with the Government only to a limited extent. In so far as the Bill takes the law forward and improves rights it is welcome, but what it does is extremely limited.

I am confident that many more Bills will come before the House involving the factors that I have mentioned, especially legal aid, wages councils, and maternity and paternity rights. The Government cannot be complacent in the belief that they have created a charter of rights of which a British Government can be proud. The Government's intransigence about the social chapter, and the intransigence of people such as the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), will evaporate as the years go by—but it will be shameful to see the British worker lagging behind those in other countries in the European Community because, compared with his colleagues elsewhere, he has fewer rights.

6.24 pm

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): The hon. Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson) said that the Bill was aimed at the wrong issues. I start by disagreeing profoundly with that statement. How can it be wrong to provide new rights for trade union members and for employees, including a whole raft of new maternity rights? How can it be wrong to improve the constitution of industrial tribunals to cut delays? How can it be wrong to create conditions for new jobs by abolishing the wages councils?

The hon. Member for Delyn, like me, was here on Second Reading and served on the Standing Committee, so he knows that at that stage I said that the Bill was good. Having been through the whole Committee process and having heard the hon. Gentleman speak many times over those 55 hours, I am prepared to say that the Bill is better now.

The Bill has been improved partly because of the hon. Gentleman's contributions, and partly because of those of other members of the Committee. It is wrong for the hon. Gentleman and other Opposition Members to say that the Government did not respond to what they, and we, said in Committee. For example, the hon. Gentleman will recall that one of the points that he and other hon. Members made about trade union ballot scrutiny was that the confidentiality of individuals might be breached and their security put at risk if the sort of information available to scrutineers became common knowledge. On that issue the Government listened and acted. New clause 6 deals with the problem.

Much criticism was levelled at the Government on the basis that if there was a flat rate of check-off, it was ridiculous for the Bill to require notification of increase on an annual basis. The Government listened to that and acted. There was criticism that women did not have sufficient freedom to choose the starting date of their maternity leave. The Government listened and acted. On issues of individual safety, practical common sense and individual freedom the Government not only heard what was said but acted.

Hon. Members raised other issues, too, on which they would no doubt have liked their views to be represented in the final form of the Bill. But it is clearly wrong to say that there has not been a Committee process that has improved the Bill.

I especially welcome some of the measures that have not been generally discussed in the debate. The method of dealing with delays in industrial tribunals—by giving the chairman enhanced powers to deal with legal issues and issues of contract—will be a great help. Having attended industrial tribunals over the past year or so, I have seen the delays. Five months is the average in half the cases listed, and a delay of a year or more is not unknown. If we can transfer 25 per cent. of the work to the chairman only—and that would be the effect of the provision—waiting times will be cut dramatically. That does not harm in any way employers' and employees' confidence in the system of industrial tribunals and in the concept of the industrial jury.

I heard what the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) said about legal aid for industrial tribunals. In my view, legal aid would change industrial tribunals dramatically——

Mr. Alex Carlile: They would be fair.

Mr. Heald: I do not accept that. Over the years, industrial tribunals have developed from being informal at the outset to being far more legalistic. Nevertheless, the whole approach is still that people from each side of industry tackle the problem and try to solve it in a manner different from the adversarial system that we know in the courts.

My experience has always been that if an applicant is not represented by a lawyer, the chairman and the members of the tribunal bend over backwards to give him every assistance. Certainly people have not suffered as a result of not having the services of someone such as the hon. and learned Member or myself.

Sir Harold Walker (Doncaster, Central): Possibly I am the only Member present who was a Member of Parliament when industrial tribunals were introduced. I do not recall the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile), the spokesman for the Liberal party, being present. Bearing in mind that he is a lawyer, probably fishing for work, may I tell him that the original purpose in excluding legal aid was precisely the reason given by the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald)—that we wanted industrial tribunals to be a means of informal jurisdiction rather than bring in the legalities and complexities which all too often accompany the presence of lawyers.

Mr. Heald: I agree entirely with the right hon. Gentleman. A unique quality of an industrial tribunal is that it is a common-sense tribunal where lay members can get at the truth of the incident and the facts that are important to the case, partly because of their own experience of both sides of industry.

I have heard the impassioned plea of Opposition Members who say that if wages councils are destroyed, the fabric of society will be destroyed and people on low wages will suffer. There is a choice: low pay or no pay. There is no doubt that minimum wage regimes anywhere in the world cost jobs. As my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) said yesterday, one may decide that it is a price worth paying. That is fair enough, but it is not right for Opposition Members to lecture us on the basis that there is not a price to pay for minimum wage legislation.

France has high unemployment; one reason is minimum wage legislation. One reason why Britain has lower youth unemployment than France, Spain, Greece and other European countries is that they all have minimum wage legislation.

If we are seeking a strategy to deal with unemployment, we have to take that issue into account. Is it right to have more jobs, even if some of them are less well paid, or do we say that there is a certain level at which we will pin the minimum wage and that we will bear the cost in terms of fewer jobs?

I was interested to read in the *Daily Mail* yesterday a remark by Lord Jakobovits, the former chief rabbi:

> "Idleness wrecks and corrupts. Any job, no matter how lowly the pay, is better than that."

It is important to have a sense of reality in the debate. With 17 million unemployed across Europe and with people desperate to work, many of them wanting the flexible, part-time jobs that wages councils deal with, the issue should be addressed seriously. The abolition of wages councils will provide a flexible method of employment and will give people more job opportunities.

6.33 pm

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness): It could be said that the Bill is a sad and unconvincing measure. It has more to do with satisfying the ideological fixations of the union bashers and the labour market deregulators than with the social and economic difficulties facing the British

[Mr. John Hutton]

people after 14 years of the Government's ruinous economic and industrial policies. If those are the Bill's objectives, I do not think it satisfies either of them.

Yesterday and today, the Bill has been attacked from both the left and the right of the Conservative party. Many Conservative Members are deeply concerned about some of the provisions. Some of those concerns have been expressed today.

Following the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald), whom it is always a pleasure to follow, I think it worth putting on the record that we on the Labour Benches have given limited endorsement to some parts of the Bill. We cannot give those parts our complete endorsement because they do not go far enough. As we have said throughout the proceedings, we believe that at some time we may have to tidy up the mistakes of the Department of Employment.

The limited parts of the Bill which we can endorse have been completely overshadowed by other parts which have been drawn to our attention by my hon. Friends and some Conservative Members. I am thinking particularly of the abolition of wages councils in clause 28. Today at least we have had the benefit—if that is the right word; I am not convinced that it is—of hearing some justification for the abolition of wages councils, but the House has been bitterly disappointed.

We heard a ludicrous speech by the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Bates), who clearly thought that the abolition of wages councils was a matter for hilarity and humour. I do not think that that hilarity will be shared by the 2·5 million people, and particularly the 2 million women, who will be exposed to the evils of low wages and exploitation by employers. If that is the best that Government Back Benchers can do, it is pathetic.

Clause 18 establishes the so-called commission for protection against unlawful action. When the Government are cutting the legal aid budget and withdrawing from the postal ballot regime established in the Employment Act 1980, at the same time to throw money at a ludicrous commissioner seems to be absurd. How is it possible to cut legal aid and to withdraw from the postal ballot regime while spending millions to support frivolous and absurd litigation?

There are also absurd provisions on check-off in clause 11. The Government have yet to provide any coherent justification for the check-off regime which they propose as the law of the land. They cannot provide justification, because there is none. Clearly, the purpose of clause 11 is to strangle check-off arrangements. That will damage industrial relations, and it was not requested by employers.

Significantly, there is tension between parts of the Bill which seek to improve the employment rights of individuals and other parts which will take rights away. There is a mix of deregulation and regulation. I think that that is why the Bill worries many Conservative Members, particularly the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), who unfortunately is not in his place.

Parts of the Bill are so badly drafted—again I am thinking of clause 18—that they look like three cherries on a fruit machine for lawyers. It is no part of the business of the House or of hon. Members to enact legislation which will have that result. The law which we are making is not clear or concise. It will not improve the employment rights of individuals. It will simply generate work for grossly overpaid lawyers. That is not a sensible use of our time.

The principles behind the Bill were out of date before the measure was presented. A party which proclaims the value of deregulation as a method of stimulating employment is presiding over chronic, mass and rising employment. Clearly the Government have no answers to the accusation that the economy is out of control. All they can produce is this absurd attempt to abolish the minimum wages set by wages councils.

The Bill is a sad reflection on the Government's economic ambitions. Not many Conservative Members have been part of our proceedings; I can only conclude that they were too ashamed and embarrassed to participate. I hope that those who have had the benefit of hearing the arguments deployed by my right hon. and hon. Friends will come to the only possible conclusion—to reject the Bill on Third Reading and to restore some sanity and decency to employment rights.

6.38 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): I apologise to the House for not being present for the earlier speeches. I was serving on a Select Committee. As a consequence, I will speak briefly.

If we are to say that levels of pay are the most important factor in employment and that we should allow them to come down, we should consider not just the 2·7 million who are covered by wages councils; to be consistent, we should talk about teachers, doctors, nurses, dentists and all the others who, as my hon. Friends and I can claim with pride, have seen an increase in their real earnings which restored part of the fall which took place under the Labour Government. Going back to what happened before 1979 is not a helpful way of dealing with trade union and employment legislation.

We need to recognise when we resist parts of the social chapter—one of the issues that has come up in our debates on the Bill—that the European Community proposals to limit the number of hours that people work do not apply to executives, to European Commissioners or to Members of Parliament. They might apply to people who have high manual earnings or who have low manual earnings. I do not go along with such a proposal because I do not believe that it is necessary. Similarly, much of what is in the Bill is not necessary. Aspects of it may be welcome to some, but it is not necessary in the main, with the exception of measures required by European directives and European judgments.

Some provisions, such as those on political fund ballots, are important because such ballots need to be carried out fairly. I hope that when union members decide, under the regular review, whether they want to maintain a political fund, more and more of them will say that they do not. I hope that, even if they have a political fund, they do not just keep paying money to the Labour party. That is damaging to the Labour party, to the trade unions and to the Conservative party. If we merely see trade unions as supporting one section of our political opponents, we shall react as we have with some elements of the Bill.

If more hon. Members had listened to a Radio 4 programme a week ago when Brian Widlake dealt with poverty and with people who had lost their jobs, their attitude to wages councils would be different. Many of those interviewed were prepared to take work not just at poverty wages, but below poverty wages. Hon. Members would then have looked more carefully at the research evidence quoted by the Department of Employment on the employment consequences of a change in the lowest rates of pay under the wages councils orders.

I repeat one point I made last night. The only serious evidence—it is pretty weak at that—that Employment Ministers have put forward is that if the rate of pay for people at the bottom of the wages councils industries fell by between 15 per cent. and 20 per cent., there might be a 1 per cent. increase in employment. I have always accepted that there might be an employment impact. However, I believe that virtually to eliminate pay—a drop in the rate of pay of 20 per cent.—for an increase from 2·7 million to 2·727 million is out of order. It does not make sense. I am very surprised that that proposal is being put forward.

There is a price to pay for the abolition of the wages councils which is far greater than the price that we pay for having them. If that balance of pain is being carried by those who are far worse off than ourselves, I believe that we should take their interests more seriously when we consider legislation.

The House cannot be said to be giving whole-hearted consent to the Bill. I hope that the other place will feel free to consider some of the issues from the beginning. For the Bill to have gone through Report without the right wing of the Tory party speaking in support of Ministers shows that we have gone beyond the days of the 1980s when such people supported what was happening.

I take a pretty moderate approach. I can see the faults in trade unions, in political parties and in some official arrangements. The fact that I oppose so many of the details of the Bill suggests to me that we should hear the reflections of the other place. I hope that the Bill comes back with some changes.

6.42 pm

Mr. Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): I first pay a compliment to the Ministers—the hon. Members for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) and for Derbyshire, West (Mr. McLoughlin). I take the view that if the hon. Member for Stirling can damage my street credibility, I can certainly damage his. I believe that I speak for all Opposition Members when I say how grateful we are for the way in which the Committee was conducted, and for the reasonable and constructive manner in which issues were debated. It made a pleasant change from my previous experience in Committee with the hon. Member for Stirling, when we engaged in trench warfare night in and night out, and came out with the Bill almost unchanged.

Matters have been different this time. The hon. Member for Stirling has made concession after concession after concession after concession after concession—I told him that I would damage his street credibility—to the extent that the Bill is significantly changed. We are grateful for that, small mercy though it is.

We conclude our proceedings on the Bill on the eve of the announcement that the official unemployment figure is, almost certainly, above 3 million—4 million in real terms. Twenty seven people are now chasing every vacancy, at a cost to the taxpayer of £27 billion. The number of people employed has fallen by 8 per cent. since 1979 and the number of those employed in manufacturing industry has fallen by a staggering 38 per cent. over the same period.

Rather than doing anything significant, the Government have preferred once again to stand aside. In this predicament, does the Department of Employment introduce a Bill to help the long-term unemployed? No, it does not. Does it introduce measures to reskill the work force? No. Does it introduce measures to build a well-paid, highly motivated work force? No. Instead, the Department has introduced a Bill which is partly out of date, which is mean-minded in its intentions and which will have no effect on the employment prospects of the nation.

With 4 million people unemployed, the only job creation measure that the Government can introduce is the abolition of the wages councils. Apparently, the only way in which we can price ourselves into jobs is by pricing ourselves so low that it is difficult to exist.

We have had numerous contributions on the wages councils. Tonight, for the first time, we have had contributions from Conservative Members. None of them produced arguments in favour of abolition. Instead, Conservative Members produced arguments against our arguments for retaining the wages councils. That shows the bankruptcy of Conservative Members.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) said, probably the most ludicrous contribution was the one from the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Bates). I am sorry that he is not here now. The hon. Gentleman thought that it was all very hilarious and he used the opportunity to mock the disabled. He seemed to think that it was funny that there was a wages council for those who needed invalid carriages. I trust that the fact that he seemed to think that it was a matter for laughter will be noted by the disabled in his constituency.

We also had a contribution from a member of the Standing Committee, the hon. Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes). The best thing that I can say is that it was an extremely short contribution. I did not understand his logic. He said that he had been approached by a business man who opposed the wages councils because he believed that they were inflexible and that they were holding back his progress. This business man never paid wages councils rates; he always paid well above those rates. Yet for some reason, the wages councils were an imposition on him. I still fail to see the logic of that.

We had the usual contribution from another member of the Committee, the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls). Once again, he was somewhat patronising and dismissive. He fell into the usual fallacy of confusing minimum wage legislation with wages councils. The two issues are related, but they are not the same and it is important always to distinguish between them.

Mr. Nicholls: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Galbraith: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not, although I referred to him. He will realise that I am trying to get on, and he knows that I usually give way.

The Government gave no reasons for the abolition of the wages councils, so I shall give them some assistance by trying to crystallise what their arguments might be. They may care to muse about them in future. Basically, there are three arguments for abolishing wages councils. The first is that those who work in wages councils industries do so for

[Mr. Galbraith]

pin money. The second is that wages councils destroy jobs and the third is that they are an anachronism. That would be the kernel of the Government's argument.

The argument that people in wages councils industries work for pin money, as the Secretary of State implied, does not hold up when we look at the figures. The figure of 76·3 per cent. for those in wages councils industries who are in households with a second income is not very different from the equivalent figure of 72·6 per cent. for those in non-wages councils industries. There is no evidence that those in wages councils industries are different. If those who work in wages councils industries are working for pin money, so are those from double-earner homes who work elsewhere—including, I presume, the Secretary of State herself.

Conservative Members' second argument is that wages councils destroy jobs. I hear assertions and I hear opinions on that, but I have yet to hear arguments to justify them. Conservative Members must learn that opinion is not fact—that the two must be separated. I have read most of the learned academic discussions referred to by the Under-Secretary of State in response to the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley). The academic evidence is at best confused. If anything, it shows that wages councils do not destroy jobs and that, where they are effective and properly policed, they have a positive effect on employment. So the second argument is no basis for abolishing wages councils.

The final argument, advanced by the hon. Member for Teignbridge—I hope that he will not want to intervene just because I have mentioned him again—is that wages councils are an anachronism. The hon. Gentleman took the opportunity to mock Winston Churchill. The Tory party has come to a sad——

Mr. Nicholls: On behalf of both myself and Sir Winston Churchill, I ask the hon. Gentleman to accept that I was not mocking Sir Winston; I was mocking Labour Members' assertions that, for these purposes, he was on their side of the argument.

Mr. Galbraith: I realised that the hon. Gentleman would try to gloss over the fact that he mocked Winston Churchill, but it was clear to us all that that was what he was doing. It is a sad day when even in the Tory party Winston Churchill is a figure of fun.

I have explained previously that the fact that something has been around for a long time and may in some respects be out of date is not of itself a reason to abandon it; rather, it is a reason to develop it and take it further. The House of Lords is out of date, yet a Bill to abolish the House of Lords has yet to come before the House.

The hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) referred to the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations and the acquired rights directive. The Committee spent some time considering that matter, and we were given the benefit of the Attorney-General's views on that. He came ostensibly to clarify the position, although I think that the general view of hon. Members on both sides of the Committee was that it would have been better if he had not, because we were left even worse off than we had been before.

The gist of the Attorney-General's position was that nothing had changed—the acquired rights directive had always applied, so the regulations had always applied to privatisations and contracting out. I think that that is the position. What has changed is that people now know about the acquired rights directive and they know that it applies equally to undertakings that are privatised. The Government were involved in a cover-up—an attempt to pretend that the directive did not apply and to get round it by including in the original legislation a provision to the effect that it did not apply to commercial undertakings. That went against the acquired rights directive. The Government tried to create a fog so that no one would realise what their rights were, but they were found out and, as the Minister said, the only important issue now is what the acquired rights directive says about appeals being made on that basis irrespective of what is in the British law.

That being the case, is it not time for the Government to give clear guidance to everyone involved—to employers, the Department and workers—so that everyone knows the position? Given that the Bill is supposed to be about the rights of individual trade unionists and workers, let us give them guidance concerning their rights and what they can claim.

The Bill has its good parts. We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) about the maternity rights and health and safety provisions. I should like to put on record again my view that many of those provisions are included in the Bill principally because the European Community wished them to be in the Bill—they fulfil our obligations in Europe. The Minister and numerous Conservative Members made it clear that if they had been given their way, many of the provisions would not be in the Bill. The Government included them because they were under legal pressure to do so.

I make a small exception in respect of the health and safety provisions, which I know the Minister supports. I am grateful to him for the concessions that he made. Lest there be any further misconception, I repeat that had the Government been left to their own devices, the good parts of the Bill—the provisions dealing with maternity rights and health and safety—would have been excluded.

Part I of the Bill contains the trade union legislation. It is based on the ideology of the 1970s and early 1980s—on the premise that the only thing wrong with this country is that the trade unions are too powerful and that if we introduce legislation to neuter them and remove their powers, we shall attain nirvana. That policy failed miserably in the 1980s and it will fail again.

In 1979, when trade unions were supposed to be the reason for all our problems, there were 23 million people employed; there are now 21 million—a fall of 8 per cent. In 1979, there were 7 million people employed in manufacturing industry; now there are only 4·5 million—a fall of 38 per cent. In 1979, we had a trade surplus; now, despite North sea oil, we have a trade deficit that grows by the day.

The Government's attack on the trade unions can therefore be seen to have been based purely on ideology and on spite. Look at the check-off clauses, on which the Minister was in disarray last night and on which he continues to be in disarray today. The clauses will neither enhance the rights of individuals—no one wants them—nor improve the wealth and prosperity of the country.

Trade unions and their members never were and never will be this nation's industrial problem. Good trade unions working with Government and industry in close co-operation are an essential part of our industrial development. Rather than be treated as the Government's whipping boys, they should be recognised as part of the basic and essential engine of recovery.

Let us hope that, with the passing of the Bill, the dogma and ideology that have been the basis of all the anti-trade union legislation have finally been laid to rest so that trade unions and their members can once again be encouraged and given the tools to develop prosperity for this country. The Bill does not achieve that. It hinders the process. That is why we shall oppose it tonight.

6.57 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Employment (Mr. Michael Forsyth): I thank the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) for his kind tribute to me and to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary. I reciprocate by saying that the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Members for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), and for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) could not have behaved more courteously or constructively during our proceedings. I should also pay tribute to my hon. Friends who, by their eloquence, restrained me from making too many concessions during the passage of the Bill.

I hope that hon. Members will not be embarrassed by that tribute. The TUC was quoted in one of the national newspapers as saying that it had achieved more on this Bill than on all the others put together. I am sure that that is a result of the constructive approach taken by the Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen and their colleagues and by my hon. Friends.

Having paid his tribute, the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden ruined everything by complaining about the Bill. He said that the Bill does not do anything to help the long-term unemployed or about training or to meet the economic problems that we face. The plain fact is that we do not need legislation to tackle the economic problems of a recession. What we need is a Government committed to the policies that this Government endorse—low inflation, low interest rates and the control of public expenditure—and a Government who are prepared to act in the interests of individuals rather than a party that is clearly dominated by and in the pocket of the trade unions. That was clear from the proceedings on the Bill.

The hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden talked about pin money. He attributed that expression to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. My right hon. Friend has never implied that pin money was involved or said anything about it. The person who used the expression "pin money" rather shockingly was the chairman of the Equal Opportunities Commission. If the hon. Gentleman has a complaint about the expression, he should take it up with that commission.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras said that not a single argument that he put in Committee had been lost. I had the impression that he had not even found a single argument in Committee, much less lost one. He said that his vision was one in which everyone would have a job and be paid what their ambition should be. I find it astonishing—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) said that he did not say it, but I wrote it down because I was so surprised by what he said. He should look it up in the record. The socialist Utopia held out by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras is one which no socialist Government in the world have ever achieved, nor ever will achieve, because we know how it ends.

The hon. Gentleman spoke eloquently about his view of a minimum wage. The countries in the European Community that have embraced his ideas of a minimum wage are those with the highest levels of unemployment. Spain has announced unemployment of 20 per cent. That is hardly surprising, given its commitment to a minimum wage.

As the debate went on, the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras slithered and slid and changed his position. Finally, we found out the Labour party's position on wages councils. The wages councils have dominated the debates and they are supported by the hon. Gentleman. But he said that if the wages councils were abolished, a Labour Government would not bring them back. That is the Labour party's position.

Opposition Members will fight to the last ditch to stop the Government abolishing the councils. They are so committed to the councils that, if they are ever in government, they will not bring them back. What a shambles. Instead, the hon. Gentleman told the House that he would introduce a national minimum wage. As my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) said, a national minimum wage would destroy almost 2 million jobs in the United Kingdom. The hon. Gentleman sought as his authority his hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead.

Mr. Dobson: Who supports him?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman asked: Who supports him?

Mr. Dobson: The Minister can misrepresent me as much as he likes. My hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) supports the concept of a national minimum wage and the Minister should not say that he does not.

Mr. Forsyth: Having looked at the writing of the hon. Member for Birkenhead, it is clear that he said that a minimum wage will destroy jobs. Will the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras say that all the other references that were quoted in the debate and the trade union leaders who were quoted are all being misquoted as well? Everyone knows that, if one puts up the price of labour, one will get less of it. It is like any other commodity. It is absurd for the hon. Gentleman to deny it.

Independent research has shown that a national minimum wage, with differentials being maintained, would destroy 2 million jobs. The truth is that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras is so in hock to the trade unions that he would rather sign up to a minimum wage and put more people on the dole than address the problem of unemployment in the United Kingdom.

The hon. Gentleman adduced an argument that he used yesterday. Hon. Members who followed the proceedings yesterday will recall that the hon. Gentleman said that wages councils could not destroy jobs because, at a time when there is a recession, the number of jobs has increased in the wages council industries and that that shows that the effect of wages councils is not to destroy employment.

In 1987, there were 2·472 million people in the wages councils ambit. By 1992, that figure had increased to 2·56

[Mr. Forsyth]

million—an increase of 89,000 or 3·6 per cent. in that period. In the service industries generally, which the wages councils overwhelmingly cover, the increase was 1 million or 7 per cent. So in the service industries as a whole, employment increased by twice as much as in the wages council industries. We will hear no more of that argument which the hon. Gentleman has unwittingly used in support of the Government's position.

Mr. Thurnham: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Forsyth: My hon. Friend should allow me to continue because I know that colleagues are anxious to speed the legislation on its way.

I should like to deal with a matter that was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor). I share his lack of enthusiasm for the transfer of undertakings regulations. Those regulations implement an EC directive which was negotiated by the Labour party 16 years ago. Hon. Members present in the House who were not on the Committee may not be aware that the Labour Government believed that the acquired rights directive which they signed in 1977 would exclude the public sector. That does not say much for their claims about people in the public sector being defrauded by this Government.

The regulations that we introduced did no such thing. We limited the regulations to undertakings in the nature of a commercial venture. That did not exclude the public sector or privatisation, as the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras claimed. In Committee, my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General made it clear that the exclusion was narrow in scope. For example, it excludes only some charities that might be considered not commercial in nature. That exclusion is being removed by clause 26 of the Bill. It is not the case that people have been defrauded because of the minor and technical deficiency in the way in which the directive was implemented.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East asked whether the Government had resisted the Commission's attempt to enforce the directive. I have been told that, if this Government had been in office in 1977, we would never have adopted the directive in the first place. My hon. Friend is mistaken in the great significance that he attaches to the minor amendments to the regulations in clause 26. As I said, the terms of the directive are significant and we want to examine them under the principles of subsidiarity which are enshrined in article 3b of the Maastricht treaty. I suggest that the Clause 26 group should rename itself the acquired rights directive group. The amendments in clause 26 do not alter the impact of the directive.

Sir Teddy Taylor: While I accept that the Minister is a born fighter, I ask one simple question: has the European Community sent a letter asking the Government to make more changes which, in my opinion, will basically bust privatisation, as others have said? Why did the Minister not fight? Why did the Government not take them to court? I am not accusing the Minister; I am accusing those who made the decisions.

Mr. Forsyth: The answer to my hon. Friend's question is that the changes that arose from the infraction proceedings do not alter the meaning and scope of the directive in the way that he believes. While he may believe that the directive is having an adverse effect on competitive tendering, that is a matter which can be addressed only by changing the terms of the directive. For that reason, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will press, in line with the commitment that we have made to subsidiarity, for those matters to be determined in this place according to the interests of competitive tendering and other matters.

We have had a number of debates on the principles behind the Bill. Although the Labour party may vote against the Bill tonight, I hope that we shall see the same thing happening on this legislation as happened on other similar legislation. This Government rid the country of the tyranny of the closed shop and gave ordinary members the rights and protections that they rightly expected. As a result, trade union bosses must now attract members and listen to their views, rather than taking them for granted, as they did so often in the past. Our legislation has moved away from the confrontational, collective style of industrial relations to one in which employees are increasingly valued as individuals. Although the Opposition now say that they would support those changes, they voted against them at the time. No doubt they will vote against the Bill tonight, even though they know in their heart of hearts that most of the measures demand support and will be of benefit to their constituents. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 312, Noes 275.

Division No. 156] **[7.09 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ruclif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*

Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek

Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek *(B'p Auckland)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tipping, Paddy
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Alan Meale and
Mr. Jon Owen Jones.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Revenue Support Grant (Scotland)

7.22 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart): I beg to move,

> That the Revenue Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1993, dated 2nd February 1993, which was laid before this House on 4th February, be approved.

I understand that with this it will be convenient to discuss at the same time the following motion:

> That the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 1993, dated 2nd February 1993, which was laid before this House on 4th February, be approved.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The order is tabled in the name of the Secretary of State. I wonder why he is not here to move it and whether he is briefing the press, as he normally does, rather than bringing matters to our notice on the Floor of the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): The question of which Minister moves a motion is not a matter for the Chair and is therefore not a point of order.

Mr. Stewart: May I be allowed to continue the debate, which is normally introduced by the Minister responsible for local government finance? I appreciate that the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) has not been long in the House.

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is not true that such orders would normally be taken by the Minister responsible for local government finance. This is part of a pattern of disrespect for the House shown by the Secretary of State for Scotland, who ducks out of every confrontation with the Opposition, and we are sick of it.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. As I have had cause to tell the House before, the accuracy and traditions of who speak and what they say are not matters for the Chair.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Can you confirm that, under successive Governments, it has been in order for the appropriate Minister to reply to a debate in the House? The practice being followed today and on other days is no different from that of a previous Labour Government.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Stewart: I am grateful, Madam Deputy Speaker. Perhaps we may continue with the debate. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is here, so may we ask Opposition Members to stop making idiots of themselves?

This is the annual opportunity for the House to debate the settlement for Scottish local authorities for the year ahead. I begin by making it clear that both orders have been the subject of full consultation with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, which raised no detailed issues on either of them.

I shall deal first with the main order under debate, the Local Government Finance Order, which represents the final stage of the 1993-94 settlement, details of which my right hon. Friend announced to the House on 12 November.

My right hon. Friend said that aggregate external finance for next year had been set at £5,165·1 million, which represents an increase of 3·5 per cent. in total on the 1992-93 figure. Because of the announcement of an extra £15 million on 2 December, the COSLA briefing uses the original 3·2 per cent. figure, but the corrected figure is 3·5 per cent., after the adjustments for the transfer of responsibility for further education colleges from local to central Government from 1 April 1993, and excluding the £63·4 million that was included in the settlement to meet the cost of care in the community and independent living fund responsibilities, which Scottish local authorities will assume from 1 April.

The settlement is accordingly fair and reasonable, especially in the light of the continuing fall in the rate of inflation. As hon. Members will no doubt have read in the COSLA brief, the figure cannot be regarded as "unrealistic".

As the report to the order explains, aggregate external finance has three components.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): The Minister may intend to comment on this, but can he say how much the Government are allowing for non-collection of outstanding poll tax, and the result for local government finance; and also how much is included for the implementation of the council tax?

Mr. Stewart: We have certainly allowed for the implementation costs of the council tax, and have allowed more than the councils' estimates. I shall come to that later. To answer the hon. Gentleman's first question, aggregate external finance is related to local authority expenditure and not to non-collection.

I must explain to the hon. Gentleman and to the House how AEF is broken down. It has three components. The first is the provision for specific grants. For 1993-94, that provision is estimated at £397 million, and a breakdown of that estimate among the various specific grants is given in appendix B of the report.

The second component of AEF is what is described in the Local Government Finance Act 1992 as the

"distributable amount of non-domestic rate income",

which, for 1993-94, has been set at £1,186 million. That represents my right hon. Friend's estimate of the total business rates payable to local authorities next year. That estimate is based on the 1993-94 rate poundages that my right hon. Friend announced on 14 January. Those poundages take account of the reduction of £68 million in the total amount of rates payable by Scottish business next year, as the next stage of the Government's policy of harmonising rate poundages north and south of the border as quickly as resources allow.

Mr. Maxton: How long will it take?

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Gentleman knows that our objective is to bring rates into line in 1995 or shortly thereafter. I can reassure him by saying that, so far, Scottish businesses have saved the equivalent of £350 million a year as a result of the Government's policy. That is a substantial sum, which has been warmly welcomed throughout Scotland by businesses large and small.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): Am I right in assuming that the figure of £350 million that the Minister has just given includes the £68 million for the coming year? A letter from the Scottish Office gives a figure of £280 million up to the end of 1993. If the figure given by the Minister includes next year's amount, it may be misleading. I am sure that the Minister did not intend to mislead the House.

[Mr. Jimmy Hood]

I have received a complaint from Clydesdale district council about the arbitrary way in which the Secretary of State has decided that local authorities in Scotland will have to make a £12 million contribution to the Government's uniform business rate policy. Regardless of what the Minister says about consultation with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, I am assured that there has been no consultation on the UBR policy. The Government have taken arbitrary action and have told local authorities that, without being consulted on it, they will have to contribute £12 million to the Government's policy.

Mr. Stewart: The consultation to which I was referring was the formal consultation on the orders. Obviously, COSLA is frequently consulted. The hon. Gentleman is correct to say that we have consistently asked local authorities for a small contribution from efficiency gains to the policy of bringing rate burdens north and south of the border into line. The main reason, historically, for the rate burdens being different has been the high level of expenditure, and therefore local taxation, in Scotland compared to England.

Mr. Hood: The Minister referred to a "small contribution". Is he saying that 15 per cent. of the total cost of Government policy is a small contribution? I suggest that 15 per cent. is a high contribution.

Mr. Stewart: If one considers £12 million in relation to the total expenditure of Scottish local authorities, it becomes apparent that it is a small contribution.

The hon. Gentleman asked me for a detailed breakdown of the figures. The reduction in 1990-91 was £80 million, with, on top of that, £100 million in 1991-92, £100 million in 1992-93 and, as the hon. Gentleman rightly said, £68 million in 1993-94.

Next year, there will be a change in the way that non-domestic rate income is treated. Under the 1992 Act, non-domestic rate income is to be pooled in Scotland with effect from 1 April, following the pooling in England and Wales in 1990. Under the pooling arrangements, Scottish local authorities will continue to be responsible for levying business rates, but the rates income collected will be paid into a central pool and distributed to authorities as a per capita amount based on the resident population of each authority.

With the agreement of COSLA, non-domestic rate income will be distributed to regional and islands authorities only. That will simplify the administration of the pooling arrangements for both local authorities and the Scottish Office. District councils will no longer have to maintain non-domestic rate income accounts.

The effect of distributing NDRI to regions and islands only is that districts will receive their AEF support solely in the form of rate support grant and specific grants. Districts will obviously receive proportionately more RSG and regions proportionately less RSG than would otherwise be the case. But I must emphasise that no authority will lose in terms of its overall level of AEF as a result of the new method of distributing NDRI.

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): I understand the complications of comparing this year's aggregate external finance with last year's, because of changes such as community care and the funding of further education, but those factors should be common throughout different regions. Therefore, why is aggregate external finance down by 0·8 per cent. in the Lothian region and up by 2·8 per cent. in the Borders region? Is that to do with band D equivalent properties, or is there another explanation for the variations?

Mr. Stewart: The overall figure for AEF, after taking account of the factors to which the hon. Gentleman referred, is up by 3·5 per cent. If he looks at the table, he will find that, in relation to grant-aided expenditure, Lothian is the equalising authority because it has a lower GAE figure per head than other regions. That factor in turn affects the total. As it happens, Eastwood is the equalising authority among district authorities. That is why Eastwood has a zero figure.

Mr. Chisholm: Is the Minister saying that Lothian region is receiving less money because there are more properties in higher council tax bands? If he is, does that not cause a problem, given that we know that, although property is more expensive in Edinburgh, the people who live in those properties are not always better off?

Mr. Stewart: It is a two-stage process, which I shall explain for the benefit of the hon. Gentleman and, indeed, the House. The revenue support grant totals £3,582·1 million for 1993-94. There is a full explanation in the report, but I shall summarise it for the hon. Gentleman.

The first stage is to equalise differences in authorities' spending needs as determined by the client group methodology—which is where Midlothian is the equalising authority. That methodology is reviewed regularly and agreed with the convention in the district committee of the working party on local government finance. Each authority's relative spending need is reflected in its grant-aided expenditure assessment figure.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): The Minister is a much wiser man than the junior Agriculture Minister, and I am grateful to him for giving way. In the context of the calculation of the needs element, does he agree that districts such as Cumnock and Doon Valley are disadvantaged by it? Such districts contain a large number of rural communities, each with its own cemetery, sports centre and so on, so revenue costs are much greater than they are for city areas. Not enough account is taken of that.

Secondly, Cumnock and Doon Valley has very high unemployment—almost 20 per cent., and I would not be surprised if tomorrow's figures show that it exceeds 20 per cent. That is appalling, and because of the requirement to keep within Government guidelines, Cumnock and Doon Valley has had to keep its budget down and cannot appoint an economic development officer to help to bring new industry to the area.

Are not such areas seriously disadvantaged by the criteria that the Minister has just described?

Mr. Stewart: From time to time, we do receive complaints from authorities about the criteria, but those criteria are carefully assessed, not by the Scottish Office acting alone but with the expertise of COSLA's technical experts on the distribution committee. A range of primary and secondary indicators are used, and the sparsity of population in an area is certainly taken into account.

As for Cumnock and Doon Valley's budget, the council will, on my calculations, be able to increase its estimated budget by just under 2 per cent. this year without hitting the capping level.

Mr. Foulkes: That is precisely my point. Cumnock and Doon Valley desperately needs jobs. The Minister and the Secretary of State have visited it, and they know the priorities—of which an economic development officer was one. But because of the Secretary of State's guidelines, the council cannot appoint such a person. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that disadvantages the authority; and cannot something be done about it?

Mr. Stewart: It is open to Cumnock and Doon Valley, through COSLA, to go directly to the distribution committee and say that it does not believe that the factors in what is a highly technical calculation are entirely fair. That is how the authority should seek redress.

That is the first stage in the process. The second stage is straightforward, although it involves a change from the procedure adopted in the past few years. That is the point to which the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) referred. Before, the amount of AEF remaining after the equalisation of spending needs was distributed to authorities on a straight per capita basis related to the number of community charge payers in each authority. That meant that there was an equalisation of spending need and an equalisation of resources among authorities. If they all spent, therefore, at GAE level, they could all set the same level of community charge.

This principle of equalisation of resources continues to apply, but with the replacement of the community charge by the council tax with effect from 1 April, the second stage procedure has had to be changed. Instead of distributing the remainder of AEF on a per community charge payer basis, the amount involved is allocated to authorities in proportion to the number of council tax band D equivalent properties in each authority. That answers the question asked by the hon. Member for Leith.

The effect of this change is to swing AEF support away from high-value property areas to lower-value property areas, but the principle underlying the distribution remains the same as under the community charge. It is that, if all authorities spend at their GAE level, they should all be able to set the same level of council tax.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Can the Minister confirm that COSLA's briefing figure that Shetland's maximum budget increase for the forthcoming year is minus 37·4 per cent. is correct? How does he expect the local authority to start to deal with that?

When the Minister deals with the islands, will he explain the following? How will the new pooling arrangements for the business rate operate, given that these are circumstances in which our per capita distribution will not be high but large sums of business rates have been paid in the past because of the presence of our oil terminals?

Mr. Stewart: As the hon. Gentleman says, the rate for the islands council is the same as the English rate. The objective is to bring other business rates that are above the English level down to the English level. The hon. Gentleman's council is in a rather unusual situation.

The hon. Gentleman may also be interested to learn that we have introduced changes to the special islands needs allowance, following representations from the Western Isles council. I can confirm that we asked independent consultants to examine the way in which the special islands needs allowance was calculated, and we accepted their recommendations.

The provisional capping principles to which the hon. Gentleman referred are not dealt with in these orders, although the provisional principles announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State showed the need for substantial reductions in expenditure for Shetland. But my right hon. Friend has already said that he would be prepared to accept a standstill budget. The hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) will be aware that the same applies to Clydebank.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): How much assessment has the Scottish Office done of the loss of revenue from which many councils have suffered because of the huge number of company bankruptcies? We are extremely worried about that.

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that non-domestic rate income can vary considerably from original estimates: it can go up or down. That is covered in the Revenue Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1993. The purpose of that order is to redetermine the amount of RSG payable to each Scottish local authority for each of the years 1990-91 and 1991-92.

These redeterminations are necessary in the light of the so-called AEF guarantee—an agreement with COSLA to guarantee the combined non-domestic rate income and RSG figure notified to each authority at the time of the issue of the distribution proposals for the year in question. Such a guarantee is necessary because it is extremely difficult to calculate exact business rate income until such matters as valuations, appeals, empty properties and so on are dealt with. RSG can be increased or reduced in the light of experience. Adjustments have been made, and 45 authorities will receive more RSG and 20 will receive less as a consequence.

Next year's settlement is very fair and reasonable, and substantially above the rate of inflation. COSLA's original bid was made when inflation was considerably higher than it is today. The settlement is made against the background of the Government's policy on public sector increases, in the range of 0·5 per cent. to 1·5 per cent.

COSLA has said that the figures are not unrealistic, and with the scope that always exists for efficiency savings, there will be no need for cuts in services and jobs of the kind that are the subject of the scare stories that we hear every year. I commend this realistic settlement to the House.

7.50 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): I mean no disrespect to the Minister—to coin a phrase, I regard him as being a nice guy—but as an ex-president of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, and as an ex-vice president under George Sharp, I may say that if the Government had sent a less senior Minister than the Secretary of State for Scotland to meet COSLA, it would have asked for the Secretary of State. The House has the same right. I am greatly surprised that the Secretary of State is unable to be present for this important debate,

[Mr. Tom Clarke]

although he was courteous enough to write a note to me. I hope that the Secretary of State will be present for future debates.

This debate is about the Government's attack on Scotland—on our services and on our people. The measure unveiled by the Secretary of State is a betrayal of our children and their teachers, our elderly folk and their carers, and our public services—which have the support of the majority of the population of Scotland, no matter their means or how they vote. To suggest, as the Secretary of State did, that the settlement is either fair or adequate is not believed even by Tory councillors in Scotland, never mind anyone else.

In the 1980s, the Government cut the number of home helps, meals on wheels, teachers, libraries, and many other services that we Scots cherish, and the Secretary of State's announcement today means that cuts will continue into the 1990s. Doubtless that is welcome news to some of the right hon. Gentleman's hard-line colleagues, whose hatred of public services is on record—but almost every Scot will greet today's news with sadness and anger.

Mr. Bill Walker: I imagine that some of the hon. Gentleman's barbs are directed at people like myself. It is difficult to follow the hon. Gentleman's logic. At what point in the past 14 years has there been a reduction below the rate of inflation in public support for local government? Unless the hon. Gentleman can demonstrate one, he is misusing the word "cut".

Mr. Clarke: I hope to demonstrate that inflation is not itself a sufficient guide. Other elements, such as the obligations that the Government place on local councils, must be considered. We heard tonight, for example, that from April greater community care demands will be imposed on councils. The spectre of unemployment also makes demands on local councils, as do unpredictable problems such as flood damage. That ought to be recognised.

Mr. Hood: Got him!

Mr. Clarke: Even in education, we are making considerable progress.

The settlement is less than generous. COSLA's document indicates that it regards the settlement as penal —that is a strong word to use—and continues the Government attack on local democracy that we have seen for more than a decade, on crucial services, and on jobs —particularly on the eve of tomorrow's announcement, when we expect to hear that unemployment is a great deal worse.

Today's short debate is inadequate in terms of conducting Scottish affairs. This three-hour debate will end with a Division that will influence every individual, family and household in Scotland. That makes the case, if ever one needed to be made, for a Scottish Parliament, supported by the overwhelming majority of the Scottish people, that will have the right to consider such matters in detail and at length, with the representatives of each community involving themselves in the subsidiarity which the Scottish people endorse but which the Secretary of State has not yet recognised.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): If there were a Scottish assembly, would not that place a massive charge on the people of Scotland—and take cash away from the useful services that could and do need to be provided for the people of Scotland?

Mr. Clarke: The best people to decide that are the people of Scotland. They have made it plain that important, essential matters such as the settlement we are debating tonight, law and order, education, the fire service, roads, planning, infrastructure, employment, and promoting Scotland in Europe ought to be given far more consideration than a three-hour debate allows.

Mr. Gallie *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: No, I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman again. As time is so limited, it would be impertinent of me to keep other hon. Members from catching Mr. Deputy Speaker's eye, having made the point that we have been given too little time.

The order represents power for one man—a man who is unable to be with us this evening. I refer to the Secretary of State for Scotland. It would not be so bad if the right hon. Gentleman represented Scotland in the Cabinet, but he appears to represent the Cabinet in Scotland. That is as unacceptable as the figures in the settlement, which adds to the numerous problems heaped on local councils, without the Government paying any regard to the difficulties that local authorities must confront.

The poll tax was rejected by the people of Scotland but was still imposed upon them, and it cannot be properly collected. That is no way to run any local government service. Any consultations with local authority representatives should lead the Government to taking the same view.

At the end of December 1992, non-payment of the poll tax totalled £478 million—more than 17 per cent. of the sum billed in the first three years of the tax. How can one run a local government system when central Government have devised an approach to finance that leaves such huge amounts uncollected? That total is heading for £498 million—50 per cent. uncollected—in the coming year. How can local authorities fund the services that they want to provide, including the industrial development to which my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) referred when, because of the Government's absurd system, the revenue to do that is not there?

The fact is that the Government have spent millions upon millions on trying to bail themselves out of the results of the poll tax. What could the local authorities have done with that money? They could have spent it on libraries, education and the police, for instance. The Government's handling of local government finance has been a disaster—an administrative nightmare—not just for finance departments, but for every department in every council in Scotland. The Government, of course, will go on promising lower bills; even tonight we have heard a promise about the council tax which is yet to materialise. At the same time, the Government will continue to blame local authorities for the inevitably reduced delivery of services—at a huge cost to the people of Scotland.

This order is being presented against a backdrop of rising unemployment, and a Scottish economy that is much weaker than the Scottish people want it to be. It is a backdrop of more poverty in many parts of Scotland; a background of hopelessness and homelessness. All that the Government offer far too many of our people is the prospect of cardboard homes and cardboard hopes.

Inevitably, social work departments face greater demands, even before the community care changes mentioned by the Minister land on their laps in April. According to today's Scottish *Daily Record*, every hour of every day someone is given a P45. If that is true, it will inevitably lead to greater demands on the housing, education and social work departments of local councils. It is clear that those demands cannot be met within the constraints imposed by the Government.

Why is the Secretary of State setting such devastatingly harsh capping levels? It is plain that he did not secure the agreement of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. In 1992, he allowed the resultant budget above grant-aided expenditure to reach 6·5 per cent.; this year, he proposes a mere 2·25 per cent. He has been told that that represents only half the sum identified by councillors of every party everywhere in Scotland as the amount required even to maintain existing services, let alone deal with the numerous burdens newly imposed on them by the Government. Fairness seems to be absent from the Government's proposals, as the Scottish people are increasingly recognising.

Councils now have to address enormous problems in their planning departments as they seek to provide local people with the best possible education opportunities, and to deal with housing problems such as damp and condensation. They desperately want to deal with such problems, but they are being denied the necessary resources.

No one believes that the Secretary of State has preserved the Barnett formula. For every £100 that is being spent, we have lost £1·10. The cost for Scottish local authorities is becoming horrendous. Imagine what local authorities could have done to improve schools, housing, roads, lighting, libraries and so forth if we had maintained the principle of that formula. Those vital matters are not being addressed.

The Secretary of State and the Minister have boasted about consultation. We want concrete evidence that the Government are prepared to listen to what is said to them during those consultations.

Mr. Stewart: I am astonished that the hon. Gentleman should refer to the Goschen-Barnett formula in this context. Aggregate external finance per head of the Scottish population is no less than 47 per cent. higher than it is in England. If the Barnett formula were applied, Government support for local authorities in Scotland would be a great deal less than it is now, not more.

Mr. Clarke: The Minister, and the Government, will have to work hard to persuade COSLA of that. COSLA itself made the point that the Government are providing £16 million less than it asked for road projects, £14 million less than it asked for law and order and protective services, £5 million less than it asked for libraries and museums and £21 million less than it asked for leisure and recreation. Above all, the Government are providing £8 million less than it asked for the urban programme that is so vital now, when unemployment is growing. The Minister has a great deal of missionary work to do if he is to persuade local authorities that the change in the Barnett formula will not apply to them.

What options face local authorities in Scotland? They are some of the most difficult that councils have ever had to face. They are confronted by the possibility of eliminating some services altogether, cutting existing services and even making employees redundant. Lothian council's capping limit for 1993-94 was set at £588·386 million, against which expenditure now stands at £608·034 million: there is a gap of £19·648 million. That is the amount by which budgetary expenditure will have to be reduced if Lothian is to avoid capping.

Strathclyde is having to reduce its budgetary expenditure by over £20 million; Central region is having to find reductions of over £8 million; Fife region is £11·53 million short of the amount needed to maintain the provision of services, even at the current level, without anticipating the demands that will be made next year. Even in Edinburgh, the Secretary of State's case is so weak that the Tory councils have rejected his budget, because they were unable to find the £5 million that he ordered them to find without devastating services to a capital city.

Opposition Members speak with considerable support from all political quarters. Strathclyde's education department faces a proposed cut of some £10·74 million, which is bound to have a devastating effect on provision for schools in the form of teachers, books and materials. The Government will then criticise education establishments for the fact that children are under-achieving, but the blame lies with an Administration who have constantly underfunded education. In that and other respects, the past is catching up with them.

Mr. Graham: May I mention something that really upsets me? A young man in my constituency has an autistic kid, and cannot secure a school place for him because Strathclyde has not enough money to provide places for such children. The Government keep telling us that they are treating local authorities fairly, but they are treating young handicapped folk in a despicable fashion.

Mr. Clarke: As always, my hon. Friend has made his point extremely well.

It was this Government who, in the early 1980s, increased local government funding below the rate of inflation. I was involved in the negotiations that took place then. Let me say, with great respect to the Secretary of State that the Secretaries of State with whom we dealt then may have been a bit more heavyweight, and may have given a little more thought to the subject that he has managed.

The Government's past approach has forced councils to cut their funding. Now, the current Government are faced with the reality of what earlier Ministers have done. Those who were only five or six in the early 1980s but who are now 15 or 16 are paying the heavy cost of the Government's considered but unacceptable policies of that time.

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Gentleman referred to his time with COSLA. He will recall the 1977-78 settlement of the previous Labour Government, when he was vice president of COSLA. The president of COSLA said:

> "To have been told by the Secretary of State the percentage grant was being savagely cut by 4 per cent. was something none of us expected."

Mr. Clarke: I look forward to arranging a meeting between the Minister and Sir George Sharp, whom he has just quoted. The first thing that Sir George would tell the

[Mr. Clarke]

Minister is that if we received the same settlement for Fife tonight as we secured that night there would be joy indeed and, to coin a phrase, we would be asking the people of Scotland to rejoice. The Government's settlement falls far short of anything that Bruce Millan or Willie Ross achieved.

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): Is my hon. Friend aware that Strathclyde must cut £20 million from its budget? Is not the amount that has been allocated to Scottish local authorities a scandal given that the Government spent £16 million in a weekend on the European summit in Edinburgh?

Mr. Clarke: I do not know whether the Secretary of State will be here later to reply to my hon. Friend's point, but if he is it will be interesting indeed.

The order has been proposed, unlike the period when George Sharp was president of COSLA and I was vice president, at a time of deep recession. Public expenditure should be part of the infrastructure to deal with that serious problem. Proper investment should be made in education and training, in building homes and improving schools and in providing better roads and lighting. There should be a response to the problems within our community, and I am extremely concerned that after April councils will be expected to take up those problems—part of the social security budget, indeed, is being transferred to them—and to exercise the role of enabler rather than provider. But so great are the demands on social work and other departments, especially given the problems of the elderly and of demography, that local councils will not be able to provide the package for community care—home helps and contact with health boards to provide occupational therapy and physiotherapy, which are vital to a strategy for community care. It should be made quite clear that the problems facing councils at the moment, considerable though they are, will intensify because the order simply does not recognise those problems. The work of and demands on local authorities will increase, but their resources simply will not match.

How do the Government respond to people's concern about law and order, which is hardly reflected in the order? Their 1992 manifesto contained a commitment to legislate on offensive weapons but made no mention of water. Today, they are concentrating on privatisation but doing nothing to reassure the community about safety in the streets.

As we consider the order, albeit in a debate that is unacceptably limited, let us be clear that it is a direct attack on disabled people by forcing cuts in home helps and services and on our schools and education by underfunding our teachers. It fails all the people who are afraid to go out or stay in because the Secretary of State has not given the chief constables the resources that they need to tackle crime in virtually every region of Scotland. Today's announcement offers no hope for Scotland's homeless, for our children, for senior citizens or for those without jobs. Today, the Secretary of State had the opportunity to invest in Scotland's local services, in local people and in local communities. He had the chance to invest in Scotland, but his party has no vision, no policies and no support in Scotland. Scotland has no faith in his party or its discredited policies either.

8.15 pm

Mr. George Kynoch (Kincardine and Deeside): I listened to the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) and began to wonder whether we were discussing the same figures as I have before me. He stated that he was once vice president of COSLA. [HON. MEMBERS: "President."] I beg his pardon: president of COSLA.

The hon. Gentleman should therefore have read COSLA's briefing paper, which it has circulated to all hon. Members. The first paragraph says:

> "Having regard to the present rate of inflation, an overall increase in AEF of 3·2 per cent. (4·8 per cent. when Care in the Community funds are added), cannot be regarded as unrealistic",

Yet the hon. Gentleman said that the order is an attack on services in Scotland and, as usual, talked down good news for Scotland—a 3·2 per cent. increase when inflation is 1·7 per cent.

Mr. Chisholm: The crucial issue is not the level of aggregate external finance but the reductions that will have to be made in services because of the penal capping limits. Reductions in services have been proposed for more than half the local authorities in Scotland. Lothian is a classic example, where £20 million is being taken out of the budget. Last year, it was the second lowest spending council per head, not because it wanted to be but because of the inadequate level of support that it was receiving. That is the reality.

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman talks about capping. Some councils are obviously overspending. Had they spent more carefully in previous years, they would not be suffering from these problems.

Mr. Worthington: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kynoch: No, I am going to make progress and talk about expenditure.

Aggregate external finance is 3·2 per cent. COSLA states that expenditure of 2·25 per cent. is permitted within these figures. The Government talk about 2·6 per cent. By my simple arithmetic, if the Government's public expenditure constraints on wage increases of 0 to 1·5 per cent. are observed, overall costs can increase by 2·6 per cent. Wages in local government account for about 60 per cent. of expenditure. If that is true, the other 40 per cent. can incur rises of almost 4 per cent., at a time when inflation is 1·7 per cent., yet the Opposition talk about cuts. That may be simplistic, but simplistic ideas are often the best. If councils were to look simplistically at giving taxpayers value for money, they would give better services.

Mr. Hood: If everything is as rosy as the hon. Gentleman seems to believe, will he tell the House of any local authority in Scotland that is employing extra workers, rather than laying them off?

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman should consider my local authority of Kincardine and Deeside which, I believe, intends to increase its staff in the coming year. One could also consider Kincardine and Deeside in relation to another issue, although I do not wish to detain the House because I know that many hon. Members wish to speak. I refer to non-domestic rates.

I very much welcome the fact that we have made a further move towards the rate applicable south of the border. The figures in COSLA's briefing document show that in 1990-91, the percentage variation between Scotland and south of the border was about 64·6 per cent., but the projection for 1993-94 is only 26·4 per cent. That is clearly a move in the right direction.

Having been lobbied by numerous businesses in Scotland, and only yesterday by the chemical industry there, about concern over the introduction of the uniform business rate throughout the United Kingdom, I believe that the quicker we can make the move to get things level, the better it will be for business.

Let us consider the figures more closely and examine the variances, which average 26·4 per cent. It is interesting to note that Kincardine and Deeside is level with the average applicable south of the border. I believe that the same applies to Shetland and Orkney. Glasgow, however, is about 43·6 per cent. at variance with the rest of the United Kingdom. In fact, the central belt of Labour-dominated councils are all at the higher levels of variance. I suggest that there is a message in that.

Central belt councils, which are largely Labour dominated, must get their house in order and use the funds and opportunities that are being given to them this year wisely and sensibly in the best interests of the ratepayer and the local taxpayer.

8.21 pm

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): It is a strange irony that I am standing on the Floor of the House tonight. I recall sitting in the Gallery 13 years ago when I was leader of Stirling district council. The Government were using the draconian powers of the "excessive and unreasonable" clause to bring down Stirling district council's rate of expenditure nearer to the level that the Government found acceptable.

The Minister might reflect on the fact that after that exercise had been carried out, at the next election the electorate increased the Labour majority on Stirling district council. People in Scotland know what has been happening for the past 13 or 14 years. They know that the Government are intervening to give themselves a majority on every council in Scotland, regardless of the voting patterns and choices of the people. They are doing so in spite of the rhetoric about the people being given a choice and being allowed to assess their councils——

Mr. Gallie: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Connarty: No, I shall not give way. The hon. Gentleman's previous interventions have been appalling and I do not intend to accept one from him.

The Government then were underfunding local authorities, and that is what this order is about—the continued underfunding of local authorities. Throughout the 1980s, local authorities had problems because the Government were placing on them many additional duties, such as those to which my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) referred.

Benefits adminstration was shifted solely on to local authorities without proper recompense. Increased environmental health duties were placed on them without adequate funding. With the passing of the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982, the Secretary of State shifted the paraphernalia of unnecessary and unwanted bureaucracy on to local authorities. The conclusions of the Stodart report also placed extra burdens on local authorities for, among other things, tourism.

Every time the Government came up with their rate support grant settlement, as they are doing tonight, they said that they had provided adequate funds. They fiddled the figures and talked about their level of inflation and other levels of inflation, but they did not give adequate funding to local authorities.

In the coming year, local authorities, especially their social work departments, will face the massive burden imposed by community care. It is grossly underfunded. As yet, it is unclear what will happen in one important aspect of the transfer of responsibilities: what payments will have to be made to keep people in residential care? The cost will fall either on the local authorities, which tell me that they do not have the funding and that the revenue support grant does not provide adequate funding, or on the families.

Families might have to pick up the tab for the extra costs of keeping their loved ones in residential care where they are currently being well looked after. At the moment, some of the responsibility for the cost involved falls on the Government, but that will not be the case after the transfer of responsibilities.

Occupational therapy services, even in the region which takes in Kincardine and Deeside, cannot afford enough people to carry out a proper survey of a person's need, sometimes even within six months. For example, they cannot give people a shower because they do not have the physical resources. It has already been said that they cannot supply adequate home help care.

Such problems will continue because the revenue support grant settlement does not take into account the aging of the population. That portion of the population requires more care, but the Government are throwing those people out of the health service's care. I have been told by health board representatives that the welfare of elderly people is no longer regarded as being a health matter but is a social concern. If that is so, the Government should be transferring resources in the revenue support grant settlement to allow local authorities to look after those people properly and give them the social care that they deserve.

Education departments are straining to maintain their morale, and I commend them on remaining motivated. I do not know how they manage it, because they have been burdened with one idea after another. Some ideas have been good, such as the five to 14 proposals. The Minister will know of the burden that has been placed on local authorities by that initiative, but local authorities do not have the resources to make the changes required of them. Many other tasks that local education authorities are being asked to perform, such as testing, are diversions. They need funding to carry out the initiatives at the regional level, to continue to develop standard grades and to continue a commitment to nursery education.

It might be notable that, under the Clinton Administration, there is a proper commitment to the Head-Start programme. The lessons from the previous programme proved that giving a child a proper education as early as possible will bear fruit in the teenage years. Youngsters stay on in education, provide the skills that we need and go on to become the technicians who will develop our future. One hopes that they will be able to pay for the retirement of those who cannot salt away money in a decent private pension fund, as many hon. Members probably can, but rely on state benefits that come from the taxation borne by the new productive industries.

[Mr. Connarty]

In my region, the cracks are beginning to show. I know of two advisers in the education department who have recently returned to being head teachers in primary schools. They wanted to get out of the advisory service, making it clear that what they were being asked to do was necessary but impossible because of the resourcing and funding from the Government for the very initiatives in which the Government encouraged them to participate and to develop.

In district councils, where I spent 10 years, the staff used to have a vision of leisure and recreation providing an alternative for people who hung around the streets, selling drugs, getting into trouble and doing all the things about which the Government complain. That vision is now very dulled by the mud that has been thrown at it by the Government in many ways, one being a level of revenue support grant settlement which means that local authorities cannot provide the leisure development officers who are required to get young people into leisure centres and make them realise that there is an alternative to hanging about on the streets.

I began by saying that 13 years ago I was in the Gallery when the Government had to use the "excessive and unreasonable" clause to bring down local authorities' budgets. At that time, people could see what an authority stood for when it had a decent level of budget. They could also see what the Government stood for when they reduced each authority's spending with a single order.

Now, it is all done by sleight of hand. Capping is up the Minister's sleeve—he wears a soft glove but there is an iron hand underneath. Local authorities are not allowed to do what the Government said that they would allow them to do, which was to set their budgets, and say to the people, "Elect us if you want to elect us, and put us out if you don't like our budget." The Government have walked away from that promise despite their warm words about the poll tax: they said that everyone would pay and would be individually responsible for choosing the membership of the local authority that they wanted. However, the Government did not want people to choose, which is why they introduced rate capping before the rate support grant order.

The world is now a different place from what it was when Labour were in power. Page 49 of the latest "Scottish Economic Bulletin" shows that in 1980 unemployment in Scotland was 6 per cent. It has gone up and down since then, but has never been below 8 per cent., and the latest figure is 10 per cent. Everyone knows what massive problems that causes for people on social welfare. The lack of jobs causes demotivation among fathers and young people.

There are problems out there, but the Government are not willing to provide an adequate revenue support grant settlement. Let the people choose the level of local authority service and expenditure. The Government are guilty, in the eyes of the Scottish people, for not doing so, as are those, like the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch), who supported them. The expenditure of the hon. Gentleman's local authority is 35 per cent. below the guideline set by the Government. The hon. Gentleman should apologise for that, and the Government ought to apologise for this impoverishing revenue support grant settlement.

8.30 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): The hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) typifies the difference between the Opposition and the Government.

Mr. Connarty: The hon. Gentleman will recall that when I was the leader of a local authority we had occasion to engage in a debate in Perth. My recollection is that he told young people that they should be grateful for the scab YTS jobs that they were given in Gleneagles. So far as I know, the hon. Gentleman has not served in local government and does not know what it is like to work on the ground to provide people with services, rather than sit here and pontificate.

Mr. Walker: The hon. Gentleman seems to think that the only thing qualifying people to take part in a House of Commons debate on any subject—local government or otherwise—is to have done the job himself. I shall not forget that, as the hon. Gentleman is inclined to speak on many topics of which he has no experience at all.

Mr. Kynoch: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the qualifications entitling Members of Parliament to speak about local government is that Parliament provides its funds?

Mr. Walker: Yes, indeed. The hon. Gentleman and his friends believe that there is virtue in simply spending money. As has been demonstrated very clearly in Kincardine and Deeside, virtue lies in providing a service at the lowest possible cost to the taxpayer and those who make their 14 per cent. contribution—or whatever tiny proportion it will turn out to be.

I am rather sorry that the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) is not now in the Chamber. I do not say so critically, as we all require sustenance in a long day here. I simply want to say that I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman is back on the Opposition Front Bench, in combative form. I should have liked to be able to say so to his face, rather than in his absence. The hon. Gentleman, like many of his colleagues, has a very selective memory. Opposition Members forget the traumas of the last Labour Government—for example, the problems created by the IMF.

In addressing the problems that face Tayside, Perth and Kinross and Angus district, I remind the Minister of matters that I have put to him and to his ministerial colleagues. I refer to the storm and flood damage sustained in my constituency and in the neighbouring constituency of Perth and Kinross. This matter was referred to also by the hon. Member for Monklands, West. The Bellwin formula, while it is useful in most circumstances, is not the answer in every case. I believe that the River Tay is unique in that the volume of water and the speed at which it moves are greater than in any other river in Europe. The unique problems of the Tay require unique answers.

Mr. Foulkes: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. No doubt, he is keen to be helpful to me, as I arranged for him to reply for the Government in a debate last night.

The hon. Gentleman is making an eloquent plea—I heard him do likewise on the radio—for public funds for people suffering from a natural disaster in his own area. As the hon. Gentleman would expect, I support that stand, since it accords with my philosophy. But the argument that he is putting forward on behalf of his constituents is out of tune with his own philosophy. In his introduction he said that money does not solve these problems. He wants to cut expenditure. He wants people to stand on their own feet. Why does he think that his constituents who suffered in this way should not have been properly insured, that they should not take care of their own liabilities, that they should not stand on their own feet? Why are they special?

Mr. Walker: As always, the hon. Gentleman is being very selective. I defy him to suggest that I have ever said that public money ought not to be used to meet particular needs. This has been the basis of my whole political career, such as it is—and I was very grateful for the opportunity to make a winding-up speech. The plain fact is that the taxpayer is constantly called upon to contribute towards satisfying specific needs once they have been clearly identified. That does not mean some kind of blanket arrangement, which is why I deliberately used the word "unique" in reference to the Tay. If the Tay were in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, I should still think that the problems were unique.

Mr. Foulkes: In my constituency are the Rivers Doon, Stinchat and Girvan, all of which create problems. The Spey, too, is a very fast river, which creates difficulties. I believe that the hon. Gentleman is stretching a point. My hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) put forward a very good argument in respect of a whole range of services, including education and social work, and he referred to the new responsibilities that have been assumed by local authorities. I support the hon. Gentleman in putting forward arguments on behalf of his constituents. Surely he, in turn, ought to support the arguments put forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West.

Mr. Walker: Again, the hon. Gentleman has got it all wrong. We are already spending much more than he or his colleagues will acknowledge, but we are not getting the best possible value. Expenditure could be more constructive and more useful and could produce better results. As time is limited, I do not intend to go into detail on that matter.

The Tay requires a special detailed survey—something for which I have already made a plea. Such a project will cost money, but we hope that it will demonstrate how the river could be managed more effectively during periods of spate and flood. The hon. Gentleman seemed to imply that I expect the largesse to extend to everybody who is affected. That is certainly not the case.

However, the Perth and Kinross local authority has special problems. There has been difficulty in my constituency, and there has been substantial difficulty in the neighbouring constituency of Perth and Kinross. The question of the Bellwin formula must be looked at carefully. It is rather nonsensical that one bank of the River Tay qualifies for less-favoured area status, whereas the other bank, which is owned by the same person, does not. That makes a difference to the amount of public money that goes towards repairing the flood banks. The flood banks are there to protect people and property, not for the benefit of any individual.

Mr. Eric Clarke (Midlothian): We are talking about the expenditure of money. The hon. Gentleman wants one-off expenditure on a barrier to ensure that flooding will not occur again. That is common sense, and in that respect, I am with him 100 per cent. However, money spent on patching a road or a roof, rather than repairing it, is wasted. Local authorities are asking for resources to do a multitude of such things. The way that you look at it, public expenditure cuts are sacrosanct. Those are things that you——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order.

Mr. Clarke: I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker; I should have said, "the hon. Gentleman". The point is that we are on your side. We are with you on this one.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Clarke: I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I meant that we are with the hon. Member on this one.

Mr. Walker: I thank the hon. Gentleman, but I do not want there to be any confusion about the narrow case that I am making. The situation is unique and calls for a unique answer. I do not want my argument to be seen as a rubber stamp or a blanket authority for across-the-board expenditure.

I drew attention to the fact that the case required a single in-depth inquiry. I agree with the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke) about patching. One of the results of patching on the banks of the Tay and elsewhere, as we know from the experiences of 1990 and 1993, was that the river had its way. Anyone who understands the situation will realise that the water has to go somewhere. The problem has to be properly tackled. There is a great need for an in-depth inquiry if we are to find answers.

I can tell the Minister that if I lived in California instead of North Tayside my neighbours would be delighted to store all that water. They would find a use for it, because there is a dearth of water in California. Some areas of the United Kingdom have recently been declared drought free and, as I said in the Scottish Grand Committee in Edinburgh, when we were talking about what might happen to water authorities, there is plenty of water in North Tayside. If anyone wanted to go there with a bucket or a bowser he could take it away, and it would be free.

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): The hon. Gentleman has made a lucid and rational case for investment in the suggested study of the banks of the Tay. The Opposition support his efforts, but I must tell him that a far smaller number of houses in Park avenue, Paisley have experienced flooding over a number of years. The residents of those houses—I believe that there are about a dozen houses—have often had to move out, at substantial cost. I convened a meeting with all the authorities—the district council, the regional council and there was even someone from the Scottish Office—a year ago. Yet those residents are expecting their houses to be flooded again this winter. I shall support the fight of the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) for the people of Tayside if he will support me in my fight for the far smaller number of people in Paisley.

Mr. Walker: Let me make it clear that I am not talking about simple flooding, which occurs throughout the whole country when rivers rise above their normal level and flood properties, and when there is a backflow from the outflows, or whatever. Such problems must be addressed; I am not ducking the issue. I am talking about what happens when a river is flowing faster than any other river

[Mr. Walker]

and with a greater volume of water. The damage done by water moving at that speed is horrendous. Whole farms are wiped away; the topsoil is removed and when the river finally subsides, there is nothing left. That is quite different from the kind of flooding that occurs in many other areas.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Walker: Other hon. Members wish to speak. I have tried to let in as many hon. Members as I could, because I believe that that is often the only time that Opposition Members get the opportunity to raise their constituency problems. That is why I give way as often as I do.

I want a single body to have the authority to deal with the problems of the Tay sensibly and logically. I know that that will require specific funding and allocations. I hope that the Minister will tell me tonight that the Scottish Office is considering sympathetically my suggestion as a special one-off, unique case, which should be dealt with accordingly.

8.44 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): As in the past, the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) has expressed eloquently his case for special funding. I endorse his plea, but when he responded to interventions the hon. Gentleman failed to grasp the point of principle at issue. The facts of nature make the banks of the Tay and its banks the way they are, and that leads to damage to people's livelihoods, farms and well-being. In the same way, the ravages of age and disability, for example, mean that some people need home helps or sheltered workshops. Yet the hon. Member for Tayside, North seems to have a mental block about that kind of local government expenditure. He shakes his head, as if to say no, but he usually seems to approve of such expenditure cuts, which often mean that home helps are not being provided and sheltered workshops are not being built. Those issues inevitably arise in debates such as this.

The hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch) said that the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities said that 3·2 per cent. could not be regarded as unrealistic. I believe that the Minister said that the sum was somewhat larger. It was said that, with inflation at 1·7 per cent., that was reasonable. But we are talking about a level of grant that has to last throughout the forthcoming financial year. I do not think that the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside could put his hand on his heart and tell us that inflation will still be at 1·7 per cent. next February. According to the Bank of England report today, that would be an optimistic assumption; 3·5 per cent. might not look so rosy in 12 months' time.

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman obviously did not hear the rest of what I said. I said that, as wage increases represent 60 per cent. of local government costs, if they were restrained and ranged from nothing to 1·5 per cent., that would leave up to 4 per cent. or even more for other expenditure. That would take account of varying inflation over the coming year.

Mr. Wallace: It may even be optimistic to imagine that inflation will be 4 per cent. in 12 months' time. The hon. Gentleman leaned so heavily on COSLA's comments he should have regard to the fact that COSLA said that reductions in services were still likely as a result of the settlement. That is because we are talking not about a one-off arrangement but about a background of 14 years during which local government has been asked to cut expenditure.

The Minister said that he expected more efficiency savings, but there comes a time when one cannot save any more. There may be some items in the budget that can still be investigated; perhaps some functions can be performed more efficiently. But the Government have failed to recognise that there comes a time when there is no more fat left; they are eating into muscle. At that point services are threatened. Repairs and maintenance in schools are not carried out, and children have to learn in circumstances and surroundings that are not conducive to learning. In the past, I have tabled questions whose answers revealed the diminishing amounts spent in real terms on school books. When I was at school pupils had a book each. Now it is common practice for books to be shared, which makes homework difficult.

An increasing number of responsibilities have been placed on local authorities. The Minister responsible for industry and local government in Scotland is present, so perhaps he can tell us how many more responsibilities were placed on local government as a result of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. I do not dispute the fact that many of those responsibilities were appropriate, but so often the resources to implement the new responsibilities do not match the task.

There are particular concerns in my constituency. In Shetland the reduction in aggregate external finance this year will be 10·3 per cent., and that follows a reduction last year. Inevitably, that must mean that there will be either a significant hike in council tax, or other local government taxation, or a cut in services. The original brief for the special islands needs allowance contemplated the possibility that it might not continue, so the fact that it is to continue is welcome. We wish to acknowledge that fact, and put it on the record.

One issue involved the resources that the two local authorities in the isles had built up not only as a result of prudent management over the years but from oil-related income. I understand now that while local authorities cannot dip into special funds to meet expenditure, they can do so to defray council tax. People will ask why local authorities which have been prudent in the past, and which have managed to build up special funds, should be expected to use those funds because Government have not provided sufficient to them otherwise to meet their responsibilities.

The hon. Member for Monklands, West referred to non-payment of the community charge. I share the views of Conservative Members that those who went about encouraging people not to pay their community charge did considerable damage to local government in Scotland. Those who have to bear the cost of that through the subsequent increase in community charge are the honest, law-abiding citizens who pay their tax and those who suffer because of services not being provided.

Mr. Maxton: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. I never argued in favour of non-payment campaigns. But if the whole responsibility for non-payment of poll tax was placed on those who propagated that idea, it would be misleading. The tax was uncollectable from the start. The problems were built into the tax and it should never have been introduced.

Mr. Wallace: That was partly recognised because 100 per cent. collection was never expected. Various factors were involved. The mobility of people was much greater than anyone had imagined. Also, in some cases it was not a matter of "can pay, won't pay" but that people could not afford to pay the tax.

The Minister knows that I am a fair person and will take the rap if I am wrong, but I understand that if a person does not pay, for whatever reason, and if that person would have been entitled to a rebate, the Government do not pay the amount of the rebate to the local authority.

Mr. Foulkes: It is a double whammy.

Mr. Wallace: It is a double whammy, perhaps. The local authority is not getting the money from the individual; in addition, it is not getting the money which it would have got from central Government if the person had paid the tax. In the first nine months of this financial year almost £0·5 billion of community charge is unpaid. The Government contribution relevant to that could be a sizeable amount. Perhaps the Minister could indicate how much he estimates the Government have saved because people have not paid their poll tax. Local authorities would be interested in knowing the amount by which their resources would have been increased if the Government had paid their share. The Government could pay, but I think that they, too, are adopting the line of "can pay, won't pay".

The problem in local government finance is that, because of the gearing effect, almost 90 per cent. of council spending is determined by central Government. If a local authority wants to incur expenditure, the impact is proportionately very high on the council tax and, because of the capping powers of the Secretary of State, the amount of discretion afforded to local authorities has become less and less.

We believe in the system of local government finance based on a person's ability to pay. In that case there would be scope to increase the local base for raising revenue. If Ministers are sceptical about that, it comes ill from a party which at the last three general elections gave tax bribes to ensure that it would win. We believe in a simple proposition that may be too radical for the Government. Local government finance should be arranged in such a way that local authorities, elected by local people to make decisions in respect of the local community, should be accountable to the electorate for those decisions, including decisions on spending. That proposition is perhaps too radical for the Government, but it would enhance the quality of local authorities throughout Scotland.

8.54 pm

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): I wish to comment first on the remarks of the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), who refused my second intervention. I do not criticise him for that; he was good enough to allow me to intervene once.

The hon. Gentleman listed matters for which he thought a Scottish assembly should be responsible. Some Opposition Members have suggested that a Parliament would be more in line with their views, but I will comment on that later. The hon. Member for Monklands, West suggested that education, roads, social services and planning should fall within the remit of a Scottish assembly. Those services are all looked after by local authorities. The hon. Gentleman seemed to be offering devolution in reverse by passing to the centre responsibility for issues already catered for locally.

Mr. Foulkes: The hon. Gentleman shows a lamentable ignorance of the proposals. The proposals are for devolution of legislative powers for education, housing, local government and so on. The proposals are for devolution of the legal framework for those services, not their administration. Administration would remain, as at present, with local government. The hon. Gentleman shows a fundamental lack of understanding. He displays an ignorance which shows us why he does not understand anything about Scottish devolution.

Mr. Gallie: I am not sure what I am not supposed not to understand. Is it the policy for a Scottish convention? Is it the policy for a Scottish assembly? Is it the policy of the Labour party that I am supposed to know about? Is it the policy of the Liberals, or that of the Scottish National party? Each of those groups has different ideas. They are a hotch-potch; they are crazy ideas. The hon. Gentleman is trying to kid us if he makes out that there is some structure that we should all be aware of.

Mr. Foulkes *rose*——

Mr. Gallie: No, I am not giving way. The hon. Gentleman had his opportunity.

As the hon. Member for Monklands, West said, the vote at the last election suggested support for Scotland's place within the Union and support for an assembly. There are two interpretations of the consequences of that vote. The hon. Member suggested that 75 per cent. of the population voted for a Scottish assembly. My interpretation is that 78 per cent. of the population voted for Scotland's place within the United Kingdom. I strongly believe that the parties of the Union must take on board the fact that an assembly would be nothing more than a stepping stone to the break-up——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have listened patiently, but I have not heard much about local government. Will the hon. Gentleman please get back to that subject?

Mr. Gallie: I accept your ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I shall come back to the topic. I was simply trying to pick up points raised by the hon. Member for Monklands, West.

The hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) criticised Kincardine and Deeside for spending at below Government limits. Voters in Kincardine and Deeside elect local councils to do just that. They fully recognise that the community charge that they have to pay relates to council expenditure. Obviously they do not favour paying high community charges, so they elect councils that are financially responsible. Instead of criticising that council, hon. Members should commend it.

The hon. Member for Falkirk, East also suggested that Labour party policies served people especially well in Stirling district. My recollection—I stand to be corrected —is that Stirling district is now a Conservative-run council.

Mr. Maxton: It was decided on the toss of a coin.

Mr. Gallie: As it was when Labour ran the district.

The revenue support grant has three elements. The first is aggregate external financial support—RSG and business rates combined—which totals £5·165 billion. As the Minister suggested, the figure for Scotland is 47 per cent. higher than the equivalent figure for England. The total allowable expenditure for local authorities in the coming year is £5·8 billion. That means that the council tax has to make up the difference of £6·35 million, which is 11 per cent. of the total expenditure of local authorities. The Government have thus been very generous to the new council tax payers. I suggest that that is far fairer than the demand when the community charge was introduced. Payments then were based on a 14 per cent. contribution.

If some of the new ideas for the introduction of the council tax, which is about to descend on us, had been introduced with the community charge, we might not have had to make the change. [HON. MEMBERS: "Like what?"] Like what? We do not now demand 20 per cent. payments for those on benefit as we did for the community charge. The 20 per cent. banding payment has been removed for the new council tax. It was almost certainly a mistake to look for payments on a per head basis without tying payments to the point of abode and without looking for a collective payment from that door. Such lessons have been learnt only in retrospect, and I regret that.

In the coming months, many who will be asked to pay the council tax may regret the passing of the community charge. They have been the silent members of the community until now.

I have said that council tax payments will be 11 per cent. of total expenditure. I also see figures between £200 million and £250 million, which will almost certainly come from the rebate system, especially as the 20 per cent. banding will be removed. That means that only 7 per cent. of local authority funding will be paid directly by council tax payers.

Mr. Maxton: I accept what the hon. Gentleman is saying about council tax rebates. The real problem with the discounts for council tax payers is that that cost will not be borne by central Government: it will be borne by the other council tax payers in the area. There may be a fair number of second homes, which have a 50 per cent. discount, in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. That 50 per cent. discount will be paid for by the hon. Gentleman and his constituents, and not by central Government.

Mr. Gallie: I do not believe that there are many second homes in my constituency, so the problem does not really arise. I recognise, however, that, in many areas—especially in the constituency of the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson)—second homes were a problem when the community charge was introduced. Therein lay another problem with the implementation of that charge for local authority services.

Another problem arose because the Government were not prepared to cap local authority spending on the introduction of the charge. In effect, that meant that local authorities spent beyond reasonable levels and blamed the Government and the community charge for the high cost to the community charge payer. I am pleased to note that the Government have learnt that lesson in time for the introduction of the council tax.

Mr. Hood: It is a roof tax.

Mr. Gallie: A roof tax was something that was in the Opposition's minds. I hold no brief for property taxes, but I believe that the council tax is the best of such options, and I support it on that basis.

Let us look once again at the rate of revenue support grant in the current year. I must draw attention in particular to the added injection of the community care allowance—some £63·5 million. I welcome the community care ideal, as do most people in the community, but I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to take careful note of what I have to say. I understand that there may well be problems of ring fencing in Scotland, but it is important that the new cash injected finds its way into the community care programme. I seek my hon. Friend's words of comfort on that.

Mr. Chisholm: The hon. Gentleman speaks highly of the community care settlement. Does he realise that a study by Lothian region shows that, throughout Scotland this year, there will be a £9·5 million care gap between the amount of money given and the amount that will have to be paid for services? Does he further realise that, when all clients are covered by local councils, that care gap will widen to £63 million? A £9 million care gap would add £5 and a £63 million gap £40 to a band D council tax payer's bill. Surely the settlement is somewhat inadequate.

Mr. Gallie: The hon. Gentleman's comments do not surprise me, especially as they are based on the findings of Lothian regional council. In my experience, whatever aspect that body is considering, it always envisages a need for more money.

The allowances give a 3·2 per cent. increase across the board—above the rate of inflation—to local authorities. If one adds in the community care component, as my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch) suggested, that raises the level to 4·1 per cent.

One important issue seems to have been ignored in the documents, and that is the effect of falling interest rates. Will my hon. Friend the Minister address that point and advise me what benefits local authorities will achieve as a result of the fall in interest rates that we have experienced, especially in the past six months? I do not think that the papers take account of that fall, which I think will place extra money in the councils' coffers.

The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities document refers to the non-collection of the community charge. In that respect, I am pleased to identify myself with the words of the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), who referred to difficulties that were initially encouraged by Opposition Members when the community charge was imposed. People were encouraged not to pay, and inevitably the collection rate fell. The situation got worse. In the first year, there was a 12 per cent. non-collection rate, which fell to 18 per cent. in the second year and 20 per cent. in the current year. That is changing, because people are being pursued. I should like the Under-Secretary of State to give me some assurance that those who have deliberately avoided paying the community charge will be pursued until every last penny is paid into the coffers of the local authorities which are entitled to that cash.

I pay tribute to the council of the Western Isles. Last week, I was privileged to visit the Western Isles with the Select Committee. I was most impressed by the attitudes of the councillors. I expected to hear complaints and whining about the problems of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International, but I heard nothing but positive views. I understand the problems which the councillors face. I would ask the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) to return my good wishes to the councillors. I trust that they will do well in the coming year with the rate support grant.

I should like to refer to the new administration of the Kyle and Carrick district council. That council inherited an horrendous budget. The previous council had overspent, and the budget was totally out of control. The new council did not wait until the rate support grant announcements were made to take action; it tackled the issue from the day it was elected in May 1992. It has made good progress.

I believe that the Under-Secretary of State will have no worries at all in having to cap Kyle and Carrick district council. That would not have been the case if another party had been in control of the council.

Mr. McMaster: I remind the hon. Gentleman that two councils look after the people of Kyle and Carrick—Kyle and Carrick district council and Strathclyde district council. The hon. Gentleman is trying to convince us that the revenue support grant settlement is generous. Can he tell us what he will say after 1 April to the people in his constituency who will lose home helps as a result of the settlement?

Mr. Gallie: I would need to examine closely the budget of Strathclyde regional council. When I find that the regional council can spend £500,000 on a campaign against changes in the water structure, and when it publishes glossy magazines and information on 29 January —the date that the consultation period closes—I must examine the budget. There must be a lot of money in the coffers which the regional council can use to the better advantage of those who pay the community charge and will pay the council tax. At present, that includes people in Kyle and Carrick district but, hopefully, they will not be included in the not too distant future because they will have a single tier authority.

It does not matter what level of rate support grant the Secretary of State announces—Opposition Members will never be satisfied. They always look for increased expenditure. Tonight, it is local government; tomorrow, it will be health, social security, third-world aid or the arts. They will want to spend more. I am delighted with the settlement, and I compliment my hon. Friend for producing it.

9.14 pm

Mr. Eric Clarke (Midlothian): I had 16 years as a councillor on Midlothian county and regional councils. I fought against the then Secretary of State for Education, Baroness Thatcher, when she stole the half-pint of milk from children. That is going back a bit. More than that, I stood out against the Callaghan cuts, so I am consistent.

I am not standing here simply to talk about policy. I am interested because the decision which is taken today will affect the quality of life of thousands of people in Scotland. I am sure that everyone is interested in that. The sacrosanct idea of Conservative Members that public expenditure cuts are marvellous is irresponsible. The cuts do not save money: they cost money. The hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) wants to spend money to save the inconvenience of his constituents. I would support you in that. But there are many other ways throughout Scotland of doing exactly the same. The spin-off of that would be the creation of jobs. I am saying to you that civil engineering jobs——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must address the Chair.

Mr. Clarke: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I cannot get out of the habit of being reasonable and speaking proper English, but I shall try my best: bear with me.

The Government's short-sighted policy costs us all money eventually. There is a backlog of work needing to be done. Let the Minister just visit some of the schools that I used to visit years ago. He will see paint peeling off the walls and windows that need to be replaced, which could have been painted. It is the old saying about the tar on the ship—penn'orth of tar. Now roofs will have to be repaired rather than patched.

Mr. Gallie: The hon. Gentleman suggested that Conservative Members were responsible for the maintenance of schools. I suggest to him that the responsibility is with the local authorities. They had the cash to manage properly. The problem lies in the fact that they have not managed their affairs in a reasonable manner.

Mr. Clarke: When I was a councillor, we stood by an increase in the rates and people had the opportunity of voting us in or out. We had the autonomy. Now there is direct Government interference. There was no capping then. We stood every three years and were either elected or not elected. What was wrong with that? The expenditure was either frivolous or otherwise. I assure the hon. Gentleman that it was not normally frivolous. We prided ourselves on running our authority well. So do local councillors now.

The hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) said that local authorities had the cash and could do this and that. That is not so. There is direct interference from St. Andrew's house. That is why we want a Scottish Parliament. We want to take power away from the individuals in St. Andrew's house and give it to a democratic body.

One of the cruellest ironies is that, although buildings can be repaired and things put back, we cannot give back to children the proper education that has been taken from them.

Mr. Gallie *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Member for Ayr shakes his head. All I can say is that it might rattle now and again.

The position is a fact of life. It is serious because youngsters are being deprived of a proper education. The remedial aspect of education which my hon. Friends mentioned earlier is being damaged, and opportunities are being removed, from young handicapped individuals. Such things cannot be replaced later. Young people cannot be repaired as buildings, roads and so on can be repaired. I ask the Government to reconsider. I know that I am talking to the deaf. The people of Scotland are getting to the stage where they want and are willing to pay for a quality of life. "Public expenditure" seems to be a dirty phrase, but it could be used to give people back some employment.

Expenditure will be required for sewers, maintenance, barriers on the Tay or an injection of cash into my

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constituency of Midlothian. That work must be carried out, and this is the time to do it. The Government pride themselves on being business men, but if they were they would get the best tenders now while there is a dearth of work. That is common sense.

I hope that people are watching and listening to our arguments. I am not here to score points against anyone, because the situation is far too serious to be funny. My constituents' quality of life will be affected if we deprive local authorities of money, and I have repeated that fact because it is so important.

How many of us have seen homeless people turn up at our surgeries? What can we do for them? I am not a super-councillor but a Member of Parliament, and I refer them to the local authority, which has a list of homeless people, many of whom are unemployed builders who could build homes.

The problems that we all face every day are too numerous to mention. Are not our people entitled to the quality of life that they deserve? They are unemployed through no fault of their own. The Minister cannot say that we are a poor country—we are a very wealthy country, but the wealth happens to be in the hands of too few people. Opposition Members want that wealth to be in the hands of many people.

Mr. Chisholm: Since my hon. Friend and I represent constituencies in the Lothian region, does he agree that, although there is a general problem with finance, the region has a particular problem, as it receives less per head than any other region of Scotland—last year it was £708 per head, and it will be less this year? Does he also agree that the result of inadequate central Government funding is that Lothian services are not what they were when he was a councillor, when they were the best in Scotland? Expenditure per head is now the second worst, because the region is not getting enough from the Government.

Mr. Clarke: I agree. We seem to be being penalised for having had the audacity to vote Labour. One aspect of the problem is the way in which the formula is worked out by the Secretary of State for Scotland and others. The Government have never got over the shock that Edinburgh is Labour-controlled, and they have never forgiven us for it. The people of Edinburgh and the Lothians are suffering for that. That is my view, and the Government can respond to it, or not, but it is a fact of life and the only logical reason. Why is the formula different from anywhere else?

Mr. Wallace: Does not the hon. Gentleman accept that, in last year's district elections, far more people voted Conservative than Labour in Edinburgh? How does he square that circle?

Mr. Clarke: Edinburgh is still Labour-controlled. Sometimes people vote in a daft way when Governments penalise them and hit their pockets. That is what the Government tried to do on that occasion. They may be succeeding, but I am sure that they will not pull the wool over everyone's eyes, and that people will realise what is going on.

I am making a plea for all those people who are employed by local authorities and who are doing their best. Because of the balance of budgets, they do not know whether they will keep their jobs and the threat of redundancy hangs over every one of them. Many have worked for the authority for years and are very dedicated, working outwith the ordinary nine-to-five job. We depend on them.

Many other people wonder about their future quality of life and ask themselves whether it is worth staying in local government or whether they should move on. That is true of teachers, who are asking themselves whether it is worth it. We depend on a well-educated new generation, who have been looked after in properly maintained schools and other institutions, and we must give them confidence. Those cuts and clawbacks do not help local authorities or those who are unemployed.

Mr. Gallie *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Member for Ayr can keep shaking his head, but I know that what I am saying is right.

Mr. Gallie *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: No, I shall not give way as I shall be finishing my speech in a minute.

I hope that common sense prevails regardless of the fact that the Government believe that their policy of cutting public expenditure is sacrosanct.

Mr. Gallie *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: No, I shall not give way. I am going to sit down as I have finished my speech.

9.26 pm

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): We have just heard the genuine voice from the heart of Scottish local government. Among Opposition Members there is a tremendous depth of experience of and expertise on local government. I hope that the Minister is listening to what is being said. I can definitely identify with many of the issues raised. Having served in a local authority, I know of the expertise and dedication of the highly trained councillors and officials who work in local authorities. Those people supply a massive range of services daily throughout the length and breadth of Scotland.

It is an absolute shame, and almost criminal neglect by the Government, to fail to understand either what local authorities are doing or the true worth and position of those authorities in Scotland. I would rather see those local authorities given greater autonomy and the resources to carry out the services to the best of their ability. I have never seen a Government who have understood that and allowed local authorities to make their contribution to Scotland.

The revenue support grant order confirms the general trend in the Government's handling of local authorities over the past decade. Successive Governments have consistently hogtied local government with more statutory obligations, while refusing to provide adequate resources, powers and skills for genuine local authority action.

The Government's view is that local authorities are simply enabling organisations, with little or no ability to act independently. That is the sum total of Government policy, and shows the direction in which they have been heading over the past decade. Now, the Secretary of State wants to determine 89 per cent. of all the income that is available to local authorities for annual expenditure. If we ally that to the Government's capping proposals, we are left with democratically elected Scottish local authorities with virtually no discretion over service provision and absolutely no discretion to expand local services to meet local need.

One major problem is that local authorities know the need but are frustrated, as they do not have the ability to meet it. They have the expertise to do so, and central Government's job is to give local authorities the tools to allow them to provide services at the levels that they know are required locally.

During the past seven years, central Government financial domination has risen from 32 per cent. to 75 per cent. in my local authority. That pattern is repeated throughout the length and breadth of the country. That means that there is little or no scope for truly local action or discretion. Under the Government's clear centralisation policy, local authorities are gradually being reduced in status to the level of non-elected health boards. They are organisations that are given fixed budgets determined solely by central Government, who simply cut spending to suit their budget levels, irrespective of local need.

Mr. Gallie: The hon. Gentleman suggests that central Government have taken more and more control over the affairs of local authorities. I acknowledge that, if central Government cap local authorities, the hon. Gentleman's argument has some merit. However, the way that local authorities administer their affairs does not allow for central involvement. I asked my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to ensure that local authorities provided nursery education to reasonable levels; he said that it was a local authority matter, and that he could not intervene.

Mr. Welsh: Compulsory competitive tendering, capping and these orders all show that the hon. Gentleman's remarks are nonsense. We oppose the quangofication of Scottish local government tooth and nail. Local authorities which know local conditions should be allowed maximum autonomy to meet local need—because they understand it. Then it is up to the local electorate to decide whether they like or dislike the way in which these democratically elected local councillors have run the affairs of the local authority.

There can be no denying that the imposition of central Government legislation—a flood of it—has badly affected local authorities over the past decade. I want that trend reversed, to allow more decision-making power to be devolved to local authorities, allowing them to make decisions on behalf of their electorates and in the light of their needs.

Local authorities are an essential part of the democratic structure of society. They can and should offer people the right to participate democratically in local decisions affecting local communities. I do not want any more quangofication—I dislike the system that ensures that health boards, for instance, are packed with Tory placemen carrying out Government policy with no mandate to do so. We should encourage democracy in Scotland—precisely what the Government are not doing——

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): What on earth is "quangofication" in Gaelic?

Mr. Welsh: I could not say, but perhaps the hon. Gentleman can help us.

Under the Government's system, spending is unrelated to actual need and there is limited scope for local discretion. If it is to be meaningful, democratically elected local government must be able truly to reflect local wishes, priorities and needs. That requires an ability to raise and target funds according to the wishes of an electorate. Everything in these orders runs directly counter to local democracy. Central Government now fund and cap local authorities, and they are turning Scotland's local authorities into nothing more than local administrative units.

I do not want local authorities to become just enabling administrators. I want them to be service providers, understanding local needs and meeting them. If the Government complete their local administration ideas, the democratic system will be the loser. The SNP opposes Tory centralism and believes in maximum local authority autonomy and decision making.

I should like to ask Labour party Front-Bench spokesmen to make their views clear. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) seemed, in his Bournemouth speech, to set Labour on a course to chase south-east English voters—expressing the very Tory philosophy which sees local authorities as enablers, not as service-providing organisations. Does the Labour party see local authorities merely as enablers or as positive service providers?

Mr. Adam Ingram (East Kilbride): The hon. Gentleman talked about local authorities being able to raise funds to spend on local communities. How does he square that with the SNP campaign in favour of non-payment of the poll tax? There was still a need to ensure that funds were collected to meet the essential needs of the community.

Mr. Welsh: Had it not been for that campaign, we would still be stuck with the poll tax.

I repeat my question to Labour Front-Bench spokesmen. If they are to begin chasing south-east English votes, some of their fundamental policies may have to be ditched. If the Labour party will not clarify its position, all Labour Members' words in support of local authorities tonight—I agree with them—will be meaningless.

The SNP is absolutely sure of the importance of a democratic role and of independence for local authorities. I am sure that the electorate will want to know whether Labour has changed its views.

In conclusion, I should like to highlight the unfairness of the non-domestic rating system in Scotland. Scottish businesses and industries are still 11p in the pound adrift of their English counterparts in this respect. So much for extra taxation under a Scottish Parliament. We already have extra taxation, because of the situation that the Government have allowed to exist for decades.

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman said that Scotland was 11p worse off than England. Obviously he did not listen to my earlier remark that Kincardine and Deeside is exactly on the average that exists south of the border. It comes down to good management by good councils.

Mr. Welsh: The exception proves the rule, but the solution is in the Government's hands. They could create a level playing field for Scottish commerce and business now, but they are talking of some future date. May we have an assurance from the Government that Scottish business will enjoy a level playing field next year? Scotland

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will pay £312 million in extra costs in 1992-93. That means job losses and higher prices to Scottish consumers, which should not be allowed.

The hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch) is the first to say that Scotland would suffer extra taxation, but I do not hear him say very much about the extra taxation that it has suffered for decades and is suffering now.

Mr. Kynoch: Does the hon. Gentleman realise that the order gives extra funds in respect of non-domestic rates, so that the differential will be reduced? The Government are already moving very fast in that respect. The differential is now only 26 per cent.—and earlier, I asked the Government to speed up that process.

Mr. Welsh: The Minister spoke about the order producing savings, but not about actual costs—which are far greater as a result of the unfair rating burden, which exceed by far his so-called savings. I ask the Minister to achieve a level playing field. Business must be hindered and jobs lost by Strathclyde's 43·5 per cent. rates disadvantage. It is all very well speaking about Kincardine and Deeside, but I want that unfair burden to be removed from the whole of Scotland.

Mr. Connarty: Does the hon. Gentleman realise that Kincardine and Deeside expenditure is 35 per cent. below the guideline? That local authority spends 35 per cent. less than the Government think it should to provide a standard level of service. Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that Scotland should take a 35 per cent. cut to achieve the level cited by the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch)?

Mr. Welsh: I am not advocating any cut. If the hon. Gentleman will listen to the rest of my speech, he will learn that I am advocating that expenditure in Scotland should match the needs in Scotland. However, I take his point that Conservative-controlled Scottish local authorities, few though they may be in number, keep rates low by destroying services.

The answer is to improve services and to keep rates low. I commend to the House the actions of Angus district council, which always has the lowest rates in the whole Tayside region while massively increasing services—something that the Tories could never manage when they ran Angus. I believe in value for money, and I take the hon. Gentleman's point in that regard.

The increased tax burden on businesses in Scotland is the price paid for Scotland's outdated union with England.

Mr. Bill Walker: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm the value of the local authority's reserves when it changed from Conservative to Scottish National party control, and how they were used to keep rates low?

Mr. Welsh: The reserves were wiped out by the Tories trying to get themselves re-elected. The SNP in Angus district inherited zero reserves—that was the state of play. The Tories were absolutely disastrous at running local authorities. The Minister has a cheek pretending that value for money is always achieved by Conservative authorities. That was certainly not the case in Angus.

When the SNP took over, Angus had the fifth highest average rents in Scotland. Under SNP control, as the documents that we shall examine later show, it now has the second lowest average rents, with a massive increase in services and good value for rent payers.

The sooner that unfair business rates are wiped out the better.

Mr. Maxton: Will the hon. Gentleman allow me to intervene?

Mr. Welsh: No, I want to finish, because other hon. Members hope to catch your eye, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Maxton *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) said no.

Mr. Welsh: The hon. Gentleman can make his own speech.

This year, a £312 million bill will be imposed on Scottish business and employment—and that is too high a price to pay for an outdated Union. The sooner that Union is abolished, the better.

9.39 pm

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Having sat through every minute of this interesting debate, I am glad to have the opportunity of saying a few words. I spent nine happy years in Scottish local government, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke): we both served on Lothian regional council. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) on his excellent speech; I remember when he was a distinguished president of COSLA.

My hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian said that, when he and I worked in local government—Labour was then in office at Westminster—we did not get all that we wanted. Of course, under any Administration, local government does not receive everything that it requires. I can assure the House, however—from my COSLA experience, and, in particular, my experience as chairman of Lothian's education committee—that those were halcyon days compared with what we are now experiencing.

In those days, we were expanding community schools in Lothian, with the encouragement of the Labour Government. We were expanding nursery education. We saw the prospect of doing even more: I looked forward to taking over some of Edinburgh's private schools, for we were certainly working in that direction. We shall do so again, once we regain power at Westminster.

Mr. Stewart: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Foulkes: The Minister will be allowed to reply to the debate, if he behaves himself.

Over the past 14 years; local authorities have been squeezed, cut and capped. That has meant a major reduction in services to the most vulnerable members of society. The sons and daughters of Edinburgh's judges do not attend local authority schools; they attend private schools, so they are not worried. Our children, however, attend local authority schools, and experience the cuts. They know that books are not available as they used to be.

We also see the effect on employment. The Government really are astonishing: they stand back in amazement, saying, "My goodness, the level of unemployment is rising", as though that were nothing to do with them. In fact, the increase in joblessness—in industry as much as local government—is a direct result of the squeeze on expenditure that the Government have imposed. They say that they are as concerned about unemployment as Opposition Members, but theirs are crocodile tears. It is the Government who ensure that that employment comes about.

We have heard a good deal of special pleading today. I agreed with the special pleading of the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker); I hope that he will agree with mine, but I am not sure that he will. Earlier, I asked a question about Cumnock and Doon Valley, which I make no apology for repeating. The area needs special consideration, because of the high level of unemployment. Cumnock and Sanquhar travel-to-work area, for instance, has a higher unemployment level than any other travel-to-work area in Great Britain. As my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West pointed out, the area has a special need for employment creation and regeneration, but the work that it wants to do has been held back by the threat of capping. Moreover, it has now been forced to increase charges to private industry for dealing with such matters as trade waste. That extra burden is creating problems for the few industries that remain in Cumnock and Doon Valley.

The hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie), in a remarkable, indeed unbelievable, speech—actually, having got to know the hon. Gentleman, I did not find it so very unbelievable—spoke of all the needs of local government; or, rather, he said that local government had no needs. He said that local government had enough money, and even implied that it had too much.

Mr. Gallie: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Foulkes: I have not even said anything yet. I know that he is very sensitive, but he should wait until he is attacked before he tries to intervene.

The hon. Member for Ayr goes to Castlehill primary school in his constituency——

Mr. Ingram: He is too old for that.

Mr. Foulkes: He might go along from an educational point of view, but he goes from a constituency point of view and says that he supports its fight, but he does not support the regional council's demands for money for repairs. He says that Strathclyde council is profligate and that it spends money on other things. Of course it does. It spends money on police, fire prevention, water, sewerage and all the social services. Conservative Members demand those services, but they will not will the resources.

Mr. Gallie: The hon. Gentleman refers to Castlehill school in my constituency. My complaint about Strathclyde is that it has not planned a reasonable closure programme over a number of years. Originally, Strathclyde planned to rebuild Castlehill, but in January it suddenly decided to close it. That is atrocious management. That is the problem.

Mr. Foulkes: The hon. Gentleman fails to understand that Strathclyde does not have control of its revenue or capital budget. It is inhibited by Ministers failing to provide the capital and revenue. The hon. Gentleman stands up in his constituency and says that he does not agree with the Government and that he will protect the interests of his constituents, but comes here and goes through the Lobby——

Mr. Gallie: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It is wrong to say that I say all these things in my constituency. I should like evidence of it——

Madam Speaker: Order. That is a point of argument, not a point of order.

Mr. Foulkes: Sometimes we wonder whether the hon. Gentleman represents Ayr or Scottish Power.

There are many more arguments that I could deploy about community care, the aging population and so on, but I shall not do so because I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) will deal with them. What sickens me is the hypocritical attitude of Conservative Members who always want services but are not prepared to ensure that they are paid for. That brings discredit to politics. The people of Scotland have realised that and it will not be long before the people of the rest of the United Kingdom also do so.

9.47 pm

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): I congratulate the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) on one aspect of his speech, in which he acknowledged the special difficulties and problems of the Western Isles and the council's struggle to meet those difficulties. I acknowledge that the Government have taken those problems on board to some extent by reinforcing their commitment to the special islands needs allowance. Like the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), I welcome that repeated commitment and hope that it continues.

The special needs of the Western Isles are based on its special geographic character and its rural nature. The population is sparsely spread over a large area. That presents the council with particular problems in trying to meet the usual responsibilities and leads to additional costs. Although the Government have acknowledged that through the special islands allowance, there is still some way to go. The revenue support payments need to be reconsidered to ensure that all the islands' special characteristics are taken properly into account.

I mentioned the geographic distribution and sparsity of the islands' population. The Minister will be aware that those factors lead to special communication problems which in turn lead to additional costs with which the council must grapple. Since the Braer disaster, no one can be under any illusions about the desperate nature of the climatic conditions that the island communities have to face, especially during the winter. Once again, they lead to special difficulties with which the island authorities in the Western Isles and in Orkney and Shetland have to deal. Dealing with those problems also involves additional costs.

When the Western Isles council was formed, it inherited a particularly low service base but it has done remarkably well in building council houses and in developing the roads programme and the transport network in general, in building links with the smaller islands in the island chain and in generally developing the provision of services throughout the islands. Inevitably, that has led to high capital costs, and because much of the provision has been made recently, it has led to the need to service the resulting

[Mr. Calum Macdonald]

debt. That is another special factor affecting the Western Isles council which the Government must take into account.

I am grateful that the Government have accepted the recommendations of Touche Ross to maintain the special islands needs allowance. It is absolutely essential for the Western Isles and for the communities of Orkney and Shetland. I should be grateful if the Minister could say that he has a long-standing commitment to that allowance and that he recognises the recommendation of an independent report that it is a much needed supplement to the revenue that central Government otherwise provide to the islands authority. I am sure that such a commitment would also be welcomed by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland.

Finally, I shall deal with water and sewerage costs. For the Western Isles, such costs represent a great financial burden. As the Minister will know, the problem is that the costs are supposed to be self-financing. In addition, the money raised from individuals within the communities is not subject to any rebate. Therefore, in an area such as the Western Isles, which has high water rates and is expected to have even higher rates in the future, the poorest members of the community face the most crippling bills. Will the Minister seriously consider that issue? He may not be willing to countenance the prospect of providing additional resources for the islands' authorities to deal with their particular water and sewage costs, but will he accept the case for introducing into the water rate a rebate similar to that available under the council tax to the poorest members of the community? I look forward to his reply.

9.54 pm

Mr. Henry McLeish (Fife, Central): As is usual when we are dealing with such matters, this has been an interesting debate, and it has served to point up the differences between Opposition Members and Conservative Members. The Conservative Government believe in spending on local services; we believe in investing in the people for whom the services are provided. That is the essential difference.

The Government will not accept that these services are legitimately provided by local authorities and that they are an investment in the community, an investment in people. I am reminded of remarks that were made a few weeks ago by the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, who, in a blinding flash of characteristic honesty, indicated that he wanted to sell everything. If that served to entertain the members of the Scottish Grand Committee, it also showed ultimate contempt for services that reach out to every family and every community the length and breadth of Scotland. Many hon. Members have indicated a similar attitude today by speaking grudgingly about the quality of local government services. Conservative Members find it difficult to manifest empathy with or sympathy for quality service.

One characteristic of the debate has not yet been mentioned. Even if the Government wanted to spend more money on local government—and I do not believe that they do—the real issue would continue to be the public sector borrowing requirement of £50 billion towards which the Government are heading. Let us forget for a moment whether they care about local government. The real issue is the financial mess in which we find ourselves as a consequence of 14 years of economic failure and incompetence. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury said recently:

> "Over the course of the Parliament we shall be looking at the direction spending on every programme is taking and whether its purpose remains right for the 1990s. We shall be seeking to identify areas where better targeting can be achieved, or from which the public sector can withdraw completely."

Does not that show that we have a problem with the Conservatives? This settlement reflects the poverty of Conservative thinking, but it reflects also the deep anguish of Opposition Members, who believe that much deeper cuts will be foisted upon the people of Scotland in the next two to three years.

Another feature of the debate has been the central hypocrisy of the Government's argument. Let us remember that, despite record levels of unemployment and record manufacturing bankruptcies, the Government will not intervene. But what happens when they are let loose on a local authority that spends slightly more than its budget figure? We have rate capping, interference in education, and so on. The Government are determined to shape the social agenda, regardless of their commitment to the freedom of local authorities. It is indeed a central hypocrisy. How does the Minister square that attitude with the Government's total idleness in respect of the key issues of the economy—jobs, and so on?

As many of my hon. Friends have said, one of the reasons for the level of local authority expenditure is related to the economic collapse that we face. Tomorrow we shall see a rise in unemployment. I can tell the Minister that the figure in Scotland may rise by 9,000—2,500 people thrown on the scrap heap every week under this regime. That fact must be taken on board. It is not possible to continue to create such levels of unemployment without expecting the regional and district services to pick up the bill for the community initiatives that are necessary to help the unemployed. Does the Minister think that that is a reasonable proposition? Or does he want us to return to the attitude adopted in the early days of this century, when a distinction was drawn between the deserving poor and the undeserving poor? I believe firmly that the Scottish local authorities have done a magnificent job by picking up the pieces left by the Government in applying their disastrous policies.

The Government always miss the importance to Scotland of local authorities. We have heard that those authorities provide excellent services—flagship services, I would argue. They need not be compared with any private sector organisation. They are efficient, value-for-money bodies and, more important, they are accountable. Is not that the essence of democracy? Is not that another of the Government's central contradictions?

Even apart from services, one in six of the Scottish work force is employed by the regions and the districts—300,000 people. Let us imagine what would happen if this evening the Strangers Gallery were packed with people who worked in those services, and they heard the grudging Conservative concessions on the caring services—the police, the fire service, the community care services and investment in jobs and training, whereby young people are given training and an education. Those people would be appalled by the indifference which the Government continue to show and which, of course, is reflected in the settlement.

We have heard the Government say many times that the settlement is adequate, with pay rises below 1·5 per cent. and inflation—temporarily—at 1·7 per cent. We are all supposed to rejoice and hope that local authorities will be able to survive. But the reality is different from the Government's window dressing.

The council tax, which will be imposed in April, is likely to be £100 higher for every household in the country because of the Government's meanness and sleight of hand over the estimates that they first discussed publicly in the press. Will the Minister explain why the council tax bills will be so much higher, adding another burden for households at a time when we are hoping for a consumer-led recovery? What hypocrisy. The Minister must answer that question.

There was much about community care in the statement. Community care is more than an emotive issue. We all support it—health boards, local authorities and everyone in the House. The tragedy is that, in April, people who leave care or psychiatric hospitals will not have the resources to lead the independent lives and have the dignity that community care was set up to create. What about the lack of funding for community care? Sixty million pounds or so will not even start to measure up to the problems.

In England we see hospitals being emptied far too quickly and local authorities being underfunded to deal with the problem. We shall not tolerate any attempt by Scottish Office Ministers to replicate those problems in Scotland. I hope that when the Minister replies to the debate he will respond to that statement.

Capping has already been mentioned. We have exposed the central hypocrisy and the contradiction in the Government's philosophy—their selective interventions. Why can we not have genuine democracy that allows local authorities to be reasonable and responsible and to provide for the needs in their areas? The Government will have none of that. The settlement is about the sum to be given in revenue support, but it is also about the reason why the Government have taken draconian steps to impose punitive capping on local authorities. Why have they done that? The answer is simple. They abhor what local authorities do and they will not countenance increases in the levels of council tax that they are trying to impose. Of course, they care little for the quality of services and jobs that may be sacrificed.

I said earlier that we shall see tomorrow that unemployment has risen steeply. Is the Minister at all concerned about the crisis in jobs and services that will ensue? One of his close friends in local government—Councillor Charles Gray—is quoted in an article under the heading:

"Councils warn jobs may be casualty of spending cuts".

I am glad to see that the Minister is awake—although his response to my jibe was slow.

I ask the Minister how many jobs will be sacrificed as a result of the settlement. Will it be 10,000, 20,000 or 30,000? More importantly for the people who receive the services, what services will be cut? Will the Minister answer? Will he intervene now and tell us what the poverty of the settlement will mean for jobs and services? Those are crucial issues, which we take seriously. The Minister is an understanding fellow, but he must take those issues seriously. For many, services and jobs mean life and death and they depend on what the Minister does.

We have talked about Government philosophy in the settlement and about the wider aspects of community care. There is another appalling prospect behind the figures that have been announced. What will the Government do about crime? Why are three crimes committed every minute in Scotland? Local government provides excellent services. The police force in Scotland does an excellent job, but it is under-resourced. The Government have given up on crime. They have created record levels, so what do they do? They walk away. They blame the police. It is the scapegoat philosophy which permeates everything they do.

Crime is a cancer in Scottish society. More than 1 million crimes were committed in the last year for which we have figures. There has been a 20 per cent. increase in four years. What will the settlement do to put another policeman on the beat to ensure that people are safe in their houses and on the streets?

The local government settlement is also about the quality of life in our communities. Why were 100,000 Scots homeless last year? We have record homelessness and record crime. Yet the Government pretend that Opposition parties should be satisfied with the settlement. We are not satisfied, either with the amount or with the complacency of some of the comments that we have heard in the debate.

After 14 years of the selfishness and greed of the Government, masquerading as a caring Government, Britain must return to a position where individuals see their future through the community. That is the sensible way forward. If we needed a potent symbol of how the community works, it is the quality, efficiency and value for money provided by Scottish local authorities. That is community in action. It means children being allowed to have the education opportunities that they would never have under the regime which the Government would impose on them. It means people knowing that they can rely on decent services, including the fire service and consumer protection measures which the Tories would like to dismantle.

Can the Minister defend the settlement and promise Scots that they will continue to have the best local government in Europe? Can he guarantee that employment levels will be maintained? More importantly, will he give a commitment to defend the notion of community which has served us well and which is under serious threat?

The Labour party does not want any more contracting out, resulting in shabby services, second-rate facilities and mass unemployment. The challenge to the Minister is to put all that nonsense behind him and to give us a settlement of which we can be proud and which will defend jobs and protect services.

10.7 pm

Mr. Stewart: I do not want to make a personal criticism of the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke); one can safely leave that to his hon. Friends who do so at daily intervals in the Scottish press. However, he was somewhat ungracious about my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. My right hon. Friend explained to him in a note that he was occupied with forestry interests in his capacity as the United Kindom's forestry Minister.

Mr. Tom Clarke: I had not expected to intervene so soon. I said in my speech that I had received the note, but since the Minister raises the point, I must say that when I am Secretary of State for Scotland, if I am asked to be in the House for two important debates or to attend a dinner with the Forestry Commission, I will be here.

Mr. Stewart: I understand that the betting is that the hon. Gentleman will not be shadow Secretary of State for Scotland for long, never mind Secretary of State for Scotland in the future. It was interesting that the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) did not refer once in his winding-up speech to the speech by his hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West. Perhaps that was a bid for the Scottish leadership.

The speech by the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) had the great merit of stirring up Labour Members. He got them very worried when he referred to the most interesting speech in Bournemouth by the Leader of the Opposition. Unfortunately, that speech was obviously not communicated to Scottish Labour Members in good time. A number of points made by the hon. Member for Fife, Central were not in line with the new philosophy as spelt out by the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith).

As always, there were a number of constructive constituency points from Opposition Members, especially from the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald). I hope that I shall have time to respond to those points. If I cannot do so, I shall be happy to have a discussion with him afterwards.

The hon. Member for Fife, Central praised the excellent services of Scottish local authorities.

Mr. McLeish *indicated assent.*

Mr. Stewart: I see that the hon. Gentleman nods. He then said that those authorities had been massively underfunded over the past 14 years. He can hardly have it both ways. If the authorities are providing excellent services, they can hardly have been massively underfunded over a long period.

The hon. Member for Fife, Central asked about the reality. I shall tell Opposition Members what the reality is. The reality is that local authority expenditure per head of population in Scotland is 30 per cent. higher than it is in England and 30 per cent. higher than it is in Wales. Aggregate external finance—specific grants, business rates and revenue support grant—is 47 per cent. higher per head in Scotland than it is in England and 25 per cent. higher than it is in Wales, which is a similar country.

Let us hear no more nonsense from Opposition Members about the Government not giving adequate support to Scottish local government. The facts simply do not show that. In the past five years, there has been a real increase in central Government support to local authorities, after allowing for inflation.

Mr. Hood: Two weeks ago, the Minister received a letter from the Auchlochan Trust, a Christian charitable trust in my constituency. The trust pleaded for the Scottish Office to guarantee the money for providing community care for hundreds of geriatrics. The trust told the Minister that if it was not given that guarantee, it would have to throw elderly people out into the street and pay off some of its many workers. Has the Minister given that guarantee to the trust?

Mr. Stewart: The community care figures have been mentioned by a number of hon. Members. The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that individual decisions are for councils. I shall give him the overall figures for Government support for care in the community. The total figure for care in the community from 1 April is £63·4 million. Some £40·6 million will be transferred from the Department of Social Security, there will be £20 million in respect of additional costs incurred by local authorities next year, and there will be £2·8 million in recognition of the independent living fund successor arrangements.

I emphasise that the amount transferred exceeds the present level of relevant Department of Social Security spending in Scotland by £4 million. In addition, we have allocated more than £20 million to authorities in recognition of community care preparation costs. I entirely refute any claim that local authorities are being underfunded for community care responsibilities. The Government have taken the additional step of disregarding local authority expenditure on community care for capping purposes. That relates to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie).

Mr. Hood: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Stewart: I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman.

I can assure my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr that the resources will not be ring-fenced but will be spent in full by local authorities without their being required to consider the impact of capping. My hon. Friend the Member for Ayr rightly paid tribute to the achievements of Kyle and Carrick since the change in administration there. In emphasising the excellent record of his authority, my hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch) rightly said that, if the authorities in central Scotland held by the Labour party over the years had followed the policies of Kincardine and Deeside, we should not have the burden of extra business taxation to which the hon. Member for Angus, East referred.

I emphasise that the reason why we have that extra burden is that, fundamentally, local authority spending in Scotland has for a long time been higher than that in England and Wales.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Stewart: Hon. Members have also suggested that there have been great cuts in manpower in Scottish local authorities in recent years.

Mr. Wilson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Stewart: I should point out that, in each of the past five years, the number of people employed by local authorities in Scotland has increased. So much for all this talk of savage cuts and threats to jobs and services. The number of people employed——

Mr. Wilson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Stewart: The number of people employed——

Mr. Wilson: Will the Minister give way?

Madam Speaker: Order. The Minister is not giving way. The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) should not persist.

Mr. Stewart *rose*——

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): Will the Minister give way to me, then?

Mr. Stewart: No, but I finally give way to the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North.

Mr. Wilson: I am grateful to the Minister, who can be very helpful on occasion. He spoke in praise of small low-spending authorities. I draw his attention to the concern felt in parts of my constituency at reports of an attempt to incorporate Largs into a greater Eastwood. The Minister should be aware of the damage that such territorial ambitions do elsewhere in the world. Will he kindly take the opportunity to say that he has no such ambitions towards the people of my constituency?

Mr. Stewart: I do not think that, on this occasion, I should spell out the whole range of ambitions that the people of Eastwood have. I assure the hon. Gentleman that that particular suggestion did not come from anyone who lives in the Eastwood constituency—although my right hon. Friend and I will consider most carefully all the representations that we receive in relation to the reform of Scottish local government.

Hon. Members refer to cuts in manpower. There have not been cuts but increases in manpower. Hon. Members referred to cuts in Strathclyde: in fact, Strathclyde will have the scope to increase its budget next year by some £55 million—an increase of 2·9 per cent. By no means can that be described as a cut. The alleged cuts of which we hear from Opposition Members are cuts in unrealistic spending aspirations. They are not real cuts.

A number of hon. Members have made specific points. My hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) rightly referred to the problems of flooding that have been faced by his constituency and its local authorities. He asked for sympathetic consideration to be given to the representations, in particular with regard to capital allocations. My hon. Friend will not expect a commitment from me tonight but I can confirm that we will consider such representations most sympathetically.

The hon. Members for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) and for Western Isles raised the issue of the special islands needs allowance and asked me for an assurance that it will continue. I can confirm to both hon. Members that we have no plans to end the allowance, having just received a consultants' report. Inevitably, we will have to examine it once single-tier authorities are introduced on the mainland. I can give an assurance that the Government recognise the problems of the islands' authorities.

I can confirm that we have decided that the special funds to which the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland referred should not be taken into account in determining the distribution of the special islands needs allowance. That was recommended by the consultants, and we have accepted it.

Opposition Members allege that Lothian is unfairly treated. I remind them yet again that the special funds are distributed formally or by a distribution committee which consists of members from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities as well as the Scottish Office. Lothian has a lower number of assessed needs for several obvious reasons—the low proportion of people in education authority schools and it is relatively prosperous and small.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Stewart: I do not have the time: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman.

In the past five years, the level of Government support in real terms has increased for Scottish local authorities. The settlement is realistic and fair.

All that we have heard from Opposition Members are the usual allegations about cuts which are not real cuts and demands for much more money to be spent on everything in sight without any attempt to allocate costs or to indicate how the money will be provided. The Government are increasing the funds available to Scottish local authorities by 3·5 per cent. at a time when inflation is 1·7 per cent. and 60 per cent. of the costs are wages. As my hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside said, the settlement is fair and reasonable.

It being three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MADAM SPEAKER *proceeded to put forthwith the Question necessary to dispose of them, pursuant to order [12 February].*

The House divided: Ayes 303, Noes 251.

Division No. 157] [10.22 pm

AYES

Adley, Robert
Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward

Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Irvine Patnick.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David

Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jack Thompson and
Mr. John Spellar.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Revenue Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1993, dated 2nd February 1993, which was laid before this House on 4th February, be approved.

Resolved,

That the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 1993, dated 2nd February 1993, which was laid before this House on 4th February, be approved.—*[Mr. Stewart.]*

Housing Support Grant (Scotland)

10.34 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): I beg to move,

That the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1993, which was laid before this House on 21 January, be approved.

I propose to keep my opening remarks brief. This is the 15th annual housing support grant order laid before the House. Many hon. Members will have speeches to make on constituency issues. Hon. Members will remember that housing support grant is a deficit subsidy paid to local authorities that, on the basis of reasonable assumptions about income and expenditure, would otherwise be unable to meet the costs of council housing from their rental income. Full details of the grant settlement for the next financial year are set out in the order and the accompanying report.

As always, I express my thanks to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, with whom the grant settlement has been discussed. Although the convention has reservations about certain aspects of the settlement, I am grateful for the constructive and helpful approach which it takes in our annual discussions on these matters.

The draft order provides that the total grant payable next year will be £35·852 million. That sum represents the difference between the eligible expenditure and the relevant income of authorities that, in the absence of grant, would have a deficit on their housing revenue accounts.

Eligible expenditure consists mainly of loan charges and of management and maintenance spending. The loan charges that we estimate that authorities will have to meet in the next financial year are—as is usual—based on a projection of each authority's capital debt to the mid-point of the financial year, taking account of new borrowing and debt redemption. In order to calculate interest charges, we apply to those projections of capital debt the pool interest rate expected for local authority debt next year. Our present estimate of that rate is 9·3 per cent. Interest rates may fluctuate, however, and I assure the House that if there is a significant change in the estimate of the pool rate, the Government will—in line with the usual practice—bring forward an appropriate variation order to adjust the amount of grant payable. For the moment, our estimate of the total loan charges to be met from local authority housing revenue accounts in Scotland amounts to £487 million.

The other major item of eligible expenditure is that on management and maintenance of the housing stock. Our estimate of eligible management and maintenance spending in 1993-94 is based on an assumed average spending level of £605 per house—a 15 per cent. increase over the equivalent average for the current year. That provides evidence that the Government are prepared to meet their share of the cost of the improvement in management and maintenance services that will arise from the adoption of the tenants charter.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): How wide-ranging is the definition of hostel in paragraph 3(3)? Does it include women's refuges and, if so, will what the Minister has to say tonight enable those managing women's refuges to seek extra money to develop their services to meet the growing need for such hostel accommodation?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I agree that women's refuges are important. I shall make certain that the hon. Gentleman is given a full reply during the wind-up. My impression is that they are covered, but I shall make certain and come back to the hon. Gentleman on the matter.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): The Minister is describing what he says is a generous settlement for local authorities. If it is, could he explain why Kyle and Carrick district council, much praised by some Conservative Members earlier and now Conservative controlled, is raising rents for local authority tenants by an average £5 a week and in some cases by as much as £15 a week? That means that some tenants simply cannot pay—especially those whose wages are frozen or who have been limited to small increases. Does he agree with the council's action; or does he agree with me that it is disgraceful?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall deal with rents generally first——

Mr. Foulkes: No.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall come back to the hon. Gentleman in due course.

As for standard rents, the assumed average rent for 1993-94 is £30·32 per house per week. I stress that that is not a forecast of the actual average local authority rent for next year; nor is it a guideline or recommendation. It is the average rent which, for the purposes of the grant calculations, we consider that authorities should reasonably be expected to receive. The actual rents of authorities may be higher or lower, according to their own decisions about income and expenditure. I shall discuss the implications of the subsidy settlement for actual rents in a few moments, but the actual rent levels are a matter for the district councils to decide——

Mr. Foulkes *rose*——

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I should draw the attention of the House to certain changes in the way in which the grant for next year has been calculated. Hon. Members should appreciate that, although the broad lines of the methodology of the grant system are by now well established, there is a continuing evolution of the system at the margin. For instance, the grant settlement for next year reflects——

Mr. Foulkes *rose*—

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman should allow me to follow this through; he needs to see the whole subject in perspective. I know that he feels strongly about his local council.

The settlement for next year reflects a different method of assessing whether grant entitlements should be adjusted to reflect overpayments or underpayments in earlier years. The former arrangements involved the use of penny rate products to establish whether the difference between an authority's loan charges as estimated for the earlier grant year and actual loan charges was substantial enough to warrant an adjustment. With the agreement of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the use of penny rate products has been abandoned in favour of a rent product of 70p per house per week as a threshold to determine whether an adjustment is necessary.

We have also responded to the convention's representations about the way in which we estimate the amounts or rents lost as a result of vacant houses. In particular, we have taken account of the numbers of houses held empty and not available for letting. Estimated rents lost for authorities with a high proportion of houses held empty for this reason have been based on 3 per cent. of assumed rental income, compared with 2 per cent. for other authorities. Again, COSLA has welcomed this change.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): I accept that, but if a local authority decides to redevelop a large number of its council houses, as Glasgow has done in Castlemilk with the full co-operation of the Government, is it not absurd that it then loses housing support grant because the houses are standing empty and thus making no rental income?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The change has been welcomed by COSLA and it takes into account precisely the point that the hon. Gentleman makes. The figure is based, for authorities with a high proportion of housing held empty, on 3 per cent. of assumed rental income. That is a move in the direction that the hon. Gentleman wants.

I should also mention the hostels portion of housing support grant. Since we took the decision two years ago to extend hostels grant to all authorities with hostels, rather than limiting hostels grant to authorities that qualified on the basis of their housing revenue accounts as a whole, there has been a welcome increase in the number of hostel places made available by local authorities, from 1,796 in 1990 to 1,956 in 1992. The Government's decision to make available additional capital allocations specifically aimed at relieving homelessness means that the number of hostel places will continue to grow over the next year.

I recognise that hostels are far from the complete answer to homelessness, but they make a signification contribution to dealing with the single homeless. Following consultation with COSLA, a maximum cost per hostel place will be introduced next year. It has been set at a generous level. For each authority, it is three times the average net cost per hostel place for local authority hostels as a whole—multiplied by the number of hostel places provided by the authority.

The hostels portion of grant next year will amount to more than £1·6 million, shared among 18 authorities.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Will the Minister give an assurance that the Asian women's refuge in my constituency will not close? I understand that it is threatened, and many people are anxious to ensure that that facility remains open. Can the Minister give that categorical assurance, so that the Asian folk in Strathclyde can rest in peace?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I should like to know more about that. That is almost certainly a local authority decision. If that hostel has been given assistance by urban aid or other Scottish Office sources I shall be happy to make inquiries and will reply to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Falkirk district council is listed among the minority of local authorities that receive a portion of housing support grant for hostels, but no figure is given. How much will Falkirk district council receive? Also, why do only a minority of housing authorities in Scotland qualify for general or hostel housing support grant? When the system was introduced by a Labour Government, virtually every housing authority in Scotland qualified. In terms of general housing support grant, Falkirk has not received a single penny from this rotten Government for more than a decade.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Housing support grant is a deficit subsidy. The hon. Gentleman asks why some authorities are not included. The size of the potential deficit determines grant entitlement. Some authorities have a relatively small deficit, so even small changes in estimated income or expenditure may have a large impact on their deficit. Other authorities have a potentially large deficit.

If I had to give a simplistic example, I would say that authorities that built a large volume of housing in relatively recent years may find that they have much larger loan charges, and therefore are much more likely to qualify for housing support grant than authorities with older housing stock.

Changes in estimated expenditure or income have only a marginal effect on the potential deficit and, therefore, on the grant entitlement. As to the hostel portion, I will answer the hon. Gentleman when I wind up and have the figures to hand.

Dr. Godman *rose*——

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I will also answer the hon. Gentleman's question about hostels, in relation to women's refuges in his constituency.

Dr. Godman *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot just stand up like that when the Minister is at the Dispatch Box. He can ask the Minister to give way, but if the Minister chooses not to do so, the hon. Gentleman must accept that.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman is very persistent. I will give way to him now, but I have quite a bit to say, and I want to hear all the constituency speeches that other hon. Members may wish to make.

Dr. Godman: I thank the Minister for giving way with characteristic courtesy—the kind of courtesy which I like to extend to him.

Hostels are an important issue, especially in view of the implications of care in the community. Many people will be released into the community, and some will be staying in hostels. Where does Inverclyde come in, and what funds will the district council receive for providing hostel accommodation for those covered by the community care provisions?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The final allocations for housing must be made available in March. We are giving high priority to community care, in regard to the funding of both local authorities and Scottish Homes. The hon. Gentleman can be certain that we shall be very specific about that when we make the final allocations.

The hon. Gentleman asked for a definition of hostels. Women's refuge hostels are usually owned by voluntary organisations; because they are not owned by local authorities, they do not qualify for housing support grant, which, in accordance with statute, is restricted to houses and hostels owned by the authorities themselves. Financial

[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton]

assistance from local authorities for women's refuges is usually provided under the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968. That assistance is subsidised through the aggregate external finance settlement discussed earlier this evening.

The hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) asked about the hostels proportion in Falkirk. I understand that it is £154,770 in 1993-94, compared with the lesser figure of £123,120 in 1992-93. The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) asked about rents. I repeat that that is entirely a matter for the council: Kyle and Carrick's rent was only £20.46 per house per week in 1992-93, well below the Scottish average of £24.75.

Mr. Foulkes *rose*——

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman can make his own case in his own way if he catches the eye of the Chair.

General fund contributions represent a subsidy from council tax payers to council house tenants. This kind of subsidy is indiscriminate, in that it benefits all tenants regardless of their personal circumstances; and it is unnecessary, to the extent that tenants who are unable to meet the costs of their housing receive assistance in the form of housing benefit. I make no apology for our proposals in the General Fund Contribution Limits (Scotland) Order 1993 to bar authorities from budgeting to make general fund contributions next year. Local authorities have been consulted individually about the proposals, and only 11 of them saw fit to make representations on the matter. I have examined those representations carefully and have concluded that none of the authorities concerned requires to increase rents by an amount that would justify a subsidy from the council tax payer.

The effect of the subsidy proposals on local authority rent levels will vary. As I said earlier, decisions on rents are for local authorities to make. The majority of authorities do not receive housing support grant in respect of their council housing; nor do they make general fund contributions. The rent decisions of those authorities are obviously unaffected by changes in the overall level of subsidy. Even in the case of authorities that receive or make subsidy, changes in the level of that subsidy from year to year are usually less important for local rent decisions than changes in levels of expenditure, particularly expenditure on loan charges.

Because of the general reductions in interest rates during the current financial year, loan charges next year are expected to be lower than this year's. As a result, the majority of local authorities should be able to make real improvements in the level of management and maintenance services with which they provide their tenants, with relatively modest rent increases.

Mr. Foulkes *rose*——

Lord James Douglas Hamilton: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman one last time.

Mr. Foulkes: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He is a very helpful Minister, which is why I want to ask him what advice I should give my constituents, who are being by required Tory-controlled Kyle and Carrick district council to pay £15 a week more than last year. Where do they find the money when their wages are frozen?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: If I were in the hon. Gentleman's place, I would find out exactly what the council intended to deliver for tenants in its housing programme. If that involves major schemes of modernisation and improvements in management and maintenance, that should be taken into account. The council must decide what levels of rent to fix.

When I met COSLA last month——

Mr. Maxton: Before the Minister moves off rents——

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have not moved off rents; I am just finishing the point.

When I met COSLA, I predicted that rents would increase by about 7 per cent. overall, but that predication now seems to be on the high side, as Edinburgh and Glasgow are considering increases of 6 per cent. or less. The proposals being considered tonight constitute a fair and reasonable subsidies package that balances the interests of the tenant, the council taxpayer and the national taxpayer, and I strongly commend the order to the House.

10.55 pm

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Listening to the Minister, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you would never think that thousands of Scottish houses are unfit to live in, that children in bed-and-breakfast accommodation are more likely than others to suffer from ill health, and that, among these children, gastro-enteritis and chest infections are normal. Listening to him, you would not think that people with disabilities wait years for suitably adapted housing, that overcrowded families cannot be housed because the council does not have the right size of housing for their needs or that single men and women can wait years just to get a small flat. As my hon. Friends have pointed out, nor would you think that refuges for women who are in danger and in need of that accommodation are so terribly lacking compared with the level of need.

On 18 January, the Minister proclaimed that it was the Government's long-term aim to reduce "indiscriminate" grants such as housing grant, and that subsidies should be more personalised, such as housing benefit. This year, housing support grant will fall from £47·5 million to £36 million—three quarters of this year's housing support grant. That is what the Minister calls an adequate and suitable settlement. At this rate of reduction, it will not be long before it ends altogether. But housing benefit does not make up the shortfall in money needed to take care of housing stock; it is part of the social security system. It does nothing for the fabric of buildings.

Far from making up lost income to carry out improvements, the Minister is presiding over a total cash reduction of more than £56 million. Housing support grant has been chopped by £11·6 million and the general fund contribution, which he mentioned earlier and which at present is a mere £1·5 million, is to be reduced to zero. Does he realise that not only owner-occupiers but tenants pay the council tax? Gross capital consents are to be reduced by £43 million.

The Minister drew attention to an extra £5 million in consents for community care. Would it not be more caring if he provided hard cash? When we take inflation into account, the council tenant might reasonably expect the total to rise slightly, instead of which there is a reduction in real terms of 15 per cent., or £70 million.

In the past decade, by such methods, more than £1,500 million of direct Government support has been denied to Scottish local authority houses. That money could have treated damp walls, replaced roofs and dangerous wiring and preserved pride in communities where houses have not seen a lick of paint in donkey's years and where tenants feel that their area is getting less desirable with every year that passes.

Gross capital consents—permission to incur capital expenditure—have been reduced by a further 10 per cent. Even the limit imposed of £385 million depends on no less than £251 million—65 per cent.—being raised by selling council houses. If district councils cannot hit that preposterous target, the Minister will not recognise reality and permit further borrowing.

Does he seriously believe that that level of sales can be achieved when, daily, people are being thrown out of work and fear being thrown on the scrap heap? It is particularly galling that so many jobs have been lost in the construction industry. Between 1991 and 1992, 1,036 construction jobs were lost to Scottish local authorities. There is work to be done, and the skills are there, but the Government do not want to know.

It need not be like that. There have been crash programmes of home building under Labour Housing Ministers, and even pre-Thatcherite Tories did better than this lot. As recently as 1981, the Scottish housing authorities built 7,000 houses for rent, but 10 years later, in 1991, the total had dropped to a mere 1,546. It takes a sort of perverse genius to cut the number of houses being built and, at the same time, to raise rents, which pay off housing debt, to such an extent as the Government have done.

In 1979, the average council house rent was £4·92 a week. Under this Government, it has risen to £24·75 a week, and the reduction in housing support grant is based on the assumption that rents will rise to an average of £30·32 a week, as the Minister said. Of course, some will be higher and some will be lower—that is what an average means.

The tenants are not getting better housing for their money—it is being used to pay debts. A few people apparently believe, or would have us believe, that there is a simple solution for councillors, and that only a want of political will and principle prevents them from carrying it out. The slogan is, "Don't pay the debts; force the Government to come to the rescue." How odd it is that Trotskyites have more faith in the humanitarian response of the Tories than any of my colleagues. But if, while we are waiting for the miracle, anyone knows a lender who does not mind his loans not being repaid, will he quickly tell the rest of us?

We cannot expect humanity from the Government, but can we at least attempt to reason with them? They know, because their policies dictate it, that rents have been rising at well above the rate of inflation. Tenants' rents are bearing a far heavier share of the payment of loan debts. In fact, the debts are now almost exclusively funded from rents. That being the case, why does the Minister not remove the barriers to borrowing and let councils decide independently how much they want to borrow for capital projects? The Exchequer is not paying much and intends to pay less, and the Government will not allow any contribution from the council tax. It is the tenants who are paying.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): If the Government were to give greater capital consent, since many councils do not receive housing support grant to supplement their financial support for housing, would it not make the situation worse for tenants?

Mrs. Fyfe: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will explain later why getting further permission to borrow to build houses will make matters worse. I shall be interested to hear what he has to say.

I also wonder why the Government will not respond to council appeals to write off loan debt. Let us take Glasgow as an example. If the city's debt were written off, its housing officials say that it would have had £119 million to spend immediately, without incurring any debts. Public companies that have been privatised have had millions of pounds of outstanding loan debts redeemed. It is a political decision to give to one but not the other. That means that there is champagne on ice in the boardroom but cold and damp in many a council house bedroom. If the Government will consider write-off when the value of the asset is less than the outstanding debt, why in the name of logic do they not redeem the debt on houses that councils are demolishing?

Let us consider the picture in Scotland today. More than 100,000 dwellings are below the tolerable standard, and the single most common reason is dampness. At the current level of funding, it will be well past the year 2000 before we even catch up on those presently affected.

Homelessness has reached a record level, topping last year's and the year before's, of 37,519 families.

Everyone knows that inadequate housing creates health problems. Shelter estimates that the health of 120,000 Scottish children is in severe danger owing to the fact that they live in damp and dangerous housing. These views are backed up by Glasgow's director of public health, who has recently written a hard-hitting report which points out:

> "half of all households with children have some problems with dampness or condensation. A quarter of a million Glaswegians live in accommodation affected by dampness or condensation."

Asthma and bronchitis are rife. Hon. Members representing other constituencies have similar stories to tell.

Fifty years ago, Beveridge had a vision of a society free from poverty. In the immediate aftermath of the second world war, when industry had to be reorganised to meet peacetime needs and we in Britain depended on Marshall aid, we still managed a massive house-building programme. In the 1960s, people believed that, in another 10 years, Scotland's housing problem would be cracked. How wrong could everyone have been? Today, in addition to the damp and dangerous housing that people are forced to live in, houses are lying empty because they are in an unlettable condition and the councils have no money to improve them. Councils do not like to have houses lying empty. They do not deliberately leave them unlet, but they do not have the money to make them fit to let. What a waste.

The Minister has seen in my constituency an area of housing, of sound construction, which has deteriorated through lack of investment, to the point where demand is nil and nearly everyone wants out. For want of necessary

[Mrs. Fyfe]

investment, the council may be forced to pull the houses down. If the Minister does not find that a shocking waste of public money, I do. It is no use him shrugging off responsibility on to the councils, saying that each council decides its own priorities. Of course they do, but there is a limit to what they can achieve with the funds at their disposal, which do not come anywhere near meeting their housing needs. Glasgow's current HRA debt is no less than £1,111 million, yet its HSG for this year is a mere £11·1 million. With that level of financial support, when will it ever get over its debt crisis?

The Minister knows all this perfectly well. Possibly he wants to do good and make a name for himself as one of Scotland's great housing Ministers. *[Laughter]* I thought that hon. Members would like that. But the Minister is tied down by the Tory ideology that has sacrificed everything —even the health of thousands of our children—in the cause of reducing inflation. The truth is that our country cannot afford to allow so many of our children to grow up in poverty and ill health—in such damp and dreadful housing—and so many of our work force to have their skills unused.

Bad housing is not something to tolerate; it is an evil to exterminate. It is a sad fact that the Government bear a grave moral responsibility for all these years of criminal neglect.

11.8 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): One thing that can be said about the speech by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) is that it was most certainly read. Another is that it was very badly read. She wrote it before hearing what the Minister had to say, and not knowing that the Chair would be occupied by you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, whom she addressed incorrectly.

The hon. Lady's remarks made it very clear that she still has no idea about finance. It is fascinating. I long for the day when every property is leased or rented at its correct rental value. That value will be pitched at such a level as to ensure that the property is maintained throughout its buyable life. This is perfectly proper and simple to do, but it was not done under the system of housing support grant. When that grant was the main source of support for housing, local authorities used rents as a means of buying votes. I make no apology for saying so. Under the system whereby all rents were charged properly, at a level that would allow building to be properly sustained, housing benefit could be paid to those who could not pay the rent. The marvellous thing about housing benefit is that it is directed at individuals' needs.

The hon. Member for Maryhill drew attention to what she described as a reduction of £1,500 million in housing support grant. But she failed to say that during the same period housing benefit increased by far more than that. Today, many more people are affected—quite properly. I do not argue with that fact. Throughout my political life I have always argued that every family should at least have a proper house to live in. I believe that we all agree about that. The question is how to arrive at that goal.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Walker: I am always willing to give way to the hon. Member for Dundee, East.

Mr. McAllion: If the hon. Gentleman genuinely believes that every family should have a house to live in, does he agree that the last thing that any United Kingdom Government should allow is the disconnection of water and sewerage services from a house? That makes the house unfit for human habitation, and therefore makes ordinary people homeless.

Mr. Walker: It will not surprise the hon. Gentleman to hear that I take a different view. I believe that unless disciplines and pressures are imposed on some people, those people will abuse the system. People who, for whatever reason, cannot control their finances may require assistance to be provided in other ways. I have not argued with that idea because, unfortunately, there are people who need to be looked after. But because one wants to look after that particular group of people——

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Walker: In a minute.

Because one wants to look after that particular group of people, one should not lay the way open. Anyone who has lived on a council estate knows that the people who live there will be able to say who all the individuals beating the system are—which people are enjoying the benefits of the welfare state, extracting all that they can out of it and deliberately and fraudulently claiming more than—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."]—Oh, yes. Anyone who has lived on a council estate knows that people can tell you who the cheats are. The hon. Member for Dundee, East knows that the people on the estates know who the cheats are, because he knows that in places such as Linlathlen the people can say who properly requires assistance, and should get it, and who is drawing unemployment and social security benefits and working on the side.

Mr. McAllion: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wray: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Walker: I shall give way.

Mr. McAllion *rose*——

Mr. Wray *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is not entirely clear to which hon. Gentleman the hon. Member for Tayside, North is giving way.

Mr. Walker: I was giving way to the hon. Member for Dundee, East.

Mr. McAllion: Like the hon. Member for Tayside, North, I accept that the people in Linlathlen can tell cheats from honest people. That is why, when the hon. Gentleman stood in Dundee, East, he was resoundingly defeated—by the voters of Linlathlen.

Mr. Walker: Of course—the Scottish National party, not the Labour party, defeated me. I stood against a sitting Scottish National party Member of Parliament, and I did not win. If the hon. Member for Dundee, East wishes to stand in Tayside, North, I can guarantee that he will be lucky not to lose his deposit.

We need a system whereby the nation's finances are used for the benefit of people in need—although we may disagree about how we want to achieve that—and people in need must really be assisted. I remember the so-called grand old days—both before the war and immediately after the war, or whenever—and the system then did not produce the necessary goods.

That is why it is essential that we try constantly to find ways of improving on what has been done in the past. I welcome the move towards housing associations, but it would be a mistake to imagine that they alone can find the answers to all our housing problems.

Mr. Wray: Does the hon. Gentleman remember the 1960s when private landlords were signing over the tenancies of buildings? They were involved in Rachmanism for years. The local authority in Glasgow spent millions of pounds on demolishing tenements when the owners ran to different countries. Does the hon. Gentleman realise that under the Public Health Act 1897 thousands of certificates of disrepair were issued by the local authority to get landlords to do the necessary work? Does he remember recently, with the abolition of the rates, private landlords running round trying to get their tenants to sign for increases because they did not want to give them the rate rebates?

Mr. Walker: I need no lessons from the hon. Gentleman on caring about people who live on council estates. I too could draw on lessons from the period that he is talking about. What about the housing blocks, built by the local authority, which were unsuitable for Scotland's climate and which had to be destroyed? What about the housing estate which nobody ever lived in and which had to be demolished? That was a waste of public money. I hope the hon. Gentleman will agree that we have to learn from the lessons of the past. The hon. Gentleman should not wish his party to live in the past. I do not wish my party to live in the past.

Mr. Gallie: My hon. Friend is right to suggest that we should learn from the past. May I refer to the comments by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray) about tenements in Glasgow and the position since 1979? I want to draw his attention to the amazing progress by the Government on the renovation of old properties in Glasgow over the past 10 years.

Mr. Walker: My hon. Friend has drawn attention to the massive public funds that have properly gone into the centre of Scotland's cities. We had an inheritance; all it required was adequate funding to bring it into modern use. The buildings were built to last, like castles, but sadly they lacked modern conveniences. The money given by the Government has made a huge contribution to the city centres of Edinburgh, Glasgow and Dundee. The results are there for anyone to see.

Dr. Godman *rose*——

Mr. Walker: Other hon. Members wish to speak. If I keep giving way, no one else will get in.

I want to bring one matter to the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister. Let us assume that a family is living in a property owned by a local authority and enjoys tenants' rights. If the property is affected by a compulsory purchase order because of a road scheme, the tenant will have to move. Other agencies will be involved. My hon. Friend should recognise that there are lessons to be learnt because the tenant may find that things get out of control. The district valuer will have to assess that tenant's rights and arrive at a judgment because the building is to be demolished. The value of the property is known, as are the years of rights and what the value would be after taking account of discounts. Surely it should not be too difficult to arrive at a sensible value.

I hope that the lessons of a particular issue will be borne in mind by my hon. Friend the Minister, who will have to take some decisions. I hope that the House will understand that there was a particular matter that I wished to bring to its attention.

11.20 pm

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): The hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) talks about local authority housing and buildings of modern design. In that context he talks about Glasgow, but he omits to tell the House that a Tory Government told local authorities such as Glasgow, an area in which my mother and many others were desperate for a home, that if they did not build non-traditional homes they would receive no grant. Councillors who were dedicated to house building in Glasgow and other major cities told the Government, "You are wrong; you are planting problems for future generations."

Mr. Bill Walker: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Martin: I shall not give way because I know that many hon, Members wish to speak.

The hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) goes back 14 years to talk about rehabilitation. If he visits the Glasgow collection in the Mitchell library he will learn that the Glasgow local authority was involved in the rehabilitation of tenements at Port Dundas in my constituency as long ago as 1910. In 1973, as a young councillor in Govan, I was involved in the rehabilitation of tenements in the Govan road.

Ministers are so often singing the praises of Scottish Homes, and after the local authority in my constituency —it is probably the position throughout the country—it is the largest landlord. There are multi-storey flats in which it is a treat to live. However, the tenant of a local authority, whatever its faults, can approach an elected councillor, and through him he can approach me. More important, a local councillor can contact every senior official in the authority. With Scottish Homes, a tenant will be able to speak to a junior official, but that will be the end of the story.

We have heard about quangos and Government appointments. It is time that people who know something about tenants' problems were appointed to the board of Scottish Homes. This year, rents increased by 9 per cent. They increased by 9 per cent. last year, as they did the year before that. The Conservatives appoint managers and then they step back, as they would with big business. They should remember that not everyone in the public sector is in a position to buy his home, no matter how cheap the price at which it is offered. Some tenants want to continue to rent because of personal circumstances or a feeling of insecurity. The tenants of Scottish Homes are paying higher rents than any imposed by a local authority throughout the country. I defy any Conservative Member to dispute that.

[Mr. Martin]

The attitude at the top of Scottish Homes is deplorable, and it permeates the whole organisation. I have two letters with me and another dozen in my office which all say the same thing: "Thank you for writing to Sir James Mellon. Unfortunately, he is in London at the moment and cannot reply to your letter." Would any of us get away with saying, "I am in London at the moment and cannot reply to my constituents"? It is as well for Sir James Mellon that he was appointed and does not have to stand for office.

As I said, that attitude is in evidence throughout the organisation. In my constituency, as in all hon. Members' constituencies, anti-social behaviour is becoming a problem on almost every housing estate. Those at Scottish Homes are taking the attitude that they are not police officers and that they do not want to become involved. That is disgraceful. Scottish Homes is about more than the provision of homes. Skill should be exercised in managing estates. If people have beautiful homes but are ashamed to take their relatives into the community because of the anti-social behaviour that is taking place around them, the landlord, Scottish Homes, should be prepared to do something about their miserable plight.

Scottish Homes takes too little account of what is going on in the community-based housing associations—the other sector in which it is involved. There are good community-based housing associations and no one has any complaints about them. But if the things that are going on in some of the community-based housing associations were going on in a local authority, the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) would be standing up and attacking us about it.

I think that I shall write to the Minister about the case that I have in mind because I am getting no satisfaction on it from the director of Scottish Homes. I refer to the case of an owner-occupier of a property in one of my community-based housing assocations, whose home has been flooded five times through no fault of her own. No compensation was granted to her until I went up from London to appeal to a community-based housing association committee. It was touch and go whether I got a hearing. Were it not for some of the fair-minded people on that committee, I should not have been given a hearing. To rub salt into the wound, when I wrote to Sir James, he told me that I must give credit to the association because it had eventually paid compensation. The point is that it paid compensation only after I had made two trips to see it.

Great play has been made of the right to buy. I inform the House that, until I made representations, tenants in my constituency were losing their secure tenancies because they had medical problems. One woman whose young child suffers from a serious illness asked for a ground floor tenement flat for the benefit of that child. She was told by the association in question that, if she did not sign on the dotted line, she would not get to move, and that if she signed, her tenancy would change from a secure tenancy to an assured tenancy. In shorthand, that means being denied the right to buy. I have made representations to the assocation and to Scottish Homes, which will not do anything about the matter. I hope that when I give the Minister the details, he will do something about it.

I recall a case not so long ago when a community-based housing association in my constituency decided to take over the old Springburn hall, do it up and sand blast it. I said that was nice because the community would have a place to hold socials, the local Labour party would be able to have a wee dance, and anyone who wanted to hold a wedding there would be able to do so. I was told, "No, this will be done up with Government funding, urban aid and so on and then sold off as offices to the highest bidder in the private sector." What sort of community-based housing association is that? It must be losing touch with the people who elected its members if that sort of thing happens.

I am glad to have the opportunity to raise this matter. It was put to me by a senior official in Scottish Homes in the west of Scotland that, because of the way in which I made representations to the community-based housing associations, I was putting undue pressure on them and he might simply decide that he would take away funding and projects from my constituency because of my behaviour. I do not know a great deal about parliamentary privilege —I may be able to get advice from the Clerks of the House —but I know that it is certainly verging on a breach of parliamentary privilege when I am told that my constituents will suffer because of the way in which I conduct myself. I do not think that anyone would say that my behaviour inside the House and outside was anything but blameless. I have never attacked officials without warrant.

The Minister, as the person in charge of Scottish Homes, should start at the top and cut his way down. He should get his act together.

11.31 pm

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): I shall be reasonably brief. In examining housing support, we must look at the changing scene in housing. In 1979, only 35 per cent. of homes in Scotland were privately owned. At present, 54 per cent. are privately owned. Obviously, that reflects the change in housing support grants. Almost a quarter of a million houses have moved out of local authority control, which means that not quite so much cash is required to go back into the public coffers.

Changes have been made to the way in which houses are maintained by Scottish Homes. I am sad to hear the comments made by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin). Happily, I have not had such problems in my constituency, but I sympathise with him. Changes have been made to housing associations and housing co-operatives; surely we must welcome them. We welcome the involvement of tenants and others who get involved in the good and sensible provision of public housing and its maintenance. It does much for the quality of life and the local environment in which people live. A pride is established within communities.

When we examine the background to the £36 million which is allocated to the housing support grant, there is another side to the story. I refer to the housing benefits in Scotland. There has been a policy change from zero to almost £1 billion in the current year. That will mean that housing will be funded in a different way. People will be given responsibilities and be required to pay reasonable rents. Those who cannot afford to pay will be covered by the figure of almost £1 billion which is being made available through housing benefits.

I draw attention to the reference by the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) to the rents charged by the Kyle and Carrick regional council. Kyle and Carrick does not receive any housing support grant for its general housing provision. I am happy to say that it receives cash for the hostels. That is welcome. I look to my hon. Friend the Minister to ensure that in future he treats Kyle and Carrick in a special way, because there is a real need to deal with the problems of homelessness in Kyle and Carrick.

Mr. Foulkes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gallie: I shall stick with the problems of Kyle and Carrick.

I suggest that the rise in rents stems from the inadequate repairs and maintenance programme that the Labour administration has carried out in recent years. The rise in rents that is currently required——

Mr. Foulkes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Hon. Members: Give way.

Mr. Gallie: I will give way in the same way as the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) showed me courtesy when I sought to intervene in the previous debate.

One of the problems which the new administration of Kyle and Carrick district council faced when it took over the reins in May this year was, as my hon. Friend the Minister said, the deliberately suppressed rents that had been established in election year by the previous Labour administration. My hon. Friend the Minister should take that point on board.

Mr. Foulkes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gallie: I will not give way, but I shall sit down and allow other hon. Members to participate in the debate.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is not entirely clear to whom the hon. Gentleman is giving way.

Mr. Gallie: I said that I would not give way but simply take my seat and allow another Member to speak in this important debate.

11.36 pm

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): That is an interesting speech to follow. The hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) sounded optimistic about the figures. I find the housing support grant figures for the next financial year gloomier than ever, as more district councils are pushed out into the cold. Four have been added to the list of those not in receipt of the general portion of housing support grant. Those still in receipt of the grant are once again seeing a reduction. As the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) said, last year the total payable was £47 million. This year, it is reduced to £36 million. That is a far cry from the £213 million in 1979. Still housing remains a huge problem the length and breadth of Scotland.

I should like to take Inverness as an example. It is estimated that the rent increases required to compensate for the reduction in housing support grant will be about 6·5 per cent. I know that other councils will have to increase their rents by 10, 11 or even 12 per cent. In preparing the estimates of income and expenditure, I believe that the Secretary of State is supposed to take into account the general level of earnings. With an increase in unemployment in the highlands, that is cold comfort indeed. That issue does not appear to have been addressed following the closure of McDermott's yard. Even for those in employment, wages are being kept to a minimum, with public sector pay restraint making it difficult to meet the rent increases.

The housing waiting list in Inverness is approaching 3,000. Waiting times for single people can be more than six years, and between three and four years for couples. In Gordon district, the waiting list is almost 2,000 and growing fast, while there are only 5,500 council houses and more than half the current council house vacancies are going to local people.

My constituency of Argyll and Bute will get no housing support this year, which is an incredible situation for a district council struggling with waiting lists. The average wait is anything from two and a half to four and a half years, against a background of rising homelessness. The only light in the gloom is the hostel portion of the grant, that has been awarded to Argyll and Bute, and I welcome that.

The number of homeless varies in different parts of Scotland, but it does not matter to each homeless person whether they are homeless in Glasgow or Lochgilphead —the reality is the same. In a civilised society, it should be a basic right for people to have shelter.

There are no grants for Argyll and Bute—with all its islands—and cuts in similar geographic areas such as Orkney and Shetland. Surely that does not reflect the fact that building, repair and maintenance costs on the islands are between 30 and 40 per cent. above the average on the mainland.

That brings me to the island of Bute. The Minister knows of my concern about Rothesay and the dilapidated state of many of the houses and commercial premises in the heart of the town. It is a beautiful island, with a hardy community struggling in a cruel financial climate. The potential for tourist development is enormous, but buildings are collapsing and have to be shored up before they are demolished, and nothing is put in their place. It is dispiriting and no one—I have been to both the Minister and the Secretary of State—appears to be able to help. Scottish Homes promised me three years ago that it would declare Rothesay a small urban renewal initiative area, but it never happened.

There is not enough good-quality low-cost housing available for rent or ownership. Too many local people have been priced out of the market, especially in rural areas of Scotland. The proliferation of holiday homes adds to the problem.

The new council tax will mean a decrease in revenue for local authorities, because it allows a 50 per cent. discount on such homes—in Wales, it can be 25 per cent. or none. There are different sorts of holiday home owners: those who use them once or twice a year and others who rightly want to retain the family home with a view to retiring to the place in which they were born and brought up. Others, who have a modest little place somewhere in a place like Tighnabruaich or Rothesay, often come from Paisley, Glasgow or Renfrew—they are not wealthy people, but come regularly every weekend and become very much a part of the community and contribute to it. They deserve to be able to have their weekends at the seaside.

In Committee on the council tax legislation, I tried to persuade the Minister to allow local authorities discretion on the amount of discount given for holiday homes, as

[Mrs. Ray Michie]

they did with the poll tax, but that was not accepted. I understand that the response of the Scottish Office to representations from local authorities, particularly in the Highland region, on discretion with regard to the council tax is that it believes that the regulations are fair. They are not.

I make a specific request of the Minister tonight: will he undertake to look again at giving local authorities discretion in the matter of council tax on holiday homes? Those authorities are best placed to decide the level of discount, and should be allowed to do so. I hope that the Minister will take that request seriously. The Minister and the Secretary of State may recall that, after the poll tax was introduced, it was agreed that the authorities should have discretion, and I ask the Minister to consider adopting the same policy on the council tax.

11.46 pm

Mr. Mike Watson (Glasgow, Central): I have listened to the debate with interest, particularly the contribution of the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie). I am not sure whether he meant to contribute to this debate, but he is nothing if not interesting—*[Interruption.]* That was not meant to be insulting. I would not object to being called interesting, and I meant the comment to be taken in that way.

The Minister is also an interesting individual. He started with an interesting comment when he said that the orders represented a generous settlement. To put a kind interpretation on those words, he can only have meant that the orders were going to be much worse and, after some infighting behind the scenes, the current figures are better than those that were originally intended. However, I doubt whether that was the case. The Minister and his colleagues do not normally allow the facts to get in the way of a good story.

The orders will result in an overall cash reduction of £56 million for housing throughout Scotland in the coming year—a cut of 12 per cent. If one also takes account of the rise in the cost of living, which should have been built into the figures, one discovers a £70 million shortfall and a 15 per cent. cut. That does not even take into account the 10 per cent. reduction in the amount that can be spent on the vital task of improving the housing stock.

The capital consents figure of £385 million depends on 65 per cent. of that figure being raised from council house sales. Whatever one's view of council house sales, everyone knows that the best of the stock has long since been sold. Those that are left are hardly the most attractive houses. In addition, there is mass unemployment and we are at the height of a recession, so there will be nowhere near as many council house sales in the coming year. The figure is grossly exaggerated and overestimated, which will mean a further shortfall in the overall statistic.

The Minister talked of the variation order that he might introduce if the cost of living rose more than he has anticipated. He should be prepared to introduce a variation order if the sale of council houses does not reach the level that he has estimated; otherwise, his proposal will be meaningless. Meanwhile, repairs will not be carried out, new houses will not be built and dampness will not be treated. The Government's priority seems to be to sell more and more houses, to contract out housing management and to cut resources.

That policy is not a surprise, as we have seen the pattern over the 13 years that the Government have been in power. One of the most serious aspects of the underfunding of housing through local authorities is the effect that the cuts and the under-provision will have on various agencies. Those agencies are funded by local authorities and attempt to deal with the growing problem of homelessness in Scotland. Glasgow has the highest incidence of applications from homeless people in the country. Although it has only 13·5 per cent. of the country's population, it has twice that percentage of Scotland's homeless applications.

We must be clear about the sort of people that the agencies assist. Many of them are in the 16 to 25-year-old age bracket and the majority are homeless because their families or friends whom they were staying with have become unable or unwilling to continue to house them. Those people are out on the streets for one reason or another—ultimately, the reason is not important. The statistics highlight the pressures placed on many young people today. They have no homes or jobs and they are increasingly unable to find training places. At 16 and 17 they receive no benefits, and they get only graded benefit payments up to the age of 24.

Meanwhile, more than 250,000 homes are severely blighted by damp in Glasgow. I and other Glasgow Members hear their stories every week in our surgeries, but we cannot effectively deal with their problems because the local authorities do not have the repairs grants to deal with them.

A greatly increased repairs budget, vital for all major cities and conurbations in Scotland, is further proof of the problem. The problems of homelessness continue to multiply. They are, if not disregarded, certainly downgraded by the Minister. The Government reduce the resources available to local authorities and that, in turn, hits the agencies that are trying manfully to stem the tide of homelessness.

One of the agencies in my constituency is an innovative organisation called the Glasgow Council for Single Homeless. It has been in existence for some years now and it is jointly funded by the city council housing department and the regional council social work department. It is performing a vital task, yet the 1992 report highlighted evidence of the continually growing number of young people referred to its city centre initiative and stopover project—two projects set up under the auspices of the Glasgow Council for Single Homeless, which is directly responsible, because of its grant aid, to local authorities.

The city centre initiative is now under direct threat. It is a good example of the co-ordinated inter-agency approach. It involves not just the social work department but the community education department of the regional council, the Glasgow Council for Single Homeless and the YMCA. Its multi-disciplinary approach is so often necessary to provide resources and to deal effectively with all aspects of the problem of young single homeless people.

The city centre initiative is a prime example of the radical approach that agencies and the local authority in Glasgow have used to deal with housing problems in general and the homelessness problem in particular. This valuable agency is now under serious threat. In March 1992 the Glasgow Council for Single Homeless was struck a body blow when it was told by the city council's housing department that its grant was to be reduced by 67 per cent., from £60,000 to £20,000 this year. Staff had to be laid off and that meant that fewer homeless people could be catered for. The decision was taken reluctantly by the housing department, doubtless as a direct result of the financial pressures applied to the council by Government cuts.

Things will get worse in the coming year. Discussions have been held to offset the worst effects on the council for single homeless, but its director was recently issued with her redundancy notice, and it is only a matter of time before the organisation goes under—unless someone comes to the aid of the local authority and provides more funds. Its future is highly uncertain and if it goes under, that will be a tragedy.

Originally the stopover project was unique, but I understand that there is also one in Dundee now—that city faces similar problems. The project was set up to help young homeless people who are on their own, many of them sleeping rough. The project provides crisis accommodation for them for up to 10 weeks. If, because of the reduced finances allowed for in this order, that accommodation disappears, the stopover project could easily go under, and another vital agency and its work will disappear.

Many of these people have nowhere else to go. We may forget care in the community—it has not started yet. These youngsters are the flotsam and jetsam of Glasgow and the surrounding areas and they need this help, if only for short periods.

Will the Minister intervene to ensure that the stopover project and the Glasgow Council for Single Homeless are guaranteed funds to enable them to continue? If the Government allow them to go under, it will prove that they are completely out of touch with the problems of the people whom they seek to represent.

The Government do not have their finger on the pulse of Scotland. They do not represent the people of Scotland and they have no feeling for their problems. If the Minister and the Department cannot deal meaningfully with the housing problems of the people of Scotland and provide them with adequate resources to be decently housed in accommodation that is affordable and fit to live in, he should stand aside and make way for a party that will do just that.

11.54 am

Mrs. Fyfe: Tonight, my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) showed real knowledge of housing realities—unlike Conservative Members who spoke. The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) said rightly that many councils do not receive any housing support grant—and her own receives grants only for hostels.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Maxton) drew attention to the plight of the young homeless. Hon. Members on this side of the House displayed their knowledge of the subject and proved that they are well aware of the realities.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Foulkes: She has just woken up.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I was here the whole time and heard every word. Did the hon. Lady ask leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

Mr. Foulkes: Yes.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I did not hear her do so. If she did not ask leave of the House, I object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse) Mrs. Maria Fyfe.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: No, Mr. Deputy Speaker, excuse me——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Mrs. Fyfe.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: The hon. Lady did not ask leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady certainly did not ask leave of the House, but it is too late now. Mrs. Fyfe.

Mrs. Fyfe: Some of us, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have more serious matters on our minds than trivial details of procedure. If the hon. Lady had managed to remain awake during some of the speeches, I would have some respect for her remarks now.

Hon. Members on this side of the House showed real concern and a genuine knowledge of Scottish housing issues. We were not so fortunate in listening to the contributions of Conservative Members—and that latest intervention was particularly inept and ill-advised.

The hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) had nothing to say and took 13 minutes to say it. Of course housing benefit expenditure has increased—that is because more and more people are out of work. Does he not realise that those who receive it have all or some of their rent paid from housing benefit? By the time that it has paid off a proportion of housing debt and for housing management, precious little is left to pay for repairs to the fabric of properties, which is why council housing stock is in such a drastic state.

The hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) spoke of Scotland's changing housing scene. He was dead right about that. Homelessness has reached record levels. This year is worse than last year, and worse than the year before that. That is the situation over which the Government preside.

Conservative Members do not address the issues. Do they not realise, and do they not care, that families are growing up in unhealthy housing? What chance in life do youngsters have when they have to grow up in damp and overcrowded housing and suffer chest infections? More and more single mothers are suffering depressive illness because of the condition of their homes and the poverty in which they live.

Conservative Members cannot claim that they believe in everyone being provided with a decent home and at the same time vote for housing support grants that are so inadequate that they are a joke.

We were given one and a half hours to debate Scotland's housing crisis. We need a Scottish Parliament, so that we may debate that issue properly and treat it with the seriousness that it deserves, so that we may restore to local councils the authority to govern their localities and not be kicked around by this Government.

11.59 pm

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I will read *Hansard* tomorrow, in case I do not answer in the few moments that are left to me all the points that were made.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) asked various questions about Scottish Homes. I shall suggest to its chairman that he should meet the hon. Gentleman. While my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has powers of direction, that is a heavy-handed measure to use. It has not been employed yet, and I invite the hon. Gentleman to follow up his points at a meeting. If he does not receive satisfaction—but I hope he will—he can come back to me.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) asked whether we could write off local authority capital debt. Unfortunately, we cannot. Local authorities with high levels of capital debt receive housing support grant to help them to service that debt through the loan charges that fall on the housing revenue account. Given that assistance, authorities secure enough income to meet the costs associated with council housing.

I should point out to the hon. Lady that there is no evidence that Glasgow's debt in relation to council housing exceeds the value of that council housing. I therefore see no particular reason why the national taxpayer should be expected to meet the cost of writing off the capital debt when, in any case, the sums involved would be enormous. I can tell the hon. Lady, however, that the results of the Scottish national house condition survey will be out quite soon—this year—and will be enormously helpful in pointing the way to effective targeting of resources in the future.

Mr. Maxton: Will the Minister give way?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, because I know that he is very enthusiastic about this subject. First, however, let me tell my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) that I am aware of the case that he mentioned, and will keep a close eye on it. I hope for a satisfactory resolution of his constituent's affairs.

Mr. Maxton: I am delighted to learn that the house condition survey is to be published at long last. Some of us suggested such a survey, and moved amendments to Housing Bills, back in the early 1980s. I was also delighted to hear the Minister say that the survey's publication would allow him to target resources where they are most needed. Will he guarantee that resources will be made available to deal with the condition of housing in Scotland, as revealed by the survey?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The results of the survey will provide reliable information on a national scale. There will continue to be a need for detailed information at local level, but we encourage local authorities to carry out local survey work, as has happened in the hon. Gentleman's authority. In some cases, if local authorities require assistance with that work, Scottish Homes may be able to help. Authorities should consider working in close co-operation with Scottish Homes.

The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) raised the issue of Rothesay. The provisional allocation for her council is £5·8 million, which is substantial. It is within the council's discretion whether to make Rothesay a priority, but I am glad to note that it has made a strategic agreement with Scottish Homes. I hope that that will help it to proceed with the matter. The other point that the hon. Lady raised, relating to council tax on holiday homes and the question of discretion, is a matter for my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), and I shall refer it to him.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson) raised the issue of the Glasgow Council for Single Homeless and its stopover project. He did not raise the question of urban aid, which gives considerable assistance; but, from what he said, I do not think that that is necessarily appropriate in this instance. I understand that the projects concerned are funded by the authority, and future grants are a matter for the district council. We have made clear our concern for the homeless by providing additional capital allocations of some £22·6 million in the past two years.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) is right: the rents charged in his authority were well below the national average, and the council clearly took that into account in fixing levels.

We will take into account the level of council house receipts from the right to buy, and we shall bear in mind the needs of authorities that do not reach the receipt targets that are anticipated. In the past, when we have been in a position to make supplementary allocations, we have taken that need into account.

I strongly support the order, and I warn the Opposition that, should they have it in mind to vote against it, they will deprive local authorities of millions of pounds. I leave that thought with them.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 190, Noes 144.

Division No. 158] **[12.04 am**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Elletson, Harold
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren

Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maclean, David
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Page, Richard
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey

Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Andrew MacKay.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret

Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Boyce, Jimmy
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Caborn, Richard

Callaghan, Jim
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Heppell, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Johnston, Sir Russell
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas

Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Michael, Alun
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jack Thompson and
Mr. Alan Meale.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1993, which was laid before this House on 21st January, be approved.

Hedgerows Bill [*Money*]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Motion made and Question proposed,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Hedgerows Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenses of the Secretary of State incurred in consequence of the Act, and

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other enactment.—[*Mr. Maclean.*]

12.15 am

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): I should like to make a short intervention. It is not my intention to be critical of the Bill or the money resolution, which I accept entirely. I want to raise a relevant point that the Minister might care to consider at this and subsequent stages of the Bill.

Some time ago, the Government accepted that the 4,000 pre-1840 Acts of Enclosure still had effect. If not, the possession of very large areas of lowland England might come into question. Many of the 4,000 Acts required that the fields established from the commons, and passing into the possession of landowners, be surrounded by hedgerows, and the hedgerows had to be perpetually maintained. It would be inappropriate for any public money to be spent by the Secretary of State or by local authorities, in fulfilment of the provisions of the Bill, in seeking to protect hedgerows that the law already required to be protected. Such duplication would be unnecessary and perhaps irresponsible.

I have tabled a couple of amendments, which I trust will cover the point when the Bill reaches the Committee stage. The purpose of this intervention is to ensure that the whole question is properly considered.

I ought to emphasise that local authorities should be aware of the provisions not only of this Bill but also of the 4,000 Acts by which the commons of lowland England were largely enclosed. Local authorities should know the conditions of enclosure and of possession that those Acts created. The matter may before very long be illustrated by a case that has been drawn to the Government's attention by the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust. We await a ministerial reply in that case.

As the matter may be considered briefly in the Standing Committee, it need not be rehearsed here. However, it is appropriate that it be considered, in terms both of the future of this very desirable piece of legislation and of the proper management of public money.

I trust that the Minister will ensure that this matter is taken into consideration, even if not by way of a reply tonight. There ought to be some sort of resuscitation for measures that are still firmly in the statute book but are sometimes forgotten by landowners who may have enjoyed possession for a very long time.

12.17 am

The Minister for the Environment and Countryside (Mr. David Maclean): I give the hon. Gentleman the assurance he seeks. We shall consider the matter very carefully.

Question put and agreed to.

PETITION

Crown Post Office (Prestatyn)

12.18 am

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): I wish to present a petition on behalf of 3,500 residents of the town of Prestatyn, which is in my constituency. These people are concerned about the possibility of the Crown post office's being downgraded and privatised. The petition reads:

The proposal by Post Office Counters Ltd to downgrade the Crown post office in King's avenue, Prestatyn, in the borough of Rhuddlan to an agency office run by James Hall (Spa) will lead to a poorer service to the public because of inferior training, lack of job knowledge, experience, dedication and customer relationships of the staff who will replace the current staff. Furthermore, the present business of Prestatyn will be undermined by an unrequired food store, which will have unfair advantage in that the public will have to enter James Hall (Spa) to receive their pensions and benefits.

The petition calls on

the right hon. Michael Heseltine, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

to intervene in the proposal to downgrade the Prestatyn Crown post office to an agency office. I fully support the petition, and hope that the Prestatyn post office will not be privatised. I am pleased to present the petition.

To lie upon the Table.

A1 (Newcastle Bypass)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

12.19 am

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): I regret to have to bring the issue of the A1 Newcastle western bypass before the House in this way, but, having tried to resolve the problems that my constituents have had over the past two years through the normal channels—letters to Ministers and meetings with them—I am afraid that we have reached the stage at which the matter must be debated on the Floor of the House, because we are not resolving the problem. I speak with the full support of my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson), who also has constituents living adjacent to the road who are suffering similar problems.

The problem concerns a grave injustice to my constituents who live in the Woodgrove area of Denton Burn, adjacent to the A1 Newcastle western bypass. Construction of the road began in 1986 and there were several consultation meetings with representatives of the Department of Transport, at which residents were given assurances about construction noise, access, obstructions, and so on. They were assured that all the problems would be kept to a minimum, as would traffic noise, fumes and vibration when the road was completed.

The usual horrendous disruption was experienced during the works—heavy plant and equipment being moved around in residential areas, blocked roads and walkways, mud, dirt, noise and the other general problems with which people have to deal when such work is in progress. One of my constituents sent me a list of the problems from which he and his family were suffering:

"1. Paths cracked and sinking due to vibration.

2. Cement dust in layers every day, worst whilst pumping mineshaft etc. full and constant vibration.

3. Cracks and settlement to east gable of house.

4. Cracks, settlement and pointing dropping out at back of house.

5. Plastic guttering ruined . . .

6. Extension cracks to brickwork and cement and ceiling cracking.

7. Lead flashing fell off chimney.

8. Bedroom ceilings cracked especially back bedroom.

9. Severe vibrations.

10. An actual piece fell off front door roof"—

Apparently, when my constituent told the constructors about the latter they thought it was a huge joke.

My constituent's letter goes on to explain about the interference with television reception, a rise in the incidence of burglary because of the rear access to properties, a rise in vandalism, and so on.

Furthermore, some of my constituents were obliged to allow access to their gardens so that the contractors could carry out works. Those, of course, were people whose properties were nearest the road line. They had to allow access to the utilities to lay pipes and duct work, and to other contractors to fill mine workings with concrete. During those activities fences were destroyed and shrubs and plants lost.

At that time my constituents were offered compensation for the disruption of between £1,200 and £1,700. Under the threat of compulsory purchase, they therefore allowed access and in 1987 they took the compensation. When the payment was accepted, the Department's officials assured four of the householders concerned that, because of the design of the road through its concrete channels, they would not suffer from noise, fumes and dirt from the traffic that would eventually use the road.

That was not true. The noise and constant smell of petrol and diesel makes it impossible to spend a peaceful afternoon in the garden. But the householders could not possibly have known that when the agreement was signed. Naturally, but unfortunately, they accepted the experts' assurances about minimal noise and disruption.

The road was opened on 1 December 1990 by Her Majesty the Queen. Almost immediately, complaints came flooding in about the volume of traffic using the road, and the associated problems. I wrote to the then Minister about the problem, and on 15 February 1991 I received a reply in which he said, inter alia:

"The noise levels and air quality . . . are in line with our predictions."

Nevertheless, compensation was paid to other residents who complained about disruption to their lives and devaluation of their property as a result of the traffic using the road. However, the residents who had received compensation of £1,200 to £1,700 for access were refused compensation for the problems caused by the traffic using the road.

So I wrote again to the Minister. On 7 April 1991 he replied:

"owner/occupiers such as you mention insisted that the Department acquire title to the land required. They were paid compensation for the land taken and also for injurious affection as a result of their close proximity to the works. The compensation paid was agreed as the full and final settlement of all claims associated with the road scheme."

In other words, compensation received prior to the opening of the road debarred further claims for compensation, even though the original compensation was accepted by my constituents for disruption and access to their property.

My constituents are adamant that they did not insist, as the Minister stated in his letter, that the Department acquire title to the portions of land within their property boundaries. They did not receive any payment for land, because none was acquired. They received from the Department compulsory purchase orders. They were informed that if they refused entry to the land required, the orders would be activated. Therefore, they gave permission for access as they felt that they had little choice. None of their land was taken. They suffered great inconvenience. In some cases gardens were left in a disgusting state.

My constituents did not at any time ask for compensation. They were not aware that they were entitled to compensation. They were pleased when they were offered sums of between £1,200 and £1,700 for what they understood to be compensation for the inconvenience caused by the works. Whoever made the offer did not inform my constituents, until they had accepted the offer, that no further compensation claims would be considered.

As the Department of Transport must have been aware that large sums in compensation for property devaluation would be forthcoming—indeed, the Minister confirmed that the noise level was in line with their predictions—the offer to my constituents of sums of £1,200 to £1,700 was, they believe, tantamount to dishonesty. Therefore, they expect the Department to rectify the position.

[Mr. David Clelland]

My constituents ask how it can be possible for people who were not affected by the roadworks to receive at least 60 per cent. more than those whose property was occupied, when needed, by people connected with the works.

In trying to be co-operative, my constituents have suffered considerable loss at the hands of the Department of Transport, their own legal advisers, or perhaps both. It was not made clear to them that the sum that they received in compensation for disruption to their homes and gardens during construction would cancel any claim because of noise or traffic usage of the road which they could not have anticipated and which, according to the advice of Department officials, would be minimal.

In the latest letter in the long saga, the director of network management and construction at the Newcastle office of the Department told my constituent, Mr. Graham, of 46 Woodgrove:

"the Department of Transport has no legal power to increase the compensation paid to you in 1987."

That misses the point. My constituents are not looking for an increase in their original compensation. They consider that to have been compensation for destruction of, and access to, property during the works. What they are now seeking is similar compensation, sometimes of about £6,000, to that received by other residents whose property was not invaded by workmen and whose lives were not disrupted to the same extent by the works.

Ministers seem to say that people are expected to take a gamble in such circumstances. If they accept compensation at an early stage for access and/or damage to property, they risk losing later when a new situation, which they could not have assessed in advance, arises. If they wait to see the eventual effects of the traffic using the road before they claim, they have no guarantee that the same level of compensation will apply.

Surely that cannot be a proper way to deal with such situations. Compensation should be assessed at or about the time when damage occurs, and ought not to preclude distinctly separate claims at a later date when there are new circumstances—in this case the traffic using the road.

I hope that the Minister will not trot out the old argument about rules and regulations. That will not do. There has been an injustice. That is clear to me, as it must be to others. There will be other road schemes; the Secretary of State for Transport announced several recently. On the south side of the Tyne, the same stretch of the A1 is the subject of statutory consultation. Concerned residents have been told not to worry. They have been assured that modern materials and landscaping will greatly reduce traffic nuisance. The same words were used in the public consultation over the Newcastle stretch of the road. If the public are to have confidence in the Department of Transport and in the assurances that they are given, they must receive treatment that goes to the letter of the rules and regulations, and that treatment must be fair and just. That is all that is being asked for in this instance.

12.30 am

The Minister for Roads and Traffic

(Mr. Kenneth Carlisle): I thank the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland) for raising an important matter. I know that he has pursued it with great energy on behalf of his constituents, and I respect that. I know that his constituents will be grateful, too.

I welcome the presence of my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson), who also has an interest in the A1. He has championed the improvement of the A69 in his constituency.

The hon. Member for Tyne Bridge has argued his case with great force, and it might be helpful if I review the history of the road. The need for a western bypass of Newcastle was clearly acknowledged as far back as 1936, and the route has been protected since that time. However, it did not feature in development documents until 1945. Much new housing was built along the protected route from 1936 to the time when the building of the road reached fruition.

The Newcastle western bypass, which cost £88 million, was one of the most important schemes in the national road programme. On completion, it was to be designated as the A1 linking the trunk road north and south of Newcastle and Gateshead and connecting important radial routes from the west, such as the A69 and A696.

The scheme initially from Scotswood bridge to the A696 was added to the road programme in 1977. However, Tyne and Wear metropolitan county council considered that the bypass should extend further north to link with the Great North road at Wideopen, and both the county council and the Department of Transport carried out public consultation in 1978. In 1980, the then Secretary of State for Transport accepted the extension as forming the trunk road bypass. The preferred route was announced in 1981. An amendment to the southern extremity of the route was proposed in 1984 to allow for the construction of a new crossing of the Tyne. A public inquiry was held in November 1985, and the orders for the scheme were made in June 1986. The first contract for the main works started in June 1987.

The Department was aware of the problems that the building of parts of the route would entail from Scotswood road through to Kingston park but more particularly along the narrow corridor between Woodgrove and the A69 west road.

Unfortunately, some nuisance to local residents is unavoidable when work is being carried out on a scheme of this size, particularly in an urban area. The hon. Gentleman mentioned how the building of the road affected his constituency and the nuisance that the work caused. The Department did all that it could to minimise inconvenience and disruption. The measures taken to that end included the setting up of regular working groups meeting on a bi-monthly basis, on which members of Newcastle city council were represented to monitor and deal with problems as and when they arose. Close contact was also maintained with Gateshead. The Department issued a series of newsletters to keep residents and road users informed in advance of what was happening. Other measures before the start of works included the insulation against noise of dwellings that qualified under the Noise Insulation Regulations 1975. Extensive advance tree and shrub planting, provision of protective fencing and alternative access arrangements were also undertaken where necessary.

The detailed land requirements for the Newcastle western bypass were made public knowledge in the mid-1980's. Although the draft compulsory purchase orders showed land to be acquired from several owner-occupied properties in the Southway and Woodgrove areas of south-west Denton, in fact the Department wished only to have essential licences over those areas of land. The licences were required to allow old worked coal seams to be grouted up. Owners of the properties affected had the right to serve blight notices on the Department, and several chose that particular option.

The district valuer, who, on behalf of the Department negotiates all land compensation matters for all road schemes, had to establish during his negotiations with the remaining property holders or their agents whether they were prepared to grant a licence for the grouting works to be carried out or whether owners insisted on title to the land being acquired. The district valuer made owners or their agents fully aware of the ramifications of both options, so they knew exactly what they would face with each option. The Department did not insist on acquiring title. In accordance with normal practice, the letter accompanying the notice to treat served on owners made it clear that the Department would prefer to acquire the lesser right, in this case a licence.

Those owners who were prepared to grant a licence were paid a licence fee for the duration of the work. That meant that compensation for any injurious affection on their property to which they might be entitled from the operation of the road would need to be the subject of a claim under part I of the Land Compensation Act 1973. As the hon. Gentleman knows, however, such claims cannot be submitted until one year after the opening of the road —in this case December 1991.

Those owners who insisted on title to the land being acquired were paid compensation for the land taken and for injurious affection as a result of the close proximity to the works at the time of the acquisition in 1987. On completion of the acquisition, a legal transfer document was signed which included a clause accepting the compensation in full and final settlement of injurious affection and all other claims to which they were entitled.

Independent negotiations were conducted between the district valuer and solicitors and/or agents representing the residents.

The affected residents of Woodgrove decided, on the basis of independent professional advice that they received, to require the Department to acquire title to the land involved. The advisers will no doubt have considered the advantages and disadvantages to their clients of the options available. They decided to proceed on the basis of immediate compensation and signed agreements in full and final settlement of all claims associated with the road scheme. No pressure was put on the residents by the Department as to the course of action that they should taken in this matter. Therefore, the Department has a different interpretation of the extent of knowledge of both the agents and the residents about what they were doing. We believed that they had full advice and knowledge of what was implied by their specific choice to sell at that time.

It is important to recognise that in 1987 neither the professional advisers representing the residents nor the district valuer could have been certain what, if any, compensation might result from a later assessment.

It is also important to recognise—this is central to the case—the Department has no legal power to increase the compensation paid to owners in 1987. There is no provision in legislation to allow us to do that.

As I mentioned previously, the route is close to residential properties which have been built since the bypass was first suggested. The protection of the route meant that relatively few houses had to be demolished, some 66 in total, but the narrowness of the corridor necessitated extensive measures to reduce the environmental impact of the road, especially noise effects on the residents. The road was therefore designed so that physical barriers exist between the traffic and the houses, either by constructing the road in cutting, the use of earth mounds or solid parapet walls. Noise insulation under the Noise Insulation Regulations was provided to 1,052 properties prior to the start of works. Subsequently, insulation has been offered to owners of a further 63 properties following completion of the bypass and the consideration of their appeals against non-provision which are permitted by the regulations.

Other problems were connected with the building of this road, as can be expected in a scheme of this size where there were many matters to resolve. A 1 km length of the bypass at the southern end, adjacent to the Shibdon pond nature reserve, is on a 9 m high embankment over alluvial deposits such as soft peaty clay. That posed problems of not only stability but ensuring that the works did not endanger the wetland areas of the reserve by changing the level or acidity of the water.

To overcome those problems, an advance works contract was let at a tender price of almost £2 million to instal vertical band drains at 1·4 m centres to speed up consolidation of the clay layer and to place a 2 m thick blanket of stone over the entire area. Carboniferous limestone was chosen for the blanket because of its inert chemical properties and it acts both as a drainage layer and as a working platform for the embankment construction. The contract included an extensive array of geotechnical instruments with automatic logging equipment to enable embankment stability to be monitored during the subsequent main filling operations.

A 4 km length of the route, from the River Tyne northwards, contained old coal mine workings at shallow depths and in some locations several seams had been worked. These workings took the form of parallel galleries with intermediate pillars left in for roof support. Most had collapsed to some extent but the remaining voids could have affected the stability of the overlying ground on which the new highway and structures were to be founded. To prevent damage to the road by future settlement, the workings were either removed when they were very close to the new road level or, if deeper, drilled and grouted with cement or pulverised fuel ash.

During the process, about 14,000 tonnes of coal were recovered and more than 60,000 tonnes of grout were injected into the ground. That was a big operation.

There are eight subways on the bypass at two grade separated interchanges and consideration was given to the best treatment for their internal faces. It was decided to use some pictorial glazed tile finishes which made them attractive to pedestrians and deterred graffiti. The subways are also wider than normal at 5 m. A design competition from two colleges of art was staged with a cash prize for the best three designs to be used in the subways.

As the route lies within an urban area, it was also considered necessary to introduce a high standard of landscape works so that the bypass would be attractive to motorists and residents. Extensive shrub and tree planting was introduced, with earth mounding to the sides of the

[Mr. Kenneth Carlisle]

bypass. Low maintenance grass seed was used. The aim was to introduce wild flowers which was a novel feature then and to give an interesting and changing pattern of vegetation throughout the year.

The 11 km long bypass was divided into five contracts to separate work requiring special expertise and keep the size of individual contracts to reasonable proportions. The works were inaugurated by the then Secretary of State for Transport, John Moore, in April 1987. Of particular note is that about £700,000 was spent on horticultural and landscape works and £12 million was expended on statutory undertakers' diversions. There are 59 structures and seven grade separated interchanges on the bypass.

I go into those details to show that it was a complicated road. We took huge trouble to make the road sympathetic and meet the demanding nature of the landscape and the urban area through which it passed. As I said previously, we consulted carefully with local people as we built it, so great care was taken in the building and design. It is a road of which in general we can be proud.

I fully recognise that the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge is not happy with the compensation arrangements but I believe that all those people who could claim compensation, or with whom we dealt, had full advice and clear knowledge of the true choice before them. They had a clear choice and their advisers were made fully aware of what was behind each option. They knew full well that if they accepted compensation in 1987, by law we would have no power to reopen those compensation claims.

I am sorry that in the end people were disappointed. No one was to know then. They made their choice and by law I have no power to open the case again. However, I fully respect the hon. Gentleman for fighting for what he believes are the rights of his constituents. I am sorry that in my reply I have had to disappoint him. I hope that I have helped to explain the position as clearly as possible.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at thirteen minutes to One o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 18 February 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[Madam Speaker *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

British Railways (No. 4) Bill *(By Order)*

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [8 February], That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Debate to be resumed on Thursday 25 February.

British Waterways Bill [Lords] (By Order)

Crossrail Bill *(By Order)*

East Coast Main Line (Safety) Bill) *(By Order)*

Greater Manchester (Light Rapid Transit System) Bill *[Lords] (By Order)*

Woodgrange Park Cemetary Bill *[Lords] (By Order)*

River Humber (Upper Burcom Cooling Works) Bill *[Lords] (By Order)*

Allied Irish Banks Bill *(By Order)*

Orders for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Thursday 25 February.

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

United States Government

1. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects to meet representatives of the United States Government to discuss Northern Ireland.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Sir Patrick Mayhew): I hope to meet members of the new United States Administration within the next few months.

Mr. Bowis: When my right hon. and learned Friend meets President Clinton's team, will he make it clear that if the President would like to send an envoy to this country as a fact finder and as a supporter of my right hon. and learned Friend's excellent peace work, it will be most welcome? However, if President Clinton sends somebody to this country to meddle, that would be as offensive as if this country sent a peace envoy to the Mexican border to look into the problems of the Hispanics.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am certain that the President of the United States would not want to send anybody to Northern Ireland for the latter purpose that my hon. Friend mentioned. It is important that the American Administration continue to give their full support to the talks process to which my hon. Friend kindly referred. I welcome every opportunity to explain our understanding of the true facts of Northern Ireland and the continuing efforts of the two Governments and of the main constitutional parties in Northern Ireland.

Mr. A. Cecil Walker: When the Secretary of State has an opportunity to talk to members of the United States Government, will he restate the investment potential of north Belfast—an area of special needs, and one which has a work force willing and able to adapt to special circumstances?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The hon. Gentleman takes a close interest in the material welfare of his constituency, and of course I will do as he wishes. I will not limit my endeavours to north Belfast because the truth is that the whole of Northern Ireland presents an admirable investment opportunity—especially to investors seeking a gateway to the single European market. I have found that overseas companies that have established themselves in Northern Ireland turn out to be the best ambassadors for Northern Ireland in that regard.

Sir James Kilfedder: Will the Secretary of State point out to the American Government that the people of Northern Ireland will welcome anyone from America, because we sent many people there in the 18th century to help create the United States of America? Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman also remind the United States Government that Northern Ireland has received visitors ever since St. Patrick arrived there—first under duress, but later glad to return to Northern Ireland? St. Patrick was of course what the IRA term a Brit. We also had visitors from the nordic countries—Vikings—to my constituency 1,300 years ago, when they wiped out the marvellous university of Bangor. Nevertheless, I hope that the Secretary of State will stress that we are always glad to welcome friendly visitors to our part of the United Kingdom.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: At a recent public meeting in Northern Ireland I was introduced as St. Patrick, and I take much to heart the hon. Gentleman's remarks. When people come to Northern Ireland genuinely seeking to learn the true facts of the situation there, they go away wiser and happier. Anyone from the United States Administration who comes to Northern Ireland for that purpose will be very welcome, and I expect that they, too, will return to America happier and wiser people.

Mr. McNamara: It is interesting to note the change in the Secretary of State's attitude since the election in the United States and the result that emerged from it.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that successive American Administrations of both parties have played a constructive role, and adopted constructive attitudes towards Northern Ireland—not least in placing important orders with Northern Ireland firms and encouraging investment there? They have also been very helpful in regard to the extradition of persons accused of serious crime. They have stopped the illegal export of arms and cut down the activities of Noraid.

In those circumstances, should we not positively encourage continued interest in the affairs of Northern Ireland on the part of any American Administration, especially an Administration involved in the reconicilia-tion of peoples and the protection of human rights? As the Secretary of State has said, we would all welcome any member of the United States Administration who came here to help to improve the situation in that troubled Province.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I readily confirm that successive United States Administrations have been of great help. In particular, I acknowledge with gratitude the help in curtailing funds that reach terrorist organisations, notably the IRA, from American sources.

Recently, the Southern Legislative Conference visited Northern Ireland. Its members spent many days there, and I was particularly glad—although not surprised—when, on their return they said publicly that their purpose would be to correct in the American media the wholly false impression of Northern Ireland that is current in the United States.

NHS Treatment

2. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people were treated by the national health service *(a)* in 1982 and *(b)* in 1992.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): In addition to this year's 1·3 million out-patient attendances and 641,000 accident and emergency attendances, 280,000 in-patients were treated in Northern Ireland in 1992. That is 15 per cent. up on the 240,000 treated in 1982. In the same period, the number of people treated as day cases increased from 10,000 to over 60,000.

Mr. Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that an increase of 36 per cent., from 250,000 to 310,000, demonstrates the Government's commitment to the health service, and to the people of Northern Ireland? Will he now tell us what has happened—within the overall figure—to the level of waiting lists for cardiac surgery?

Mr. Hanley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments, which I shall pass on to my noble Friend Lord Arran, the Minister responsible for health in Northern Ireland.

There is a particular problem with cardiac surgery in Northern Ireland, because of the problem of cardiac disease. I am pleased to say, however, that—owing to the waiting list initiatives in Northern Ireland—in addition to the £1 million-plus a year that has been helping to reduce long-term waiting lists from more than 5,000 people to a third of that number, we now have £2·75 million extra to spend on the cardiac waiting list in the coming year. That should improve matters further: it should entirely wipe out the waiting list, which was reduced from over 400 early last year to its current level of 170.

Mr. Maginnis: When considering the availability of acute hospital services and access to such services, will the Minister also consider—and tell the House—whether they should be rationalised without boards making known to the public the full implications, including financial implications, of the change? Is the Minister aware that, in its document "Making Choices", the Southern board has suggested changes in the delivery of maternity services, which would certainly disadvantage many people in south Tyrone and mid-Ulster? I refer to the proposals for the South Tyrone hospital.

If the Minister does not ensure that the full implications of those proposals are made known to the public, we shall find that, in future, hospitals will be unable to deliver the services that he has outlined today and will encounter extreme difficulty in applying for trust status. Will the Minister encourage health boards not to put the cart before the horse?

Mr. Hanley: The hon. Gentleman refers to the Southern health and social services board's recently-published major reviews, entitled "Making Choices." It is a genuine review; it asks people to state their choices; it asks for their comments. Any interested individuals or organisations can send in their responses by 31 March. It is hoped that the review of services will be completed by 31 May. The hon. Gentleman said that the review does not contain certain information. The review contains six options for the future arrangement of hospital services. However, the board made it clear that it wants other options to be generated and that it wants suggestions from the general public. This is genuine, open consultation. No decisions have been taken.

Rev. William McCrea: Does the Minister not realise that in the Western board area the excellent maternity services provided by the Tyrone county hospital for the mothers and children of that area are being destroyed by a totally undemocratic board which does not represent the will of the people and runs across everything that is included in the patients charter and that affects patients choice? The review is no more than a sham. It will not be accepted by the people of that area; and it never will.

Mr. Hanley: The hon. Gentleman has put his views to Ministers forcefully over the past few months. We are grateful for the interest that he takes in his constituents in that regard. Although "Making Choices" says that there could be a loss of obstetric, gynaecological, ear, nose and throat and paediatric services at South Tyrone hospital, the report makes clear that no decisions have been or will be made on anything until the whole consultative process is complete. The Southern health and social services board will take full account of the views expressed by the interested parties in framing its views for the future. I believe that the hon. Gentleman has a very important part still to play in that consultation process.

Inward Investment

3. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the current level of inward investment in Northern Ireland.

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Robert Atkins): So far this financial year, the Industrial Development Board has secured seven new inward investment projects involving a total investment of just over £105 million and offering 1,299 new jobs. This is a most encouraging achievement.

Mr. Coombs: How many of the firms to which my hon. Friend referred in his answer would have come to Ulster if the clammy hand of the social chapter had been wrapped around the throat of the Province's economy?

Mr. Atkins: My hon. Friend, with his usual perspicacity, has put his finger right on the key to all this. My hon. Friend will recall what the President of the European Commission said recently when he referred to the United Kingdom as being a paradise for investment. Certainly this part of the United Kingdom is doing extremely well and would probably do a jolly sight less well if it had to be part of the social chapter, as my hon. Friend rightly says.

Mr. Beggs: May I, on behalf of my colleagues, congratulate those who have been associated with bringing successful new inward investment to Northern Ireland. However, my constituency has lost ICI, Courtaulds, Carreras, Klingers Yarn, Blue Circle, Circaprint and GEC. When can I expect some investment to be directed towards my constituency to make up for those job losses? Can the Minister assure me that sufficient assistance is available to existing industry in Northern Ireland to secure its jobs and its own manufacturing base?

Mr. Atkins: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point about his constituency, which I understand. It happened over a number of years. The Industrial Development Board, together with Ministers, has tried very hard to redress that by attracting new investment to Northern Ireland. We have been extremely successful, as the hon. Gentleman recognised in his opening remarks. He will understand, however, that if a company wishes to invest in Northern Ireland, the IDB can only offer a variety of choices to it. It is up to the company, in the final analysis, to make a decision about where to go. Of course we offer the hon. Gentleman's area, just as we offer every other area in the constituencies of Members on both sides of the House. In those circumstances, I do not believe that his premise holds up: that, somehow, we are letting his part of the world down. I shall continue, as he well knows, to fight as hard as I possibly can for new investment, both in his constituency and in every other constituency in the Province.

Mr. Budgen: Does my hon. Friend agree that the undoubted need for inward investment does not justify American interference in the affairs of the Province? If there is such interference, does he agree that it should be on a reciprocal basis and that we should be allowed to talk about the problems of the black areas of New York? Might I suggest that I might be given a small job in that discussion because I am ignorant, prejudiced and extremely keen to offer unasked for and impertinent advice in order that I may appear important to my constituents? It is obvious that I am supremely suited, as the Americans are, to the task.

Mr. Atkins: I shall certainly draw the attention of the Chief Whip to my hon. Friend's interest and hope that perhaps for the next three months he might be able to provide my hon. Friend with the opportunity to leave this country so that he does not have to participate in any votes on the Maastricht treaty.

Mr. McGrady: If I may return to the more serious business of unemployment in Northern Ireland, I congratulate the Minister and agree that any inward investment is most welcome. But surely he must be aware from his own departmental statistics and, indeed, his parliamentary answers, that certain areas of Northern Ireland never have industrial development. They coincide with high endemic unemployment. Does he agree that the matter must be redressed by the zoning of Northern Ireland for preferential treatment for those areas that have been deprived of investment in the past and have a current and endemic higher level of unemployment than many other areas?

Mr. Atkins: The hon. Gentleman fights his corner as hard as anyone I know in trying to attract inward investment. I know of his particular interest in Chicago and other areas of the United States. I reiterate the point that I made to the hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs) that I cannot force a company to invest in a particular area if it chooses not to do so. My job is to persuade them to invest in Northern Ireland. Of course, we try to encourage them in areas where we see that there is a factory, a site or a problem that would suit their operation. Given the concern that he expresses, as he knows, I have undertaken to make inquiries with the IDB about exactly what it is doing in his constituency. If I find that there are weaknesses, I shall seek to redress them.

Mr. Stott: While inward investment in Northern Ireland is to be welcomed, wherever it originates, it is having little effect on the employment prospects of a vast number of people in the Province. The Minister will be aware that the total number of people unemployed in Northern Ireland now stands at a staggering 108,000. Of that total, 29,152 are under the age of 25. Given such a chronic waste of talent and skill, what positive steps does the Minister intend to take to reduce the unacceptable levels of unemployment which are his direct responsibility?

Mr. Atkins: I cannot accept the direct finger of responsibility which the hon. Gentleman points at me. The problem has for many years existed and he is right to say that it is a difficult and intractable problem. Although the headline total of unemployment in Northern Ireland has increased, the adjusted figure is the same as last month's figure. The figures for the past four months are encouraging, while the total is disappointing. But that makes even more important the task that I and my hon. Friends in the Administration, together with every Member of Parliament, have in encouraging existing companies to expand and provide new jobs and in attracting new companies, such as those that were the subject of the excellent announcements just before and just after Christmas of 1,400 job creation opportunities from inward investment. That provides the future for the young people about whom the hon. Gentleman and I are so concerned.

Security

4. **Mr. Cyril D. Townsend:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on security in Northern Ireland.

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Michael Mates): Since my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State answered a similar question on 21 January there have been eight deaths as a result of the security situation in Northern Ireland, including five civilians, one member of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and two soldiers.

The Government are determined to secure the defeat of terrorism, from whichever side of the community it comes. The police, supported by the Army, are continuing their efforts to prevent and deter terrorist attacks and to bring those responsible for terrorist crimes before the courts.

Mr. Townsend: My hon. Friend will be aware of the concern in the House about the rising level of violence by those who, while calling themselves loyalists, seem to specialise in killing and maiming Her Majesty's subjects in Northern Ireland. What success are the security forces having in curtailing the activities of such vicious criminals and, more importantly, in successfully bringing them before the courts?

Mr. Mates: My hon. Friend is right. It is a worry that so-called loyalist terrorists are on the increase, that violence is on the increase and, worst of all, that random sectarian killing seems to be a feature of what comes from that side of the community. We are determined to root out the terrorists from whichever side of the divide they come. There is no difference in the determination of the Government and of the RUC to bring terrorists to justice, from whatever side of the community in Northern Ireland they come.

Mr. Molyneaux: Has the Minister seen the report in the *Belfast Telegraph* about the IRA ordering 40 young men to leave Dundalk or, as the IRA delicately put it, "face the consequences"? That comes on the eve of the Sinn Fein/IRA annual conference in Dundalk—which, of course, is those organisations' forward base. Do the Minister and the Secretary of State expect parties in the House to condemn that exclusion order as fiercely as they oppose the prevention of terrorism Acts?

Mr. Mates: Indeed, we have nothing but contempt for what the IRA stands for, for what it says and for all its works. The way in which it seeks to impose its own law in certain parts of Northern Ireland will be resisted as, I am perfectly certain, the Irish Government will wish to resist any attempt the IRA may make to take the place of the forces of law and order in the Republic of Ireland.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Is the Minister now in a position to make a full statement about the bomb discovered three weeks ago in the canteen of the Crumlin Road prison? Would he care to confirm or deny to the House that just before the bomb was found the canteen had been used by republican prisoners, that the security check had been made and had failed to discover the bomb, and that the bomb was actually discovered by an orderly shifting chairs in the canteen? Can he tell the House whether the security camera placed in the canteen after the previous bombing in 1991, in which a loyalist prisoner was killed, was in operation? Will he tell the House whether anyone has been charged with the planting of this bomb or of the previous bomb, which killed a loyalist prisoner?

Mr. Mates: There is no question that the incident was very serious, in that any amount of explosive, however small, that finds it way into any prison is a serious matter. However, it is important to point out to the hon. Gentleman that the device was not a bomb and was not capable of explosion. It was a very small piece of explosive with some form of electrical contact. To say that is not to undermine the seriousness of the situation, but the device was not a bomb.

Mr. McNamara: The Minister will be aware that the people of Northern Ireland must have confidence not only in the role of the security forces but in the Ministers responsible for dealing with them. Bearing that in mind, will he take the opportunity not only to agree with the Prime Minister that all who were killed on bloody Sunday were innocent, but to apologise for and correct the inaccuracies in the statement that he made on Radio Telefis Eireann? First, rubber batons were used in Derry on the same day, so the Army had methods of protecting themselves other than bullets. Secondly, the Minister said:

> "There would have been no murder of anyone if it hadn't been for the bloody riot organised by those very"

murderers.

In view of the Prime Minister's statement, will the Minister tell us which of the 14 dead had organised the "bloody riot" in Derry, of which there was later no evidence? Will he now give a full apology, not a fudged one, to say sorry for the extreme distress that he has caused—or are we to add this to his other clangers, such as the statements on Father Ryan and Coalisland? Should he not consider his position?

Mr. Mates: First, the extracts from which the hon. Gentleman has read came from an interview that I gave 14 months ago, on a different day and in a different context, when I was Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence and not a Minister. That part of my statement was taken out of context, but I said straight away—the next day—that those remarks were high on the list of things that I wished I had not said. I believe that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) has also said one or two things in the past that he has had cause to regret. I then made a statement in which I fully supported the letter that the Prime Minister wrote to the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), and I stand by what that letter said.

Terrorism

5. **Mr. Gallie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people were convicted of terrorist offences in Northern Ireland in 1992.

Mr. Mates: Last year, 404 people were charged with serious terrorist-related offences, including 34 with murder, and 63 with attempted murder; 354 people were convicted, including seven of murder and seven of attempted murder.

Mr. Gallie: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. How does the number of charges made compare with the number of incidents reported? Is he satisfied with the level of cross-border co-operation that he receives from the Irish Republic?

Mr. Mates: I am not sure that we have the statistics in the form for which my hon. Friend asks, but I will certainly look into that and, if we do, I shall write to him about them.

Cross-border co-operation is much better and continues to improve. The Anglo-Irish Agreement has been the major instrument in improving that co-operation. We are not satisfied, however, and we shall continue to do what we can to ensure that it gets even better.

Dr. Hendron: With regard to the brutal murders in 1988 of corporals Derek Howe and Derek Wood in Penny lane, Andersonstown, and the gross inconsistencies of the court decisions on those charged in connection with those murders, and bearing in mind that Patrick Kane, Sean Kelly and Michael Timmons were not present in Penny lane when the soldiers were shot, will the Secretary of State refer those cases and other associated ones to the Court of Appeal? The Secretary of State will be aware that relevant medical evidence relating to Patrick Kane was not used at the trial. I am aware that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) has already raised this matter.

Mr. Mates: As the hon. Gentleman knows, representations have been made to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State about the cases relating to the murder of those corporals. My right hon. and learned Friend is considering all of them and will then take whatever action he considers appropriate.

Mr. Bill Walker: When my hon. Friend discusses with his colleagues in government the conviction of terrorists, will he bring to their attention how essential the helicopter assets of the Royal Air Force and the Army are in catching the terrorists before they are convicted? We cannot trade off those helicopters for regiments of infantry; we need to have both.

Mr. Mates: My hon. Friend finds ever more ingenious ways of making his point. This is, of course, a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence and not for me. However, the contribution made by Army and RAF helicopters in Northern Ireland is of inestimable value in the fight against terrorism.

Mr. Trimble: Will the Minister also confirm that the helicopters took the film that enabled the courts to identify and convict the persons involved in the murder of the two army corporals, including Messrs. Kane, Kelly and Timmons, are a particularly valuable asset to the security forces? Will the Minister recommend to the Secretary of State that when he replies to the erroneous and misleading letter that he received from the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), he should explain carefully the distinctions, in law and in fact, which the courts drew carefully and accurately in that case?

Mr. Mates: I confirm that all the helicopter assets are of value; the way in which one can observe and take pictures of incidents is also particularly valuable in bringing convictions. The answer to the hon. Gentleman's final point is that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State will have heard what he said and will no doubt take it into account.

NHS Trusts

6. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many expressions of interest in trust status have been received from hospitals in the Belfast area.

Mr. Hanley: Belfast is part of the Eastern health and social services board area, in which all the units of management have expressed interest in attaining trust status.

Mr. Fabricant: That is good news for the people of Northern Ireland, but can my hon. Friend do anything to encourage hospitals and health management units in the north-west to apply for trust status? In encouraging them to do so, he might well point out the example of a trust in my own constituency of Mid-Staffordshire. The Mental Health Foundation has increased the number of psychiatric consultants fourfold and the number of community psychiatric nurses from 12 to 58 since becoming a trust.

Mr. Hanley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; the benefits of trust status are becoming more evident to all. In Northern Ireland, in the first wave there were three applications, of which one is now a trust; in the second wave there were 11 applications, nine of which are now proceeding; and in the third wave, which my noble Friend Lord Arran introduced recently, four applied and four have been granted. I do not believe that it is the Government's role to try to encourage trust status as such —*[Interruption.]*—because the advantages are apparent to all.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Does the Minister accept that four trusts were not able to be appointed because the necessary legislation was not in place? Does he appreciate that those seeking to implement trust status have difficulty doing so when the health and social services board interferes in the arrangements? I am thinking particularly of the City hospital in my constituency, where for several years a senior board official has been seeking to rubbish the Jubilee maternity hospital, which has been giving excellent service and to which GP fund holders are glad to refer people, rather than take the advice of the Eastern health and social services board, which has said, in effect, "We shall not purchase, although your quality and price are right."

Mr. Hanley: The hon. Gentleman's support for the Jubilee hospital is well known. Matters are still progressing on that front and the issue is still open for consultation. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the four community units of management to which he referred have been accepted in theory as trust while waiting for the legislation to be passed; I have every confidence that it will be passed and that those units of management will become trusts before the end of this year.

Mr. William O'Brien: How many representations has the Minister received expressing concern and fear about trust status applying to social services and hospitals in Belfast? Why is the Department afraid of obtaining views on the concept of trusts from people in Northern Ireland who work for and serve in the health and social services sector? Why is the Minister afraid of addressing the fundamental issues of trusts in Belfast in particular and in Northern Ireland in general, particularly as they apply to the social services?

Mr. Hanley: My noble Friend Lord Arran is certainly addressing the issue of trusts. Indeed, had the hon. Gentleman been listening more carefully earlier he would have heard that the record on the establishment on trust status in Northern Ireland is ever increasing; they are becoming more and more popular and not one trust that has been applied for has expressed any regrets. More than that, the level of complaints after a trust has been established has dwindled to almost nothing. In other words, fears are being exploited by Opposition Members, whereas the reality is benefits to patients, which is exactly what trust status is designed to achieved.

Industrial Productivity

7. **Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on Northern Ireland industrial productivity levels.

Mr. Atkins: Gross domestic product per employee in manufacturing industries in Northern Ireland in 1991 was £17,900. Over the five-year period, 1986 to 1991, manufacturing productivity in Northern Ireland increased by 18 per cent., which compares very well with the growth in manufacturing productivity of 19 per cent. for the United Kingdom as a whole over the same period.

Mr. Ross: Do not those very welcome figures indicate that, as manufacturing productivity improves in Northern Ireland, so Northern Ireland becomes a much better place for inward investment? Will the Minister do all that he possibly can to increase the productivity of the work force in Northern Ireland so as to attract more inward investment?

Mr. Atkins: The hon. Gentleman is entirely right. If we are to continue to seek foreign investors investing in Northern Ireland, as well as from other parts of Europe and the United Kingdom as a whole, we need to increase productivity to the sort of level that demonstrates that the work force is first rate, that the products made are first rate and that, all in all, Northern Ireland is the best place to invest in, for all the reasons that the hon. Gentleman mentions.

Mr. Bellingham: Does the Minister agree that good labour relations and inward investment play a key role in Northern Ireland's recovery? What representations has he received from business men in Northern Ireland about the effects of the social chapter on their businesses?

Mr. Atkins: I think it fair to say that the general consensus among business men involved in Northern Ireland activities will be that the social chapter is the disaster that we know it to be, and they recognise only too readily the contribution of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in ensuring that there was an opt-out from that disastrous policy, which, as the President of the European Commission has said time and again, has ensured that Great Britain and Northern Ireland is a paradise for foreign investment.

Irish Constitution

8. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he plans to raise the issue of articles 2 and 3 of the Irish constitution with Irish Ministers; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I met the new Irish Foreign Minister, Mr. Spring, on 22 January and also on 3 February. On both occasions, constitutional issues, including that issue, were among the subjects discussed.

I am glad that the Irish Government have said that they are willing to initiate and incorporate constitutional change in the context of an overall political settlement.

Mr. Barnes: Dick Spring has said that it would be easier to define a nation if it were one community on two islands, rather than two communities on one island. Would not the removal of articles 2 and 3 from the Irish constitution assist greatly in discussions between the two communities and therefore assist further that possible definition?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The hon. Gentleman well knows the areas in which articles 2 and 3 present real difficulty to the constitutional parties and the Government in reaching the objectives set out by my predecessor in March 1991. The talks, which continued during last year, achieved considerable success, but there is a long way to go. I believe that articles 2 and 3, among many other matters, call for very careful consideration in the future.

Mr. Peter Robinson: Will the Secretary of State tell the House in clear and simple terms: do he and the Government want Northern Ireland to remain an integral part of the United Kingdom?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I have made it clear, as have predecessor Administrations, that so long as the democratic will of the people living in Northern Ireland, clearly expressed, leads to their wishing to remain part of the United Kingdom, the Government wish them to remain part of the United Kingdom and, what is more, we shall honour the constitutional guarantee that has been given to them in that regard.

Mr. Hume: Does the Secretary of State agree that this is largely a propagandist issue and that the problem of Northern Ireland existed long before that constitution was introduced? Does he agree that it is normal that fundamental aspirations are included in the constitutions of most countries, but that there is no evidence of any description that articles 2 and 3 would be implemented by any form of coercion by any party in the south of Ireland? In your own constitution, the head of this state must be the head of a particular church, and bishops of that church have seats as of right in the House of Lords, but no one would argue, I think, in propaganda terms, that Britain is a sectarian society.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I shall not take up every facet of the hon. Gentleman's question. I agree with him that articles 2 and 3 in the Irish constitution have formed part of that constitution only in relatively modern times—since 1937. I agree with him also that the problems of Northern

Ireland have roots which go back a long way before that. That does not, however, deprive articles 2 and 3 of any substance or of any significance to the matters that all the main constitutional parties and the two Governments were addressing last year in the talks, which I hope will resume.

PRIME MINISTER

Havercroft

Q1. **Mr. Enright:** To ask the Prime Minister when he will pay an official visit to Havercroft.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): I am making plans for a series of visits to all parts of the country and hope to include Yorkshire among them.

Mr. Enright: Is the Prime Minister aware that miners from Havercroft, who have been blackmailed into taking redundancy payments, do not count among the 3 million unemployed? Is he further aware that if the pit at Grimesthorpe were to be closed, male unemployment in the area would be one in three? Will he today, therefore, guarantee the future of Grimesthorpe, not least because it is commercially profitable?

The Prime Minister: No one is blackmailed in the way the hon. Gentleman says. The position of Grimesthorpe, as with the other pits, will be covered in the review being undertaken by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

Engagements

Q2. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for 18 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Jones: Does not Britain need a national strategy to combat the evil of mass unemployment? When will the indecision, drift and the weakness come to an end? Has not the right hon. Gentleman's conduct of Her Majesty's Government in recent times been a disgrace? If he cannot give a lead to our nation, should he not go?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is well rehearsed, but not well informed. If he had been well informed, he would have known, for example, that in a recent speech in Athens the Leader of the Opposition admitted that unemployment was a problem not only in this country but right across Europe. If the right hon. and learned Gentleman recognises that, why cannot the hon. Gentleman?

Q3. **Mr. Oppenheim:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 18 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Oppenheim: Does my right hon. Friend agree that when it comes to the social chapter there can be no free ride, that such benefits have to be matched by increased productivity or they will add only to unemployment and that the best way to get sustainable long-term jobs is to continue with structural reforms, particularly improving education, rather than engaging in short-term bail-outs and subsidies for unsustainable industries? Would not policies like the social chapter, increased payroll tax, a statutory minimum wage and the repeal of trade union laws—all Labour policies—add to unemployment rather than improving the situation?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is entirely right about that. There is no purpose in the Opposition saying that they care about unemployment when they are committed to policies that will put up unemployment and keep it up. Until they drop their support for the social chapter, the minimum wage and windfall tax, they are in no position to lecture anyone about job losses.

Mr. John Smith: Does the Prime Minister appreciate that the country will never forget that it was his Government and his Chancellor of the Exchequer who told us that unemployment was a "price well worth paying"? On the day when unemployment has reached the tragic total of 3 million, will he now publicly repudiate that heartless approach?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. and learned Gentleman knows very well that we have set in place—[Hon. Members: "Answer!"] We have set in place to assist people who are unemployed a comprehensive system of schemes unmatched in the history of this country and unmatched elsewhere in Europe—[Hon. Members: "Answer the question."]—the training for work programme, the job clubs, the job—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I will not have hon. Members shouting down any other right hon. or hon. Member. I warn Members that I shall use the authority that this House has given if this continues.

The Prime Minister: I was trying to inform hon. Gentlemen, who were shouting out, of the assistance that has been put in place to help people who are currently without work to be trained and to get back in work, which I should have thought was what the right hon. and learned Gentleman and I would wish to see done. I repeat for his benefit: the training for work schemes, the job clubs, the job interview guarantees, the business start-up schemes, the job plan workshops, the restart courses—constitute an unprecedented amount of help to deal with a problem which exists in this country and in every country in Europe.

Mr. John Smith: Does the Prime Minister not appreciate that unemployment at this menacing level is not just a personal disaster for millions of honest and decent people who want to have the independence and dignity that employment can give them, but also an economic millstone around this country's neck? Does he not understand that uenmplopyment at this tragic level costs Britain £27,000 million per year and that we lose 780 million working days? Is that not economic madness as well as social tragedy?

The Prime Minister: Of course we appreciate that fact. That is why we are seeking, first, to help those who are unemployed, and also to create the circumstances to make sure that they have permanent, long-term, sustainable jobs in the future. We are determined to bring unemployment down, and we will—but with our policies, not with the lack of policies of Opposition Members. I repeat that we have put in place the most comprehensive training programmes ever to help unemployed people. We shall be introducing new training schemes with almost half a million new training and employment places in April. In terms of getting permanent, sustainable jobs, we have brought inflation down to its lowest level for 25 years, my right hon. Friend's autumn statement put in place further policies for growth, interest rates are at their lowest level for 15 years and retail sales are rising. Those are the facts which bring positive hope for the unemployed, not the empty rhetoric of the right hon. and learned Gentleman.

Mr. John Smith: If those schemes were of any value, if they were successful, and if the Prime Minister really cares about bringing down unemployment, why has he stood idly by and allowed it to rise in every month of his period of office? Is it not rather contemptible, on this tragic day, to be seeking to blame others and to abuse his opponents? Is it not time that he accepted the responsibilities of his office and did what the country desperately wants him to do—put bringing down unemployment at the top of our national agenda?

The Prime Minister: What the right hon. and learned Gentleman had to say at the outset of his remarks was very revealing: if, he said, these schemes are of value. Does that explain why the right hon. and learned Gentleman and his party have opposed every training measure that we have put in place for unemployed people? The facts are that the Government have put in place nearly 1 million training and employment opportunities this year, and we plan to increase them by half a million in April. I would find the right hon. and learned Gentleman's concern more convincing if he had just one decent economic policy to tackle unemployment. Instead, he has two bad policies. The first is the tax on excess profits: the old Labour party speaking again—they do not like profits, they want to penalise success, and they will never understand that profits fund investment and finance jobs. And now they want a training tax as well to put more people out of work. Perhaps the right hon. and learned Gentleman should have a word with his transport spokesman, who said of the minimum wage—*[Interruption.]* I know Opposition Members do not like it, but they had better listen. His transport spokesman said:

> "I knew the consequences were that there would be some shakeout, any silly fool knew that."

Madam Speaker: Has the Prime Minister completed his answer?

The Prime Minister: I sat down, Madam Speaker, because you were getting up. I will repeat the quote from the Opposition transport spokesman. *[Interruption.]* They do not like it, but they are going to get it. I repeat the quote from the shadow transport spokesman, who said of a national minimum wage:

> "I knew the consequences were that there would be some shakeout, any silly fool knew that."

It is a pity that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) did not know that and did not oppose a policy which would lose jobs.

Mr. Robert Banks: Has my right hon. Friend seen reports showing that not only is Nissan in Sunderland exporting cars to Japan, but Vauxhall is now exporting Astra cars to Japan? Is that not a remarkable turnround in the fortunes of British car manufacturers, good for jobs and good for exports?

The Prime Minister: It most certainly is. We all recall the state of the car industry in the 1970s. I wholeheartedly agree with my hon. Friend that this is welcome news for British car manufacturers, proving that they can compete with the world's best on quality, price and productivity both in this country and in exporting.

Mr. Ashdown *rose*——

Mr. Skinner: You bailed him out.

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) must resume his seat. Time is passing.

Mr. Ashdown: Why does the Prime Minister always use his time to tell us what the Opposition said instead of telling us what he will do? Last night President Clinton gave his country hope through strong leadership and a clear programme for renewal. Is it not fortunate that the Prime Minister does not have to make a state of the nation address because it is clear that if he did he would have noting to say, not even, it appears, "Sorry"?

The Prime Minister: If the right hon. Gentleman had listened, he would have heard a long list of action that the Government have taken. Since he did not listen, let me give him more information. The £2·5 billion spent on training measures is two and a half times as much as any previous Government spent. We had the package of measures in the autumn statement to boost the construction industry by releasing capital receipts, the assistance for manufacturing industry by introducing new capital allowances, and the extra help for exporters. The right hon. Gentleman is leader of his party. Where has he been that he knows none of this?

Mr. Lidington: Is my right hon. Friend aware that businesses in the Thames-Chiltern area are reporting increased exports to the middle east, the far east and north America? Does he agree that in a world economy which is becoming more and not less competitive, permanent jobs and prosperity will depend on the enterprise and hard work of businesses like those and not on the meddlesome bureaucracy and cheap answers proposed by Opposition parties?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is quite right. In a fiercely competitive world, it is only if we have the most competitive industries that we can look forward to job creation or to increasing prosperity. That is why it is necessary to get inflation down. That is why it has been necessary to get interest rates down and why the improvements in productivity which are becoming so remarkable are one of the best indications of our future prospects. They are good prospects as a result of the measures that we have taken and will continue to sustain.

Q4. **Mr. Trimble:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 18 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Trimble: I have here a letter from the Fair Employment Commission refusing assistance to one of my constituents with regard to his complaint that he had been discriminated against by the civil service. Incidentally, the letter is signed by the public servant who suggested recently that photographs of Her Majesty should not be displayed in a public building. The clear implication of this letter is that criteria, instead of being set objectively by reference to the nature of the job, should be manipulated in order to achieve the quota——

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must ask a question. We now have the background.

Mr. Trimble: The Fair Employment Commission described this manipulation as affording equality of opportunity. Does the Prime Minister agree that such criteria should be manipulated for the purpose of achieving the commission's job quota in every place of work?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman had let me see the letter, I should have been able to give him a detailed reply. If he does so, I will examine the letter and respond to him in detail. As I have not seen it, the hon. Gentleman cannot have expected a reply of any sort.

Mr. Simon Hughes: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that I take points of order after questions. This is a continuation of questions. Throughout most of the 20 years I have been here, this is the way it has been done, and I shall not change it now.

Business of the House

3.30 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): Will the Leader of the House state the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): Yes, Madam. The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 22 FEBRUARY—European Communities (Amendment) Bill: progress in Committee, 12th day.

TUESDAY 23 FEBRUARY—Debate on international peacekeeping, on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

WEDNESDAY 24 FEBRUARY—Debate on the Army, on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

THURSDAY 25 FEBRUARY—European Communities (Amendment) Bill: progress in Committee, 13th day.

FRIDAY 26 FEBRUARY—Private Members' motions.

MONDAY 29 FEBRUARY—Debate on Welsh affairs, on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committee A will meet on Wednesday 24 February at 10.30 am to consider European Community Documents No. 9482/91 and 9284/92 relating to minimum health and safety requirements for work on board fishing vessels.

[Wednesday 24 February:

European Standing Committee A: Relevant European Community documents—9482/91 and 9284/92, health and safety on board fishing vessels; relevant report of the European Legislation Committee—HC 24-ix (1991-92), Hc 79-i (1992-93), HC 79-xi (1992-93).]

Mrs. Beckett: I thank the Lord President for his statement. Does he realise that two aspects of it will arouse considerable resentment in all parts of the House?

First, arranging debates on the Maastricht Bill for Monday and Thursday is a device transparently designed not to facilitate scrutiny but to evade it, as it may well mean that key debates, and possibly key votes, will take place in the early hours of Friday morning, which is not for the convenience of anyone in the House.

Secondly, where is the Education Bill? *[Interruption.]* As the right hon. Gentleman may not have heard that question, I shall repeat it: where is the Education Bill? The right hon. Gentleman will vividly recall that the Government gave the excuse that they had to guillotine that Bill out of Committee so that it could be back in the House no later than next week. It could have had an extra week in Committee, affording many additional hours of scrutiny—which, heaven knows, it needs. Why will it not be before us next week? Is it to enable us to have one-line business between the two Maastricht days?

In view of the increasing volume of press reporting about the coal industry, can the Lord President give us any indication of when we may expect a White Paper and a debate on that issue?

I want now to put to the Leader of the House a question that I have put in previous weeks and will continue to put until he grants us the necessary debate: when may we have a statement from the Home Secretary about the crime wave in this country? There is increasing concern about this matter. The Home Secretary is widely rumoured to have dramatic and far-reaching plans for reorganisation of the police, to take control into the hands of the Government. That will inspire no one with greater confidence. It is important that we have a statement on this matter and on public expenditure as soon as possible.

Mr. Newton: First, despite the rather abrasive tone of some of the right hon. Lady's questions, I congratulate her on her first appearance with that appellation at the Dispatch Box.

Secondly, in a slightly more abrasive mode myself, I should say that the notion that there should be resentment at a perfectly normal use of parliamentary time to discuss an important Bill is absurd. The Education Bill was allowed a considerable length of time in Committee, no understanding was entered into that it would be debated immediately on Report, and the two debates that are scheduled for the middle of next week are debates that the right hon. Lady has been demanding for weeks.

As for debates on coal, the police and the Home Office, I am afraid that I have nothing to add to what I have said to the right hon. Lady in previous weeks.

Mr. John Biffen (Shropshire, North): The next time that the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), the deputy Leader of the Opposition, shows some signs of wilting before the requirements of proper scrutiny of the European Communities (Amendment) Bill, will my right hon. Friend remind her that the Committee and Report stages of Gladstone's Home Rule Bill took 82 days, which gives us some idea of the parliamentary requirements of scrutiny of these affairs?

In that context, the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on Monday about amendment No. 27 to the European Communities (Amendmemnt) Bill have excited considerable interest in the House and outside, and raise matters of proper parliamentary concern that go far wider than Maastricht. It would be unsatisfactory if the House proceeded, technically and formally, to vote upon amendment No. 27 without having a further chance to consider and debate it in the light of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary's remarks.

Mr. Newton: I thank my right hon. Friend for the first part of his observations, which, without exciting expectations of 82 days on the Bill, I regard as a perfectly proper recognition of the importance of proper scrutiny by the House, whether on Mondays, Thursdays or other days, of the European Communities (Amendment) Bill. My right hon. Friend will understand that the latter point he raised is properly one for the Chairman of Ways and Means and not for me.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Having regard to the widespread concern north and south of the border at the proposed cuts in public expenditure on civil legal aid, and also to the news that the appropriate Select Committee is now undertaking a quick report in order to investigate the matter, will the Leader of the House use his good offices to bring the appropriate Home Office Minister to the House to make a statement delaying the introduction of the proposed changes until the Select Committee has had a chance to report?

Mr. Newton: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman the specific undertaking he seeks, but he will know that a Scottish Office Minister has commented on legal aid in Scotland, a matter which I would expect to be debated in the appropriate way in due course, as I told the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing).

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): As senior Ministers inadvertently but consistently misled the public on the impact of amendment No. 27 on the imposition of the social chapter on the United Kingdom, will the Leader of the House assure us that, before the debates on Monday and Thursday, all Ministers will be circulated with a brief paper by the Foreign Secretary describing the exact impact of the amendments that we are debating?

Mr. Newton: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made it clear in his statement on Monday that my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General or another legal officer would be here on appropriate occasions to advise the House if need be.

Ms. Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Is the Lord President aware of early-day motion No. 1412 in my name?

[That this House is appalled to discover that the health needs of Londoners are being decided by a Secretary of State who is unaware that the Royal Free Medical School and the Royal Free Hospital, albeit mutually supportive and inter-dependent, are separate establishments, each with its own unique and proud history of service to their community: and demands both an apology by the Right honourable Lady and a moratorium on any further changes in London's health provision and training until she has fully informed herself of what those needs and provisions really are and who provides them.]

In order to facilitate those London Members who would be only too happy to furnish the right hon. Lady with the relevant information, would he be good enough to find time for a full debate on the subject at the earliest possible opportunity?

Mr. Newton: I note the hon. Lady's specific request. On the first part of her observations, she will know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and my hon. Friend the Minister for Health conducted a wide range of consultations between the publication of the Tomlinson report and the statement that was made on Tuesday. Of course, decisions on many of the matters arising from that report can only follow extensive consultation under statutory procedures, which give everyone the opportunity to have their say.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): When will the House have an opportunity to debate local government corruption? We constantly hear reports from Lambeth, Hackney, and indeed from Monklands, and from Waltham Forest, and so on. Those matters touch members of the public more than many other matters we discuss here. As councils are about to set their council tax bills, surely it is about time that this matter got the widest possible airing.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Newton: I note my hon. Friend's request, and the substantial support for it, at least on this side of the House. However, I do not think that I can promise in future a further extension of the fairly large opportunities for debating local government matters that have occurred in recent weeks.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): When are we likely to have a debate on the effect of the Government's employment legislation, particularly on the manufacturing sector? Is he aware that, yesterday, Timex in Dundee paid off 300 skilled and semi-skilled workers, despite the fact that they went through the proper ballot procedures laid down by the Government? Workers have anxiously been trying to get back into work, but the management have arbitrarily decided to pay them off. Can the Leader of the House arrange time for us to discuss the impact of changes in employment legislation on the manufacturing industry?

Mr. Newton: I can only sensibly say to the hon. Gentleman that employment legislation has of course been under debate in the past two days.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Will the Leader of the House find time in the very near future for a debate on education? Such an opportunity would provide us with the chance to point out to people in this country that we enjoy grammar schools, city technology colleges, independent schools, Church schools, grant-maintained schools and a whole range of other choices for parents and pupils because of the policies of the Government and despite the wishes of the Opposition?

Mr. Newton: I advert to the request of the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), who is clearly keen to debate the remaining stages of the Education Bill. I certainly envisage that that will not be long delayed, and it will give my hon. Friend the perfect opportunity to make the important point that he has just raised.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): Will the Leader of the House ask the Home Secretary to give the House a statement on what he is trying to do about the problem of missing persons in the United Kingdom? Is he aware that there are 43,000 runaways each year? Happily, most return home without having been missing for a long time?

Is he aware that it is the second anniversary of the disappearance of my constituent Vicky Hamilton, who is still untraced? Tragically, her mother died in January without knowing what had happened to her daughter. Is he aware of the concern expressed by the police in Lothian because there is no national bureau or database for missing persons? That is a major problem. Will he ask the Home Secretary to explain when he will do something to set up such a database?

Mr. Newton: I will certainly communicate that request to my right hon. and learned Friend.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): In the light of the recent announcement that Jaguar is to spend no less than £500 million on car making in Coventry, and that Lemmerz, the German wheel-making company, is to transfer its entire heavy wheel-making facilities to my constituency, can we have a debate on engineering, which would give us the opportunity not only to describe how far the investing community throughout the world has confidence in British engineering, but also to discuss the disastrous effects that the social chapter would have on competitiveness in engineering and other industries?

Mr. Newton: Somewhat to my regret, I cannot promise my hon. Friend precisely the debate that he wants. However, we are close to extensive debates on the economy and related matters following the Budget, and it may be that they will provide my hon. Friend with the opportunity he seeks.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I press upon the Leader of the House the need for the Attorney-General to

[Mr. David Winnick]

make a statement on the Maastricht Bill not at some vague future time, but as soon as the Committee sits again next Monday. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that there is bound to be concern about conflicting advice? As the House and the Committee have already been misled once, what confidence can right hon. and hon. Members have in any legal opinion given by Ministers on future occasions, when it is quite likely that we will be told in a week or a fortnight that it was all a mistake? The Attorney-General should come to the Committee early on Monday and make a statement—that should be the first item of business.

Mr. Newton: I am not in a position, and nor would I wish, to add to my earlier remarks and those of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on Monday. I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman will find ways of raising those matters when the Committee resumes on Monday.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his successful timetabling of major recent Bills in Committee. Will he find time for a debate on the Jopling proposals on sittings of the House?

Mr. Newton: I have told the House once or twice recently that the prospect of progress with the Jopling proposals depends on our discussions through the usual channels. Those are complex matters, but I hope that we shall make progress—and I know that the right hon. Member for Derby, South does, too.

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): Will the Leader of the House find time next week to debate the serious implications of a report in today's *Birmingham Post* to the effect that the British receivers of Leyland-DAF told 200 people working at the Birmingham van factory that Renault will take them over and employ them for five months, on condition that they sign away all their rights under employment protection legislation enacted by the House? Is that not especially important, given that the President of the Board of Trade told the House that he keeps in close touch with the receiver? It seems Government policy not only to deny the benefits of the social chapter to this country's working people but to connive at an attempt by foreign companies to tear up existing Acts of Parliament.

Mr. Newton: Not having had the advantage of reading that report in the important regional newspaper to which the hon. Gentleman referred, it would be wrong for me to comment—but I will bring his remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

Mr. Matthew Carrington (Fulham): Will my right hon. Friend urgently arrange a debate on the Government's response to Professor Tomlinson's report on health care in London? The House needs an opportunity to debate the methodological errors that Professor Tomlinson made, which led him to conclude that London—which has some of the longest hospital waiting lists in the country—still has too many acute hospital beds. That led to significant errors in the Government's response.

Mr. Newton: I cannot give my hon. Friend that undertaking, but I note his request and that made earlier by the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms. Jackson). I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the fact that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health will be in the House to answer oral questions on Tuesday.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): May we have a debate at long last on the two outstanding reports from the Select Committee on Members' Interests? I refer to those on the register of commercial lobbying organisations and on clarifying the registering of Members' interests. As the Leader of the House knows, there has been confusion in the minds of the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Minister of Agriculture about what should or should not be registered. I hope that the Leader of the House and the Government are not postponing a debate simply because they endorse the view that Conservative Members should be put out to hire.

Mr. Newton: I assure the hon. Gentleman that there is no foundation for his concluding remarks. As to his request for a debate, and as I have told the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) several times in recent weeks, I have discussed with the Chairman of the Select Committee how we might proceed, but I cannot say this afternoon precisely when a debate will be held.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): My right hon. Friend may recall an horrific case in my constituency in 1987, when Olympic marksman Alan Bray was robbed in his shop, tied up, doused in petrol and set on fire. Is my right hon. Friend aware that Michael Patrick, the criminal responsible for that, has been released after——

Madam Speaker: Order. I would be obliged if the hon. Gentleman would tell me how his question relates to next week's business. That is what I am interested in.

Mr. Tredinnick: It relates to next week's business in that I request my right hon. Friend to arrange a debate on the activities of the Parole Board. The investigating officer in the case at the time has written to me to say that Michael Patrick's release after five years is not in the public interest. It goes against the advice given to the Parole Board. Is my right hon. Friend aware that a large proportion of my constituents are up in arms about this man's release? With respect, I want to know what my right hon. Friend proposes to do about it.

Mr. Newton: I think that my hon. Friend will understand that it would be inappropriate for me to make any comment on the case without notice. Clearly, however, he would like me to bring his remarks to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary—including his request for a debate—and I undertake to do so.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): When may we have a debate on the connection between mass unemployment and the industrial relations climate? As the Leader of the House has heard, the management of Timex in Dundee yesterday sacked more than 300 of its workers for committing the crime of standing by negotiated agreements and exercising their rights under the present Government's trade union legislation.

May we have an early debate about that? If the Government do nothing about such management tactics —if they simply sit back while that management recruits replacements for its workers from the ranks of the three million unemployed—no one will ever believe them again when they say that they care about the unemployed.

Everyone will understand that mass unemployment lies at the heart of the Government's strategy for driving down workers' wages and conditions.

Mr. Newton: I do not for a moment accept the thrust of the last part of the hon. Gentleman's question. As for the first part, as I said a few moments ago to the hon. Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross), we have been debating such matters for the past two days.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): May I support the call by my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) for a debate on education next week, for the additional purpose of finding out what contribution schools and teachers can make to help children avoid becoming sucked into juvenile crime? That is of great concern to the House. In such a debate, should we not consider whether teachers have enough sanctions against indisciplined children, and perhaps consider the reintroduction of moderate and reasonable corporal punishment for the most serious offences—including the occasional six of the best?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend will know that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is considering matters relating to juvenile offenders, but they are slightly wide of my hon. Friend's points about education and discipline in schools. Let me point him in the direction of the remaining stages of the Education Bill, which—as I have said twice—I do not expect to be long delayed.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I thank the Lord President for confirming that the regulations pertaining to civil legal aid in Scotland will require the affirmative procedure in the House of Commons. May I also ask him to consider the matter critical, in the light of parliamentary replies given yesterday which suggested that advice and assistance would be given some concessions but that eligibility for legal aid would not?

In deciding when to table the motions, will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that the regulations are not debated at the tail end of a busy day, and that the debate is not restricted to an hour and a half? May we have a minimum of half a day's debate, and preferably a full day's debate? The regulations are critical to many people in our society.

Mr. Newton: I take note of the hon. Lady's request. As she knows, the arrangements for business of that kind are normally subject to discussion through the usual channels.

To avoid any possible misunderstanding, let me clarify what I said in my letter to the hon. Lady yesterday. I said that "a number" of the sets of regulations were subject to the affirmative resolution procedure. That, however, is merely a small point of clarification.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): I would not wish to set a precedent by asking a question about next week's business, but I intend to do so. Can my right hon. Friend tell me what exactly the international peacekeeping debate will involve? Shall we be able to talk about naval matters? We consistently have single-service debates—I am very grateful for the one on the Army which is to take place the following day—but we cannot often talk about the full strategic defence issues, because the rules of order prevent us from crossing the boundary, so to speak, into multi-force issues. I should be grateful for guidance from the Leader of the House.

Mr. Newton: I am genuinely grateful to my hon. Friend, in a way that is not always the case when one says that, for making quite an important point, in my view, about the way in which we sometimes discuss matters in the House. It has not proved possible, for various reasons which perhaps I had better not go into, to achieve precisely what I wanted on that occasion, but it is certainly my understanding—subject to your guidance, Madam Speaker—that a debate on international peacekeeping would make possible a range of very wide observations, and certainly could embrace any operations in which any of our armed forces are involved. I should also point out that the debate will be opened by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the Leader of the House reverse his opinion about the need for a debate on mass unemployment next week, bearing in mind the fact that the Government could save 300,000 jobs at a stroke by ensuring that the 100,000 local government job cuts are not carried out, that the 100,000 job cuts associated with the pit closures are not carried out and that the 100,000 job cuts associated with the hospitals are not carried out?

If the right hon. Gentleman says that there is no time for such a debate, he should get rid of those tinpot Maastricht debates that are due to take place next week. The British people wonder why this palace of varieties is debating this tinpot Common Market rubbish when it should be debating mass unemployment and that pile of human misery, of people without work.

Mr. Newton: Three points, I think. First, given the extent to which jobs in this country depend upon our trade with Europe, the hon. Gentleman's last point is a long way from reality. Secondly, to answer the first part of his question, if we went down the path that he implicitly advocates, the burdens on British industry through extra taxes would certainly cost more jobs than any that would be created. Thirdly, on his question about a debate, I have already adverted to the fact that we shall be having an extensive economic debate within a matter of weeks.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that I at least am delighted with the first four days of next week? The topics listed for debate are all ones in which I have an interest. I hope that I shall have an opportunity to contribute. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that on Tuesday, when we debate peacekeeping, and on Wednesday, when we debate the Army, it will be in order to raise matters concerning the Royal Air Force where it is directly involved in peacekeeping and support for the Army?

Mr. Newton: Again I am in danger, Madam Speaker, of treading on your toes, but I should have thought that that is highly likely, although it might be a bit more difficult on Wednesday. As to the general flavour of my hon. Friend's remarks, I can only say that I look forward to his contributions on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): In order to show that this House is in tune with the real concerns of the nation, can I make a suggestion about next week's business: have the two days on Maastricht but make them Saturday and Sunday, and use the two spare days to debate the proposition that work is the foundation of human endeavour and well-being, and that people's capacity and willingness to work is a nation's greatest

[Mr. Jeff Rooker]

asset? We should then be able to discuss the immorality of this Government in dismissing that proposition out of hand.

Mr. Newton: For a moment, I was tempted to try some light-hearted response to the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, but he knows that he is someone for whom I have considerable respect. I understand why he made the point, although I do not agree with the thrust of his remarks. All I would do is reiterate what was clear in everything that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said at Question Time: that the Government attach great importance to getting people back into work, but that they have a difference of opinion with those on the Opposition Front Bench as to how that is best done.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Will my right hon. Friend find time next week for a debate on tourism? Is he aware that it is now some five years since our last debate on tourism? Is he further aware that the industry is in considerable difficulty? It is hampered by daft regulations. One which is enforced by all hoteliers in Torbay is that guests are no longer allowed to take their own electrical appliances into their rooms. That means no hair dryers or electric shavers. That is the type of daft regulation which handicaps our industry. It is high time we had an opportunity to bring those matters to the attention of the House.

Mr. Newton: I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment will note the particular point that my hon. Friend embraces in his question. On the matter of a debate on tourism, I can go a little further than last week and the week before. I am actively looking for an opportunity for such a debate, but I cannot give a specific undertaking at present about precisely when it will be.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Is the Leader of the House aware that the announcement that there will be no news in next week's business about the future of British coal miners will be deeply disappointing to thousands of miners and their families? As the livelihood of 2,000 miners in my constituency is to end at the end of March and we shall be in March before an announcement has been made, could we have a statement? *[Interruption.]* I do not know why people are grinning about this issue when 2,000 families are being added to the thousands of other unemployed in my constituency.

Could we have a statement next week from the Department of Trade and Industry to remove the speculation and leaks in the national press which suggest that there is a form of psychological warfare against some of the finest people that there have ever been in Britain?

Mr. Newton: I can only reiterate what I said several times both earlier today and on other occasions. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade will make a statement following his review, which needs to be thoroughly and carefully carried out, as soon as he can do so.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): Will there be an opportunity in any debate next week to discuss the relevance of President Clinton's policies to Britain and British politics? As the President's policies include making student loans repayable, introducing competition into public health care, tax cuts for the middle classes and even capital punishment, some of us on the Conservative Benches are rather surprised that those on the Labour and Liberal Front Benches seem so pathetically taken with President Clinton's policies. Is this a case of them genuinely revising their policies, or are they playing their old game of jumping on any passing bandwagon?

Madam Speaker: Order. I would be much obliged if Members would not make statements about their opinions. They should ask questions about future business of the House. Such statements delay other Members asking direct questions. I can only call all Members if one short direct question is asked, and there are short answers, please.

Mr. Newton: The short answer to my hon. Friend, despite the fact that I have considerable sympathy with the general purport of his remarks, is that the opportunity for developing those points will most likely arise in the Budget debate to which I have referred several times.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Can we have an early debate on the economy? Is it not strangely ironic that the Labour party was attacked over 17 years about the role of the International Monetary Fund in our affairs in 1976, yet the IMF is now issuing instructions and making demands of the Government that they cut public expenditure and reduce the public sector borrowing requirement?

Mr. Newton: I see absolutely no parallel between the comments from the IMF and the position which the Labour Government got into in the autumn of 1976, when they had an IMF team here, in effect running the country.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, if the Government deny the House a further and separate debate on amendment No. 27, the Government will add to their reputation for being crude and authoritarian towards individual Members and will demonstrate that they are cavalier and careless with the House? It will further demonstrate that the sovereignty of the British people cannot be safeguarded by parliamentary democracy. The only way in which the rights not of the House but of the British people can be safeguarded is by a referendum.

Mr. Newton: I do not, of course, agree with my hon. Friend. Several other amendments which will be discussed fall into the same category of amendments which the Government do not wish to see passed but which would not affect the capacity to ratify the treaty.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Will the Leader of the House consider making a statement next week on religious tolerance in the House of Commons? Is he aware that my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) is delighted that the Crypt will be available for his forthcoming wedding, but dismayed to learn that the Catholic exchange of wedding vows is not allowed to take place there? Will the right hon. Gentleman use his good offices to ensure that that apparent religious intolerance is removed, thereby demonstrating that the House of Commons is firmly part of a multi-faith Britain?

Mr. Newton: I shall certainly undertake to look into that matter and establish how it can best be further considered.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): May we have an early debate on the tragic plight of terminally ill children? Is the Leader of the House aware of the cruel rule whereby, while hospices for adults receive nearly half their funding from national health services, hospices for children get none? The rule was revealed by the Rainbow organisation in my constituency. If we cannot have a debate on the subject, will the right hon. Gentleman undertake to ask the Secretary of State for Health whether she will consider making a statement to the House?

Mr. Newton: Perhaps it would be most sensible for me to draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the fact that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health is due to answer questions in the House next Tuesday. He may like to try to raise the subject with her then—but of course, I shall draw what he has said today to my right hon. Friend's attention.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): The fact that we have heard several expressions of concern about the likely impact of the social chapter on the British economy means that it is possible that the House may not have understood or appreciated the full import of Monday's statement. Might it not therefore be a good idea to have a day's debate on the statement next week?

Mr. Newton: I am not sure that I entirely follow my hon. Friend's remarks. In any event, it is clear from what has transpired already, both now and on other occasions, that many such points are likely to be raised next Monday. I would not wish to predict the answers that may then be given.

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): May I press the Leader of the House again to reconsider the prospect of an early debate or a statement on the coal industry—for the sake of the future not only of the 30,000 miners involved, but of the mining manufacturing and engineering companies? In addition, we are also awaiting a statement on mineral planning guidance note No. 3, and on the assisted areas arrangements. Those are all tied in with the response on the coal industry.

Mr. Newton: I understand the hon. Gentleman's anxiety for a statement, but, as I said in response to an earlier question, it is clearly important that the Government's review should be thoroughly conducted. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade will make a statement as soon as he can, and I am not sure that much would be gained by some sort of holding statement, which is what the hon. Gentleman appears to be requesting.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Will the Leader of the House use his great influence with his Front-Bench colleagues to persuade them to concentrate and focus next Tuesday's debate on the subject of the letter signed by two recent former ambassadors to the United Nations which appeared in *The Times* this week? The letter called on Britain to support a comprehensive international ban on the testing of nuclear weapons. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that Russia, the United States Congress and France have all agreed to support such a ban? Unless Britain takes such a decision, we could well be the last country in the whole world to continue to test nuclear weapons—a wasteful, costly, dangerous and polluting practice.

Mr. Newton: I am not sure whether comments on such matters could be squeezed into order on Tuesday or Wednesday next week, Madam Speaker. At any rate, I shall draw the hon. Gentleman's comments to the attention of the Foreign Secretary and others concerned.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): Following the Prime Minister's statement last week on royal taxation, is there not a case for an early debate on that important matter? Is the Leader of the House aware that Prince Edward told my local paper, the *Lancashire Evening Telegraph*, that speculation about the extent of royal wealth, to the tune of £6·5 billion, was "absolute crap". Is there not a case for an urgent debate to shed light on the true extent of royal finances?

Mr. Newton: I am afraid that I have not had the advantage of reading the *Lancashire Evening Telegraph*. I believe that one thing that is probably quite strongly felt by hon. Members on both sides of the House, whatever their views about other aspects of the matter, is that members of the royal family are as entitled as anyone else to privacy in relation to their tax affairs.

Points of Order

4.9 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. A moment ago, you were good enough to say, as you have said before, that you can call all hon. Members only if short questions are followed by short answers. You were obviously in some difficulty during Prime Minister's Question Time, which we all understood, because the Prime Minister gave an enormously long answer——

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): A considered one.

Mr. Hughes: Yes, a considered, prepared answer, which was read out. Perhaps you will be kind enough, Madam Speaker, to call for the tape of Question Time to see how long it took to give that answer; it certainly took well over one minute, if not two.

"Erskine May" obviously allows Ministers to read answers. I should like to preface my remarks by reading a short quote from page 295:

> "An answer should be confined to the points contained in the question, with such explanation only as renders the answer intelligible"—

that would give you, Madam Speaker, an opportunity to intervene quite often—

> "though a certain latitude is permitted to Ministers of the Crown".

Then a footnote says:

> "For example, the rules governing the reading out of material and quotations from speeches at question time do not apply to Ministerial replies."

May I ask you to consider the general issue whether the reading of answers by those on the Front Bench has gone beyond a quote from a speech or a press release and become a new form of question and answer?

In due time, will you say something to the House, Madam Speaker, that will mean that we can do what you want us to do, so that we can get through many more questions and answers? Above all, we should have the opportunity to question the Prime Minister and other Ministers and hear their answers and not those of civil servants, scriptwriters or Tory central office. I hope that such a change would improve proceedings. At an appropriate moment, I ask you to make an announcement, in the presence and hearing of the Prime Minister and other Ministers on the Front Bench.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: If it is a further point of order, I shall hear the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis), and then I shall take the point of order from the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett).

Mr. Bowis: I too have heard your requests, Madam Speaker, for shorter speeches and questions. I suffered for the third time today of having a question on the list for Prime Minister's questions, but it was not reached because we did not get past No. 4. Excellent as my right hon. Friend's answer was—I enjoyed hearing it, as we all did—and following the suggestion of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), would you consider looking at the number of times on which the Leader of the Opposition can rephrase his question having got it wrong the first time? When it is necessary for him to have three bites at the cherry, it may be an occasion for you to have a stopwatch and to add a bit of injury time so that we can get further down the list of questions.

Mr. Bennett: Would you consider, Madam Speaker, not just the points that have just been made, but your comment to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey that you would take his original point of order at the end of business questions?

When you and I first entered the House, it was fairly common for points of order to be raised when the incident in question actually happened. I believe that "Erskine May" suggests that one should raise the matter at the earliest opportunity. I am well aware that there was some abuse of the procedure, when people tried to use points of order to rephrase their questions or to put new questions. Therefore, it became the tendency for the Speaker to say, "Can it not wait until the end?" It became the convention for people to wait until the end of business questions, wherever possible, to raise their point of order.

I thought that you were now almost suggesting, Madam Speaker, that it was impossible for hon. Members to raise points of order during Question Time. I suggest——

Madam Speaker: What is the point of order?

Mr. Bennett: There is a danger in that tendency. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey had a valid, immediate point of order that could be answered only by taking it during Prime Minister's Question Time, because the Prime Minister was abusing his rights to answer those questions.

I suggest, Madam Speaker, that, if you are not prepared on occasion to accept points of order at the instant they occur, hon. Members will have to look for other means of redress. One such means is shouting, which you and I deplore. There are other procedures, such as "I spy strangers." I suggest that, sparingly, it might be better—as I say, very occasionally, as on this occasion—to take a point of order at the moment when the incident occurs during Question Time, rather than insist on it being left till the end.

Madam Speaker: I have a point of order from the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond).

Mr. Salmond: You, Madam Speaker, are not responsible for speakers being long-winded. The most succinct way for me to put my point might be to say that, if the length of the Prime Minister's answers are becoming such as to preclude the asking of Prime Minister's questions, that must constitute an abuse.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. As it was decided some time ago that only 10 questions to the Prime Minister should appear on the Order Paper, do you think it would be a good idea to change the system to oblige the Prime Minister to answer the 10 questions? If he took extra time to answer them, that would be his problem, but he would have to get through the 10. That would ensure hon. Members whose names had been drawn out of the ballot would have a chance to ask their questions. By that means, a Prime Minister could not filibuster. To help in that process, Ministers might be instructed not to use civil service briefs. They should have to answer questions and deal with matters in the way we on the Back Benches have to operate, in an extemporaneous fashion.

Madam Speaker: For a start, the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) might like to raise the subject of his point of order with the Leader of the Opposition.

The House is well aware of my concern to get through the Order Paper. I appreciate the disappointment felt by hon. Members whose questions appear on the Order Paper, particularly at Prime Minister's Question Time, but are not reached.

As the hon.Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) is aware, I have no control over the length of answers. From time to time I appeal to hon. Members for short questions and answers so that we might make progress.

At the time when the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey first raised his point of order, nothing irregular had happened: there had been no breach of our Standing Orders or usual procedures. I had an idea of the subject about which he wished to raise a point of order, but there was no breach at that time.

I draw to his attention and that of the House a ruling given by the then Speaker in 1987, when he said that he proposed

> "to revert to the well-tried practice of earlier times and to take points of order, except on any matters needing my immediate intervention, such as breaches of the sub judice rule, or for short notifications by a dissatisfied Member that he intends to raise a certain matter on the Adjournment, in their proper place, which is after all proceedings on private notice questions, statements and Standing Order No. 20 applications".—*[Official Report*, 12 February 1987; Vol. 110, c. 459-460.]

That is why points of order are taken at the end of Question Time, otherwise there would not be much time for hon. Members to ask questions.

I appreciate, and share, the concern of the House. We are all anxious to make our views known and to receive good and speedy responses. I shall reflect on the points that have been put to me today.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I am grateful for that ruling, Madam Speaker. Will you consider whether the phrase about a certain latitude being allowed to Ministers will eventually require some direction and guidance from you? Otherwise, in theory, it would be in order for a Minister to spend 10 minutes reading from a press release when giving an answer.

Madam Speaker: I hope that the House will allow me to reflect on the matter and to look into all the points that have been put to me.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments &c.).

MEDICINES CONTROL AGENCY

That the draft Medicines Control Agency Trading Fund Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Foreign Compensation (Amendment) Bill *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

4.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd:) I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The House has before it a short technical Bill to amend the Foreign Compensation Act 1950. The Bill received its Second and Third Readings in the other place on 5 November and 3 December 1992. It enables the Foreign Compensation Commission to act in those cases where Her Majesty's Government receive or expect to receive compensation for losses overseas from or through an international organisation or tribunal.

The key reason for the Bill is to cope with claims against Iraq as a result of its unlawful invasion and occupation of Kuwait in August 1990. As an independent statutory quasi-judicial body, the Foreign Compensation Commission is able to bring special administrative and legal skills into the determination of individual claims that the Government have espoused and into the equitable disbursement of any funds received in settlement. However, as the explanatory memorandum to the Bill explains, the Foreign Compensation Commission may be empowered to act only where the Government enter into an agreement under which compensation is to be paid by another country, or in anticipation of such an agreement.

When the Foreign Compensation Act was passed in 1950, it was not anticipated that there would be a situation in which compensation would flow through an international organisation or tribunal. We now face that very situation, as a consequence of Iraq's unlawful invasion and occupation of Kuwait. It is for that reason that the Bill comes before the House. It replaces section 3 of the 1950 Act with a new section which will enable Her Majesty to provide, by Order in Council, for the Foreign Compensation Commission to act in circumstances in which the Government receive compensation paid by another country or by an international organisation or tribunal.

Provision for the commission to act will also be possible where receipt of such compensation is contemplated. There will no longer be a requirement that an agreement with another country must be concluded or contemplated before provision is made for the Compensation Commission to act. Nor will compensation have to be paid directly by another country.

I need to explain how the claims following the Iraqi war are being handled, in order to explain the practical effect of the amendment. Under the provisions of Security Council resolution 687 of 1991, the Security Council established the United Nations Compensation Commission and a compensation fund and that new United Nations body is mandated by resolution 687 to receive claims for damage or injury to individuals, Governments or corporations as a result of Iraq's unlawful invasion and occupation of Kuwait.

[Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd]

The policy-making body of the new United Nations commission is the governing council, which has the same membership as the Security Council. Since July 1991, it has drawn up the detailed criteria for eligible claims and claimants, and established the commission's procedures. Claimants submit claims to their Governments who forward them to the United Nations Compensation Commission. The commissioners will recommend to the governing council allocations of compensation to Governments. Governments will then distribute compensation between their claimants.

While the majority of claims will be for fixed amounts under expedited procedures, we cannot be certain whether the commission will nominate specific amounts for individual claimants or companies in every other case, or whether there will ever be occasions when Governments are given overall sums to distribute between their claimants. Particularly in the case of large or complex claims, the Government will need to be prepared to adjudicate claims and decide on the distribution of compensation. Amending the Foreign Compensation Act in the way proposed will provide us with the appropriate means to do that, by authorising the Foreign Compensation Commission to undertake the task.

Other Governments are making similar arrangements and I trust that the Bill will commend itself to the House.

4.23 pm

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): I welcome the Bill. I am sure that the entire House—there are numerous Members in the Chamber—will agree that it is uncontentious. It will agree also, I am sure, that it was right in the situation in which the Government found themselves—especially in relation to collecting information on compensation claims and distributing payments —that the Government should find the appropriate mechanism. Existing legislation, deficient as it is, is the ideal vehicle. We welcome the fact that the Government are using an existing institution and existing legislation to deal with the problem that has arisen.

The battle for Kuwait, following the illegal annexation by Iraq, is some time behind us, though its legacy lingers on in so many different ways. The Bill seeks to deal with the reparations that arise from Security Council resolution 687, whereby Iraq must contribute to compensating those who lost their assets, livelihoods, and in many instances, their personal possessions as a result of the annexation. None of us should underestimate the pain and suffering of so many people in the area as a result of Saddam Hussein's illegal policies.

One of the remarkable features of this minor piece of legislation is the speed with which the United Nations has been able to move. The Foreign Compensation Commission has moved with enormous speed, given the way in which the United Nations has had to work in the past. It is quickly getting to grips with an extremely serious issue. It is good that the British Government have been able to find a mechanism so early on for handling claims and I hope, eventually, payments.

I should like to know precisely how much money will be available. The Minister has told us how many claims there are likely to be and how many of them are likely to be British; it will be quite a large number. Quite a few British citizens worked in the area and many claims will be made on their behalf. The principal source of compensation moneys will be the oil revenues that Iraq can gain from its supplies. It was given permission to start delivering oil, and all revenues from the oil shipments were to go to the United Nations. At least 70 per cent. of the revenues were to be remitted to the commission.

It is my understanding that precious little oil is being exported from Iraq. Little, therefore, is as yet available to settle the compensation cases that we are talking about. The unwillingness of Iraq to use its oil to gain revenues and to gain contributions for itself stands in marked contrast to the complaints that are made by the Iraqi Government about the penalties that are being imposed on their country by the world community. It stands also—not for the first time—in stark contrast to the pain and suffering that are still being experienced by the poor, benighted population of Iraq, which could well do with the resources that would be available if Iraq took the opportunity to export the limited amount of oil that is available.

I am therefore presuming that the bulk of the assets so far available to the commission will be coming from the sequestration of assets previously held by Iraq in the west and frozen by Security Council resolutions. It would be interesting to know precisely how much is still available through that means.

It is estimated that the claims that are likely to be made to the commission will amount to about £50 billion. The maximum that is likely to be obtained through oil revenues and subventions will produce a mere £3·5 billion per annum. I am sure that the Minister will be able to confirm those figures, which I obtained from the March 1992 edition of *Law Times*. If this is the case, clearly the ability of the commission to settle anything but a fraction of the compensation cases in the short term will be extremely limited. It will be many years before all these compensation cases are likely to be settled, however quickly the commission works.

Having made those few remarks and welcomed the Bill and the expedition of the process, I hope that the Minister will understand that the Opposition believe that the speed with which the process can be carried out and resources can be given to the commission will be the biggest test ahead.

4.31 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): The Bill contains powers to make subordinate legislation by Order in Council. Orders in Council are not made by the Queen, although that is the rubric that is used. They are made by a group of Ministers meeting in the Privy Council, and that can be as few as two or three.

We all welcome provision for the awarding of compensation, but this is a fairly controversial area. Some people will feel that they qualify for compensation when the criteria that the commission lays down through the order—or which Her Majesty lays down by Order in Council—may not embrace such people. The whole of clause 1(2) relates to the conditions that must be fulfilled in order to qualify for compensation. That is clearly an area of some controversy, because some people will feel that they are eligible, whereas the Order in Council may rule them out.

I should, therefore, like to know from the Minister before the Bill slips through the House virtually unnoticed what further parliamentary procedures the Orders in Council will be subject to. One of the strengths of the Commons is that people have some recourse when there is a conflict between an institution established to set out criteria, as under the Bill, and the criteria that some people feel should apply to them. It is on those occasions that some parliamentary scrutiny is of advantage.

If an Order in Council is made, will it be subject to further parliamentary scrutiny of any kind? Will the Minister be open to representations from people outside the categories laid down by the criteria in clause 1(2), or will it be beyond any kind of negotiation?

These are minor matters in a minor Bill which is designed to enable compensation to be paid. I am not objecting to it, but there are too many occasions on which too much delegated legislation is given to too many Ministers, and I believe that, where there is the opportunity, we should raise these questions so that at some future date we are not confronted with the necessity, if criteria need to be changed, of making another Order in Council. Of all the procedures of delegating powers, the Order in Council procedure tends to be the most arcane, and I believe that we should make things as open and democratic and as subject to the scrutiny of the House as possible.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): I apologise for intervening towards the end of the hon. Member's timely speech. He will know that Northern Ireland in its entirety is governed by Orders in Council. If we are very lucky, we get a 90-minute debate.

Coming to the relevant point, there is no possibility of amendment. In fact, on one occasion when the former right hon. Member for South Down, Mr. Enoch Powell, pointed out a printer's error in an Order in Council, the Minister acknowledged that it was a printer's error but it could not be altered even when the House entirely agreed that it was an error; it had to return to the Privy Council. Real scrutiny and the possibility of any amendment are absolutely nil.

Mr. Cryer: That is one problem with delegated legislation. Except in one or two minor cases, such as census legislation, primary legislation cannot be amended. Indeed, some of my remarks would not be relevant if delegated powers could be amended.

As Chairman of the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments and the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments, I find that we are often confronted with instruments which are badly drafted and which give to Ministers powers not provided by the primary legislation. In other words, they are ultra vires and the terms are ambiguous.

That happens only with a minority of instruments, but they may affect people's lives—no more so than in a case where the person is seeking compensation for injury or loss, but, because of bad drafting or a lack of awareness by those who drafted the instrument and those who subsequently rubber-stamped it, the framework cannot be amended.

Recently we had an example at the Joint Committee. Two Ministers had signed identical statutory instruments produced by their Departments. In both cases the instruments had been altered, apparently after signature. When Ministers are presented with instruments to sign, it is conceivable that, because they have a pile of documents before them, they do not scrutinise the instruments as minutely as they should. That is how mistakes happen.

We are talking about legal documents with legal enforcement. If the documents do not cover all cases, some may be excluded by virtue of that definition. I seek information from the Minister. There are real problems with delegated legislation. The Minister is probably aware, and I hope that he is trying to do something about it, that in 1992 the Government produced more statutory instruments than any other Government in the history of Parliament. They produced just under 3,500 instruments, which is 10 every day. Therefore, I am using the opportunity to seek information and to remind Ministers that, while there is a need for delegated powers, there is also a need for scrutiny.

4.37 pm

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I am grateful to the hon. Members for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) and for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) and to the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) for their contributions. I shall do my best to comment on all the points that have been made.

In response to the hon. Member for Hamilton, we expect some 3,000 British claims in all, 2,000 from individuals and the remainder from companies. More than 1,000 British claims have already been forwarded by the Foreign Office to the commission. Most are for loss of personal possessions, but many are for mental pain and anguish and, in some cases, injury suffered by former British hostages at the hands of Saddam Hussein. Prisoners of war ill treated by the Iraqis are also eligible to claim.

On the payment of claims, the hon. Gentleman asked me to explain two figures, £50 billion and £3·5 million. Under a Security Council resolution claims will be paid from a percentage, initially 30 per cent. of Iraq's oil export revenue. Before the 1990 invasion, Iraq's gross export earnings amounted to some $15 billion a year. Under resolutions 706 and 712 of the Security Council Iraq was permitted to export up to $1·6 billion worth of oil. The revenue would go into a special United Nations escrow account, which is immune from attachment of Iraqi funds by other creditors.

That is the position that the United Nations established, but, as we all know, Iraq has so far refused to resume the exporting of oil—at least, officially. As a result, the Security Council adopted on 2 October resolution 778, which authorises the sequestration of certain unencumbered frozen Iraqi assets—outside Iraq, of course—to be used in the same way as the oil revenues under the resolutions that I mentioned earlier. Of United States moneys sequestered, some $21 million has been placed in the United Nations for use by the compensation commission, and more is expected from that source.

There is not yet any estimate of the total number of claims. Thus, it is very difficult to say at this stage whether there will be enough money. It is clear that there is not enough in funds released into the escrow account so far. However, we are maintaining pressure on the Iraqi Government to export oil for their own benefit and to meet their obligations under United Nations resolutions.

I have been asked whether certain Export Credits Guarantee Department loans will be covered. It is important to establish that all losses must be eligible.

[Mr. Lennox-Boyd]

There are certain ineligible losses. For instance, losses arising from the situation caused by the United Nations embargo are not eligible. To be eligible, losses must be direct. Any loss that can be established to have arisen directly from Iraq's invasion and occupation of Kuwait —whether a business or a private loss—will be eligible. Of course, any debt existing before 3 August 1990 will not be eligible under these procedures. We expect about 800 British business claims. These will be eligible if they satisfy the direct loss criteria.

Mr. George Robertson: I should like to take the Minister back briefly to the question of debts that existed before the invasion. Clearly, any failure involving the ECGD would be an outstanding foreign debt constituting an Iraqi liability. From recent developments and discussions, we know that the rate of failure involving the ECGD in respect of contracts delivered, or intended to be delivered, from this country to Iraq is fairly substantial.

I wonder whether the Minister, either today or in writing at a later date, can give me the latest estimate of the proportion of Iraq's foreign debt that is accounted for by British ECGD cover where there was failure.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman with that information. These compensation arrangements do not, of course, apply to debts incurred before August 1990.

I fully appreciate the desire of the hon. Member for Bradford, South to remind Ministers and the House of the need for parliamentary scrutiny of all procedures. However, the purpose of the Bill is to bring the Foreign Compensation Act 1950 up to date to deal with the Iraqi situation. We are not proposing to give the Executive any powers that are not available to them under the Act of 1950. We are seeking to secure compensation not under direct bilateral agreement with the Government concerned, as under the 1950 Act, but from the United Nations under the provisions established by Security Council resolutions. The existing powers, with the available scrutiny measures, have operated satisfactorily. I might mention, as an example, recent settlements with the former Soviet Union, which are among the most prominent of recent years.

The Orders in Council will be subject to the usual parliamentary scrutiny, as under the 1950 Act. I am afraid that the negative resolution procedure will be adopted—again as under the 1950 Act—but I can assure the hon. Gentleman that any representations made by parliamentarians or by those acting on behalf of claimants will be considered most carefully by the Foreign Office. There will be a great deal of interest and publicity.

The Government intend that most of the work in connection with these compensation claims will be handled by officers of the United Nations compensation fund, rather than by officers of the British compensation commission. We are giving powers to the British commission lest claims be dealt with by the United Nations fund in a generalised way, with the detail of arrangements and distribution to be determined by the British commission. The provisions of section 2(2), to which the hon. Gentleman referred, are substantially administrative. The substantive criteria will be decided by the United Nations body.

I hope that I have dealt satisfactorily with the points raised by hon. Members.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

FOREIGN COMPENSATION (AMENDMENT) BILL *[LORDS] [MONEY]*

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Foreign Compensation (Amendment) Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to the provisions of the Act in the sums so payable under the Foreign Compensation Act 1950.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Appropriation (Northern Ireland)

4.47 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Michael Mates): I beg to move,

That the draft Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order 1993, which was laid before this House on 15th February, be approved.

The draft order has two purposes. The first is to authorise expenditure of £80 million in the 1992-93 spring supplementary estimates. This will bring total estimates provision for Northern Ireland departmental services to £5,094 million for this financial year. The second purpose is to authorise the vote on account of £2,376 million for 1993-94, to enable the services of Northern Ireland Departments to continue until the 1993-94 main estimates are brought before the house later this year.

Details of the sums sought are given in the estimates booklet and the "Statement of Sums Required on Account" which, as usual, are available in the Vote Office.

Within the estimates, many of the votes seek token increases only because new pressures have been offset by savings elsewhere in the vote. To give hon. Members the maximum time, I shall refer only to the main areas where supplementary provision is sought. In the Department of Agriculture's vote 1, a token increase of £1,000 is required to reflect expenditure trends in capital grant schemes. The sum of £2 million is for additional commitments under the agriculture and horticulture development scheme. This is offset by reduced requirements under the farm and conservation grant scheme, where the uptake of grants has been lower than predicted.

The Department's vote 2 also shows a token increase of £1,000. That reflects various reallocations within the vote, including a £200,000 increase for fees to private veterinarians under the disease eradication programme. An additional £370,000 is for watercourse management, including flood defence, and £250,000 for the forestry service.

Token increases are sought for four votes in the Department of Economic Development In vote 1, an additional £5·8 million is for new inward investment projects. That reflects the Industrial Development Board's success in attracting internationally competitive companies. A recent example is Pan European Textiles, which will create up to 500 jobs. A net increase of £5 million is sought for assistance to Short Brothers plc. That additional expenditure is offset by savings elsewhere in the vote, including a £3·2 million reduction in industrial development grants, reflecting lower than anticipated claims. Due to slippage on a contract, there is a reduced requirement of £7·8 million in relation to assistance to Harland and Wolff Holdings plc. That will now fall to be paid in 1993-94.

In vote 2, £1·7 million is sought for the industrial research and technology unit, and £1 million for assistance to the Northern Ireland tourist industry. It is encouraging that initial indications of visitor numbers in 1992, estimated at 1·24 million, show a further increase on the previous year's record performance of 1·18 million. Also in this vote, £1 million is required to cover the additional costs of clearing the Ormeau road gas works site in Belfast. Those increases are offset by savings elsewhere in the vote. They include £5·5 million reflecting the Local Enterprise Development Unit's accelerated implementation of its new strategic approach to financial assistance.

In vote 3, which covers the training and employment agency, an additional £4·7 million is required to meet in full the demand for training places under the youth training programme. Offsetting savings have been found elsewhere in the vote.

Finally, in the Department of Economic Development, additional provision is sought in vote 4 to meet expenses incurred in the privatisation of the electricity supply industry in Northern Ireland. Those are being met from the proceeds of the sale of the generating stations earlier in the year.

The Department of the Environment requires a token estimate in vote 1. That reflects a redistribution of resources within the roads programme. Some £700,000 is for minor roads schemes.

In vote 2, covering housing, additional net provision of £14·4 million is sought. Hon. Members will recall that an additional £18 million was made available under the house purchase scheme announced in the Chancellor's autumn statement. Increases in the vote are offset by receipts of £3 million from sales under the co-ownership scheme and housing association rents.

Vote 3, covering expenditure on water and sewerage, shows a token increase of £1,000. That reflects various reallocations within the vote and includes an additional £7·6 million for capital expenditure on sewerage services. That includes the first stage of the replacement of Belfast's century-old sewage treatment plant at Duncrue street. The estimated total cost of the project at present prices is £67 million. Increases are offset by reductions elsewhere and by increased receipts.

The token provision sought in vote 4 reflects an increase of £2 million for community economic regeneration schemes, which continue to be targeted at areas of social, economic and environmental need. Additional provision is also sought for Belfast action teams and for caravan sites for travelling people.

The Department of Education seeks a net increase of £7 million for vote 1—£6·2 million is for grants to education and library boards, including the increased cost of school teachers' salaries, and £2·3 million is for voluntary grammar and grant-maintained integrated schools. The Schools Examination and Assessment Council seeks £1·1 million, mainly in connection with education reforms. Those increases are offset by reduced requirements, including £2·5 million for the repayment of loans.

In vote 2, £1·8 million is sought for the increased uptake of student loans and an increase in the cost of postgraduate student awards. Resources have also been reallocated within the universities and colleges of education sections.

The Department of Health and Social Services seeks a net increase of £13·2 million in vote 1. The main increase of £11·7 million is for the family health services, to meet increased costs in pharmaceutical and general dental services and £6·2 million is for increases in capital expenditure. Those increases are offset by increased receipts, including £2·6 million from health service contributions.

Additional net provision of £3 million is required in vote 3. This includes £9·7 million for increased expenditure on housing benefits, rent allowances and rent and rates

[Mr. Michael Mates]

rebates. Those increases are offset by reductions elsewhere and by increased receipts of £5 million from the national insurance fund.

Finally, in vote 4, which covers social security, £40·4 million is sought to meet increases in the numbers receiving a wide range of benefits, including attendance and disability allowances and income support.

In my opening remarks I have drawn attention to the main provisions of the order. In replying to the debate the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), will respond to the points raised by hon. Members. I commend the order to the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): It might be helpful if I made it clear that the debate on the order may cover all matters for which Northern Ireland Departments, as distinct from the Northern Ireland Office, are responsible. Police and security are the principal excluded subjects, but I am sure that hon. Members are well aware of that.

4.55 pm

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for setting out the permitted subjects for debate. I intend to address most of my remarks to the condition of the economy in Northern Ireland.

Today's debate takes place in the shadow of new unemployment figures showing that more than 3 million men and women are now out of work in the United Kingdom. In Northern Ireland, the figure stands at a disastrous 108,000. Ministers have previously found comfort in the fact that Northern Ireland was not as ravaged by the recession as the rest of the United Kingdom had been. However, the growing unemployment queues in the Province should send strong signals to the Government that it is time for them to awaken from their complacent slumbers.

The Minister of State, the hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins), recently described the unemployment figures for December as merely "disappointing". What is disappointing is the Government's apparent contentment to sit back and wait for recovery in Northern Ireland to bloom when it will.

During 1992, the total number of unemployed in the Province increased by more than 4,000, and accounted for 14·7 per cent. of the work force. That is the highest figure of any region within the United Kingdom. It is one league table where I would be happy to see the Province at the bottom.

The Minister will no doubt be aware that the economic forecasts for the coming months are just as dismal as the Government's record on unemployment. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the Coopers and Lybrand annual economic review published last month, which makes depressing reading. It predicts that up to 6,000 jobs will be lost this year in the Province, and warns that Northern Ireland's economy can well expect a zero growth rate in 1993.

Another report that was published last year by the *PA Economic Review* of Cambridge said that the jobless total will climb

"without respite as output from the Province's manufacturing and agricultural sectors continues to decline."

According to the report, more than 100,000 manufacturing jobs and 8,000 people employed in farming, fishing and forestry could lose their jobs during the next 10 years.

The underlying weakness of the Northern Ireland economy and the Province's high rate of population increase mean that the 1990s will be an extremely difficult decade. The report's author, Mr. Colin Warnoch, concluded:

"The outlook for the next decade and beyond is not good."

He warns the Government against making cuts in the real value of public expenditure.

Under such circumstances, the Government should be taking decisive and positive action. Instead of a concerted effort to treat the causes of unemployment, we have been treated to the musings of the Prime Minister, who wishes to clear the unemployed out of job interviews, when they can get them, and on to the streets to be engaged in community service. Of course, that would not provide the unemployed with any more remuneration or the chance of a real job, but apparently it furnishes them with the satisfaction of knowing that they are serving their own community. I thought that the Prime Minister's performance at the Dispatch Box this afternoon, when my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition raised the issue of unemployment, was nothing less than an insult to those 3 million people who have been thrown on the scrap heap by his Government.

The Government should be serving the people of Northern Ireland by investing in communities which continue to suffer the waste of unemployment. I am sure that the Minister would wish to tell the House how he thinks that the schemes proposed by the Prime Minister will help the unemployed in Strabane, who represent 23 per cent. of the work force; or the unemployed in Derry, who represent 20 per cent. of the work force; or the unemployed in Belfast, who represent 21 per cent. of the work force in that city. In neglecting to tackle unemployment, the Government are neglecting the rich potential within every individual in every part of the Province.

The one true resource which the Government insist on leaving untapped is the people of Northern Ireland, who are left with the frustration of knowing that the Secretary of State is as content to let the Province slip into economic decline as his Cabinet colleagues have been to see the rest of the United Kingdom languish in recession. It is clear that the contempt that the Prime Minister and his colleagues show towards the unemployed is equalled only by the contempt with which they treat the low-paid.

On 6 November last year, at column 431 of *Hansard*, the Secretary of State announced his intention to table an order to abolish wages councils in Northern Ireland. Almost 34,500 workers in Northern Ireland are covered by wages councils. The majority of those people are women and are almost exclusively the only wage earners in their households. Those people covered by wages councils agreements are among the poorest paid workers in the Province.

Tonight is not the occasion to address the issue in detail, but the Minister should be aware that the Opposition will oppose such a move with as much vigour as we have for the rest of the United Kingdom. I hope that I will have the support of hon. Members representing the Province.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): In the light of his comments, will the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that, with so many people on low wages, Northern Ireland can be described as a low-wage economy, and that, in that sense, it has not been attracting the investments that we were told low-wage economies attract?

Mr. Stott: The hon. Gentleman makes the point better than I could. I very much hope that, when the Secretary of State brings the order to the House—I understand that it will be subject to the procedure—and we pray against it, we will have the opportunity to debate the matter on the Floor of the House.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I very much welcome the hon. Gentleman's commitment that the Opposition will pray against that order when it is laid. I hope that it will be the beginning of a practice that the Opposition will regularly follow in praying against negative resolution orders. As the hon. Gentleman knows, a high proportion of Northern Ireland legislation is made by negative resolution orders, which means that it is never debated. That scandal cannot be allowed to continue.

Mr. Stott: I hear what the hon. Member says. I cannot give him an explicit commitment that we will do that every time, but when the matter warrants it, as the matter of wages councils does, we will do everything we can to ensure that it is debated on the Floor of the House of Commons.

Earlier this week, I was invited to meet representatives of the Northern Ireland Co-operative Development Agency. I am pleased to tell the House that I spent an enjoyable and informative morning in Derry visiting a few of the worthwhile local projects which the agency has been instrumental in establishing and sustaining. However, I am deeply concerned that the future of this vital agency is currently under review.

Allowing the agency to close would simply further widen the credibility gap between the Government's claims to be concerned with developing local businesses and economics and the reality of their policies. The Minister is no doubt aware that significant improvements in strategy have already been made by the agency in recent years.

The KMPG report recognises that the agency

> "is now in a position where it has established a mission statement, developed a list of objectives and outlined its strategy for achieving these objectives—none of which was in place in 1988".

Given the importance which the Government rightly attach to value for money, I am sure that the Minister also welcomes the statement that

> "the vast majority of client enterprises considered NICDA's services to be highly appropriate and of a high quality".

Again, that was from the Government's own report.

The agency is responsible for local projects as diverse as environmental development and developing interests and opportunities in music and the arts. Its value is without question. It has been in a position to assist the growing number of individuals, groups and organisations now entrusting themselves to the principles of co-operation and the notion of community ownership in the process of social and economic development.

The individuals I met earlier this week are mainly drawn from marginalised communities—areas which have little or no history of economic development or infrastructure. Their motivation has been the desire not for personal profit, but to create community confidence and hope that it is possible to initiate jobs and enterprise to fight back against the social consequences of poverty, unemployment, neglect and the socio-economic and political realities which face most disadvantaged communities.

Mr. David Porter (Waveney): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman's rhetoric, which is quite entertaining, but some five minutes ago he asked the Government to take positive and decisive action on unemployment in the Province. I am waiting to hear what positive and dramatic action the Government can take. In formulating his reply to me and the House, perhaps the hon. Gentleman might take into account the fact that the Government have taken considerable measures to help the Province. I would draw attention to those relating to Shorts and to Harland and Wolff, which would not have happened on the mainland. If the Opposition have a policy for decisive action, the House would be grateful to know what it is supposed to be.

Mr. Stott: The hon. Gentleman frequently attends Northern Ireland debates; we are old sparring partners. I refer him to several speeches and publications which my hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor has been producing since the turn of the year, setting out a detailed analysis of how we would go about creating jobs and a proper industrial strategy. Most of those proposals would benefit the people of Northern Ireland.

If the Government pursue their intention to close the Co-operative Development Agency or drastically reduce its budget, Northern Ireland will become the only region within the European Community without specific funding for the promotion of co-operative development. I therefore strongly urge the Minister to review the policy towards the Co-operative Development Agency and facilitate a partnership between the agency, the Local Enterprise Development Unit and the Department of Economic Development.

Of course, the lack of Government initiative in helping local economies to develop is symptomatic of a broader economic non-policy. When the Government withdrew from the exchange rate mechanism, the policy void was filled with nothing more than a broad grimace from the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Confidence in the Government's ability to manage the economy is falling in the Province, as highlighted by the Coopers and Lybrand report. It concludes that one third of local businesses are unsure when recovery will occur:

> "The manufacturing sector tends to be more gloomy than the service sector, with 50 per cent. being uncertain and the majority of the rest of the opinion that economic recovery will not come for some time to come."

The report warns:

> "The local economy still remains well below the UK average, and indeed most of the other regions, in terms of all indicators of economic growth."

That lack of confidence and lack of growth has been met by a lack of Government action. The only dogmatic policy that still seems to be on the agenda in Northern Ireland is privatisation. The Government are intent on making the people of the Province pay for their mismanagement of the economy. They are doing nothing more than plundering the utilities for fast cash. That is the quick-fix, short-term solution.

There is no more acute example of the consumer having to pay for Government failure than the flotation of Northern Ireland Electricity. The Electricity Consumer Council recently obtained information suggesting that the

[Mr. Stott]

price of electricity is likely to rise by a huge 15 per cent. after privatisation. Under those circumstances, I can understand the Minister's reluctance to meet the group to discuss the likely effects of Government plans, but instead of ploughing relentlessly through representations by individual and business electricity users, the Government should come clean with Northern Ireland consumers. How does the Minister think that a significant rise in electricity prices will cultivate any increase in confidence among the Province's big users?

If the Government privatise and float off Northern Ireland Electricity, and if the increased price that I quoted is correct, what impact will that have on the Province's future employment patterns?

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): If the hon. Gentleman's assertion is correct, it will sound alarms throughout Northern Ireland industry. The threat of a 25 per cent. phased increase in electricity charges over the next three years was enough for some manufacturers to consider pulling out of Northern Ireland and relocating to the mainland. If charges increase by another 15 per cent., as the hon. Gentleman has implied, that will systematically kill off employment opportunities and existing industries.

Mr. Stott: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. In my discussions with primary users—industries using more than 1 MW—I learned of their fears, and that they may consider it necessary to relocate elsewhere, where energy costs are much cheaper. The consumer council, which believes that figure of 15 per cent. to be correct, wants to meet the Northern Ireland Minister responsible for privatising the electricity industry, but I understand that he has not seen its representatives. When he does so, perhaps he will confirm or deny the figure that I have just read into the record.

I return to the subject of investing in people. Of the total unemployed in Northern Ireland, 27·8 per cent. are under the age of 25, and almost 58 per cent. are under the age of 34. That is a scandalous figure, and one of which the Government should be deeply ashamed. In the light of those statistics, one would have thought that educating the young would be at the top of the Government's list. Instead, they have thrown the education service into turmoil. By trying to push on with so-called education reforms in Northern Ireland, the Government have precipitated something approaching a crisis.

I am glad to see that the Minister responsible for Northern Ireland education in his place. The Minister and his colleagues thought that they knew best—certainly the Minister's predecessor thought that he knew best. They did not listen to the deep concerns expressed by right hon. and hon. Members when the relevant order was debated three years ago, and nor did they listen to the professionals —the teachers themselves. As a result, the Government have been forced to review, back-track and delay. They have left teaching staff in an uncertain no man's land, doing their level best to provide decent education for the children in their care.

I remind the Minister that the former Minister of State, the hon. Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney), said that his frequent contacts with teachers had convinced him that the vast majority were impatient to get their hands on the new programmes of study and to make a start on implementing them. Since then, the Government's enthusiasm appears to have waned. In a recent study by Queen's university, Belfast, 93·6 per cent. of school principals strongly agreed that the implementation of the reform programme has been a disaster.

It is time also that the Government listened to the economic heartbeat of the Province. Northern Ireland needs new life breathed into its infrastructure and into its demoralised people—those who are unemployed and who have no prospect of being re-employed. Northern Ireland needs investment and real co-operation between the Government, industry, and the community. Most of all, we need the Government to enable the people of the Province to utilise all the energies, skills and potential that we know them to have.

Sadly, judging by the Government's performance not just this year, last year or the year before that but for the past 14 years, they have failed not only the people of the United Kingdom in providing worthwhile jobs but the people of Northern Ireland.

5.17 pm

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): It is unusual to have so much time to debate next year's budget for Northern Ireland. We could spend a great deal longer doing so if even more time were available, because we are debating the nitty gritty. Because there is a lack of any democratic responsibility at any level in Northern Ireland, everything lands on the desks of Northern Ireland Ministers—should we choose to put it there. That serves them right, because they know perfectly well what could be done to devolve power to various locally elected people, but for the past 20 years they have failed to do it.

The order, which was laid on 15 February, highlights again the wholly undemocratic nature of the way in which Northern Ireland is run. We have been saying that for many years, and I am sure that the Minister understands that as well as we do. I hope that the Minister and his colleagues will get their finger out and move towards democracy in the Province. The unrepresentative quango system that is currently used to run the Province is unacceptable to anyone who claims to be a democrat.

Both the hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) and the Minister touched on some of the matters for debate tonight, and I am sure that other hon. Members representing Northern Ireland constituencies hope to catch the eye of the Chair to expound on their own concerns.

I begin by welcoming the change announced last autumn regarding compensation payments and the Government's view that any excess over the provision made should come from the contingency fund. That will at least prevent the Northern Ireland block grant from being dipped into too deeply. It is a welcome and necessary change.

The present system of compensation law in Northern Ireland has been in operation for a good many years, and I believe that a careful examination of that operation is long overdue. As the Minister will know, the compensation agency is conducting a questionnaire survey. That is all right as far as it goes, but I do not believe that it is an altogether sensible way to proceed. A far more detailed investigation is needed to try to sort out the difficulties that some people have encountered, and many others allege that they have encountered, in the operation of compensation law in the case of both criminal and personal injuries.

Just before Christmas, the Coleraine bomb wrought tremendous destruction. The other day, I took a deputation of Coleraine business folk to see the Minister of State, the hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins), and they floated some ideas for putting the heart back into the town. That cannot be done on the cheap; it must be done properly. I hope that the Government will make every effort to render all possible assistance, to ensure that the town has a good anchor in the centre and can resume its former health and prosperity. As the Minister knows, however, that health and prosperity has been much blighted by high unemployment rates.

The Minister will also be well aware that Coleraine is the key shopping anchor for the whole north coast, which has a tremendous tourist industry. I see little sense in trying to build up a tourist industry on the north coast without maintaining the shopping potential of Coleraine town. Walking through the streets of Coleraine on any dampish summer's day, it is possible to meet almost every citizen of Northern Ireland at some point; but one hardly ever sees Coleraine folk. They appear to be elsewhere.

The town is a magnet, attracting people from the entire Province and, indeed, from further afield. I have always been amazed by the impossibility of finding my constituents in Coleraine town centre when I have tried to canvass them there. However, I find nearly every other Northern Ireland Member's constituents—who, of course, are very welcome. The local traders have a slogan: "Use your brain, shop in Coleraine". That is a sound slogan, and one which most of the Province clearly accepts as a truthful indication of the potential of the town's shopping facilities. Ministers have received our deputations favourably so far; I hope that that favourable reception will be converted into favourable action in the coming weeks.

Another problem that troubles many of my constituents relates to the difficulties faced by agriculture. Let me give two examples. First, the potato growers are in a dreadful position. Potatoes cannot be stored and forgotten about for a year; once grown, they must be sold. The growers must get rid of them. They are a costly crop to produce and, far from declining, production costs are rising every year. In my opinion, someone who manages to grow a crop of potatoes to sale point for £1,000 per acre is doing very well; I suspect that the cost could be rather higher.

The Province is justly famous for its seed potatoes. I used to play a small part in growing them, because for many years my father grew the foundation seed stock for the whole of Northern Ireland. I witnessed the whole production process, from the point at which single tubers were planted to the point at which the Department of Agriculture, which was then in charge, sold the high-quality, top-class seed to farmers for commercial on-growing. It is not a cheap business: it is both costly and difficult, and requires a good deal of time and effort.

Many varieties of potato are grown for a specific overseas market. This year, farmers have encountered horrendous difficulties in trying to harvest their crop: some of my neighbours are still digging potatoes. Moreover, the sale of the potatoes has caused severe problems, because for some reason the export market—and there is only the export market—has disappeared. I am told that there are a number of reasons for that, not least the fact that the countries that usually import potatoes seem to be running out of hard currency and are therefore not in a position to buy. The problem seems to have been compounded by the fact that some other EC countries are using EC money to fund the purchase of potatoes from their nation states. The result is that United Kingdom farmers, especially those in Northern Ireland, are left with a costly crop on their hands. Some of it is now being used for stock feed.

Any specialist grower—this is now very much a specialist market—can no longer survive a loss of that kind. In the past, it was possible to provide schemes to help out in one way or another. I hope that the Minister will take note of the problem, for it is very important. People will be looking for seed potatoes next year: the crop has served the Province well. It is a cash crop—a high-value crop. It is in severe difficulties this year, but those difficulties will probably not be repeated. When potatoes are transported to warmer countries and grown there, they pick up disease so fast that a fresh, healthy seed must be imported every year, or at least every other year. Such countries will be looking for potatoes next year and, if we do not grow them, the market will be gone for ever. That would have serious, long-term financial consequences.

My second agricultural example relates to the recent debate in the House about an order concerning hill livestock compensation payments in Great Britain. I listened carefully to the Minister who defended the decision to cut the payments. I must say that I admired his brass neck: he persisted in talking about the ewe premium. In my view, his remarks were completely out of order, because the order had nothing to do with the ewe premium; it concerned an entirely different matter. If the Minister looks at the legislation, he will appreciate that.

The ewe premium applies throughout the United Kingdom. As the Minister referred to it the other night, let me point out that the satisfactory increase in the premium —if it can be called satisfactory—arose because of the decline in the value of lambs, changes in the value of the green pound and the increase in the number of ecus taken into account from 5·5 to 7. The whole 7-ecu rate was recalculated, resulting in a final figure of 79p extra increase. The agriculture Minister seemed to consider that a wonderful act of generosity on his part, but it was not; it was simply the automatic outcome of his operation of the system. It is ridiculous that he should try to get away with such an argument. The farmers can count as well as he can; no one believes the case that he has made.

That order did not apply to Northern Ireland, but an exactly similar piece of legislation does. As far as I can discover, it is not subject to parliamentary scrutiny, which is a great pity. It means that we are deprived of another hour and a half debate on the subject. The Minister could not then have got away with talking about the ewe premium when he ought to have been talking about hill livestock compensatory allowances—HLCAs. We should have drawn the attention of the occupant of the Chair very swiftly to the fact that he was out of order. However, it is not possible to have such a debate. Therefore, we have to deal with that issue today.

The ewe premium is a one-off premium. It arises from a mechanical application of the present rules and is unlikely to be repeated. The HLCA cuts bear particularly harshly on hill farmers. The ewe premium applies to all the

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farmers, whether they are hill or lowland farmers, but the cuts will have a particularly severe effect on hill farmers' incomes.

That leads me to discuss food production generally in the United Kingdom. The food that is produced in this country has to conform to standards that are laid down by the European Community and this House. The legislation that we are discussing today makes provision for quite a lot of money to be spent on enforcing those standards. I welcome the provision of that money. It means that the people of this country enjoy wholesome, high-quality food. The production of food to those standards, however, is very expensive. Therefore, we must look to the so-called level playing field that everyone demands for everything else.

We have no control over the production of food that is imported to this country. We can only control and police the production of food within the confines of the United Kingdom. If we have no control over the standards of food production elsewhere, it cannot be said that the costs of food production are comparable. Therefore, the production of food by United Kingdom farmers is not done on that so-called level playing field.

It is difficult to check food quality. If a machine does not work, it is easy enough to take it apart, find out what is wrong and correct the fault. However, we do not know what is sprayed on to crops or put into the ground elsewhere. We do not know, either, what is fed to livestock overseas. That factor of food production has been largely ignored. However, we ought to face up to it. If we do not, it might have severe consequences for the people of this country who eat imported food. It must also be borne in mind that food production cannot just be switched on and off. It takes a long time to build up the production of food. Once the market is lost, it is extremely difficult to regain it.

We have also been treated to the claim, regarding HLCAs, that the incomes of United Kingdom farmers are going up. Everyone admits that farmers' incomes increased from a very low base. I understand that the Northern Ireland figures for 1991-92 will not be published until the middle of March. However, farm incomes in Northern Ireland fell between 1988 and 1991 from £136·3 million to £125 million.

One can argue, of course, about the methodology. There was argument in the House a few days ago about that. If the same methodology is used, one can see whether incomes are rising or falling. The methodology is now so standardised that there is a fair indication of the way in which farm incomes are moving. Farm incomes over that period were down by over 8 per cent. Inflation during the same period was 20 per cent. Therefore, the fall in farm incomes was much greater than the cash sum to which I referred. The reduction has to include inflation.

Farm incomes include two elements. The first is the living expenses of farmers. They, like everyone else, have to eat. So do their families. Those expenses cannot be greatly reduced. Many farmers, especially hill farmers and small farmers, live frugally. The second element is the sum invested and there has been a considerable reduction in investment in farm machinery and equipment. That ought to worry any Minister with responsibility for farming. It certainly worries me.

If farmers enjoy fairly high income levels, they invest. Whenever their incomes fall, they cut their investment. They decide not to buy a new tractor, or other equipment. Although it may be desirable, they decide that they can carry on with the old piece of machinery for another year or two. They decide not to build new sheds or new silos. They let their machinery take its chance and stay outside under a sheet of plastic. Investment is the first to suffer. Over that same period, farm investment went down by 7·5 per cent. The most notable reduction was investment in tractors which, in money terms, fell from £14 million to £10·5 million. That says an awful lot about the state of farm incomes in Northern Ireland.

I hope that the Northern Ireland Minister will answer the question that the United Kingdom Minister failed to answer the other evening: how many farmers in Northern Ireland receive income support, or some other form of support from public funds, such as family credit? Many of them are in that position. It is not a happy position for proud and independent farmers to be in.

In 1988, the average value of Northern Ireland lambs was just over £40 a head. In 1991, it was down to £33. I believe that the 1992 figures will show the loss of a further £1. Last year, lambs were selling for about £32. That represents a drop of £8 in the value of each lamb between 1988 and 1992. However, inflation totalled 22 per cent. between 1988 and 1992. If those two factors are taken into account, instead of receiving £32 for each lamb, Northern Ireland farmers ought to have received £48 in order to stand still.

Mr. Beggs: Will my hon. Friend make it clear to the House that he is referring to the prices for finished fat lambs? Hill farmers rarely have the conditions in which to finish the lambs that they rear. Therefore, the price for their lambs ranges from between £16 and £22 per head when they sell them on for finishing.

Mr. Ross: Yes. My hon. Friend draws attention to a relevant point, which is that the price of hill farm lambs has dropped by considerably more than £8 per head. Therefore, those farmers suffer very much more from the drop in value.

We hear a lot of nonsense about extensification, environmentally friendly farming and all the rest of it. That is asking farmers to uninvent the wheel. It cannot be done. There is a body of knowledge within farming about how food can be produced efficiently, well and to high quality. One cannot wipe that knowledge out of people's minds. They will continue to use it. If the acreage that is farmed is restricted, farmers will intensify. One cannot get away from that.

There is a large problem of farm profits in the United Kingdom. I have something to say to the Minister and I am sorry that I did not get the chance to say it to a fuller House. Farmers' incomes may have been dropping; the price of lamb off the farm may have dropped by an horrendous amount in the past four or five years. But I do not think that many of our wives have noticed the price of lamb dropping at the butcher's shop.

I do not hear Sainsbury's and other grocery chains telling us that their profits have dropped. Indeed, I understand that this year they have all celebrated record profits. Perhaps the people of Britain had better think a little about that. It seems to me that the primary producers have contributed considerably to those profits. Unless a sensible price which reflects the costs of production is paid for not only lamb but beef and many other products which come from the farms of the United Kingdom, we shall go into a steady downward spiral.

We need a true level playing field, not one that is tilted against the farmer. In my experience, it was always tilted against us. We seem to be the only business which always buys retail and sells wholesale. I cannot think of any other business that does that.

There is also a problem of depopulation in the rural areas. I do not like that. I believe that more people should live in the country. But they need to be country people. My experience is that when folks move out of large towns into the country they have considerable difficulty in adjusting to country life. We must keep country people in rural areas and allow them by one means or another to earn their living there.

If we are to keep a viable rural population, if only to look after the countryside, the Government must realise that it will cost someone money and that that money will have to come through the Government. To some extent, the HLCA payment was intended to help people stay in the country and keep it neat and tidy. If the Government decide as a matter of policy that they will not maintain the type of countryside that we have at present in the United Kingdom, well and good. But let them tell us.

I have heard stories about the countryside going back to wilderness. It will not go back to wilderness. It will go back to what appears to be wilderness or a wilderness of sitka spruce. It might be a wilderness in which people pursue sporting activities such as shooting, hunting and the rest, which are popular with some folk. The countryside will be used for something, but it will not be used for food production unless farmers can obtain a reasonable return on the food that they produce.

I could continue at length, but I shall raise only two further small items. The Minister talked about flood defence. That is a matter which must be examined. I hope that whenever planning authorities consider a planning application for a house on a flood plain, they will point out to the individual who is building it that it is on a flood plain and that flood banks can be breached. I hope that a comprehensive look will be taken at how we could care for folk who live on flood plains. Such problems arise not only in Northern Ireland but throughout the United Kingdom.

Every time there is an horrendous wind or rain storm we are confronted with complaints from many parts of the United Kingdom and requests for help for flood victims. There is no help. It is not good enough for the Government to say that if something is insurable they will not cover it. In theory, houses and buildings on flood plains are insurable, but one need only try to insure a house on a flood plain to see how difficult it is. Something must be done on a nationwide scale, not least in Northern Ireland, to deal with that problem. Let the Minister bear that in mind when he talks about flood defence.

I have made points about the Local Enterprise Development Unit previously and I make no apology for doing so again. LEDU can handle the simple job. It can handle an application from a firm with all the i's dotted and the t's crossed. But there seems to be a big black hole in its ability to handle the inventor who walks through the door looking for help. Such people seem never to find anything that is useful to them. Will the Government please take a look at that aspect?

I believe that there are many inventions and good ideas floating around in Northern Ireland which, with a certain amount of help at the right time, could make a useful contribution to reducing unemployment and, in many cases, extending the engineering industry in Northern Ireland. We should try to provide such help. Some ideas will go wrong, but so what? A great deal of money is being lost anyway. I am not telling the Minister to throw public money away, but sometimes it is necessary to risk public money to obtain a good return. Over a period of years, a scheme could be worked out that would pay for itself and do much good for the whole Province.

Royal Assent

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Consolidated Fund Act 1993
Damages (Scotland) 1993
Bankruptcy (Scotland) 1993
South Yorkshire Light Rail Transit Act 1993

Appropriation (Northern Ireland)

Question again proposed.

5.45 pm

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): I take as my starting point the same point as that of the previous two speakers. The hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) commented on the procedures of the debate. I took note of a comment made by an hon. Member who visited the Chamber and listened for a few moments to our debate. As he went out, he said, "This business should not be on the Floor of the House. It is county council stuff." Many of us would probably nod our heads to that remark.

However, those of us who do not have the opportunity to deal with the issues in other places must take the fullest opportunity in this place to do so. But I remind the Government that it is wholly inadequate to deal with such levels of expenditure in such a cursory way. As the hon. Member for Londonderry, East said, we are fortunate that today, unlike many other days on which we have approached appropriation account debates, we are left with much more time, so that more Members will be able to speak, and perhaps some of them will speak for longer.

My district council set its rate in the past few weeks, as did every district council in Northern Ireland. Our expenditure is about £4 million to £5 million. We could have discussed it for days and tabled amendments on the items on which we spent it. Not so in the Chamber. We are limited by time, and we have no opportunity to do anything but vote against the amounts of money— something which people in Northern Ireland are not keen on voting against.

We could have better procedures in the House to deal in much greater depth with the expenditure of Northern Ireland Departments. Members of Parliament are denied scrutiny of those Departments under the existing system. I say that as a strong devolutionist. I see no inconsistency in believing in devolution for Northern Ireland and

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wanting proper Select Committees in the House which reflect the business of the House at that given moment in time.

Having got that one out of the way, I should like to comment on the remarks of the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott). He rightly drew attention to the milestone that has been reached in the unemployment figures. It is a milestone which casts a dark shadow over the nation. That dark shadow is seen in Northern Ireland more than in any other part of the nation. Almost 110,000 people are unemployed; that is a long dole queue. I remind the Minister that we are talking not only about loss of resources in economic terms but about a serious social impact on the Province.

Each one of those cold statistics represents a family, and the hopes and aspirations of the people who surround the person who should have been the family breadwinner. It is a debilitating position for people to find themselves in, without the expectation or hope of finding employment in the foreseeable future. It is therefore incumbent upon the Government not to treat unemployment in Northern Ireland casually, and not to say, "Well, we cannot do too much about unemployment in Northern Ireland, especially with the terrorist backcloth." I accept immediately that terrorism presents great difficulties for those who want to induce investors into Northern Ireland and to encourage people to expand their businesses there—but that difficulty should call the Government to greater heights of energy and enthusiasm in attempting to do the job.

The hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Porter) asked the Opposition where their policies were. I suppose that, if he were here now, he could ask me the same question. I trust that the Minister will consider a suggestion that I shall make about what can be done in Northern Ireland by elected representatives from Northern Ireland.

Before I make that suggestion, I shall place on record by way of a marker my pleasure that, in both Shorts and Harland and Wolff, which represent the major industries in my constituency, there is now more stability than there has been for a long time. That must be welcomed, although the fact that there have been some reductions in employment in both those firms over the year is not welcome. Many of us hope that, as time goes on and we come out of the long deep recession that we have suffered, those firms will be able to expand, and some of those jobs may come back.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that not only Harland and Wolff but the whole British shipbuilding industry would benefit if our Government used the same yardstick for intervention money from Europe as other European countries do?

Mr. Robinson: Yes, indeed; there is no doubt about that. The point needs only to be stated to be accepted: the hon. Gentleman is absolutely correct. Harland and Wolff would benefit considerably, and the Government could do themselves and the nation a favour in environmental terms. We have all seen the dramatic impact of oil spillage, and there is real cause for the Government to impose much stricter regulations about the age and standard of ships allowed into our waters and the standard of ships built in our yards. A scrap-and-build policy at a lower level would help shipbuilding yards throughout the United Kingdom. I trust that the Government will take that idea on board. It is certainly being urged by several trade unions involved in the shipbuilding industry.

The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1992 was the brainchild of the Department of Economic Development, which no doubt encouraged the Department of the Environment to say that local government could have a financial input into economic development. As a result, the Department introduced an enabling order to allow district councils to spend up to 2p in the pound in their rates for the purposes of economic development. Even before the provision was introduced, many local authorities were spending money on economic development under the old section 115, which allowed them to spend money for the good of the district council area or any part thereof.

The 1992 provision, however, clearly directs the attention of district councils to economic development, and encourages them to play a role. Many, if not most, councils in Northern Ireland are already involved in enterprise schemes that are either up and running or on the slip road ready to be put in place. It is good and proper for district councils to make their contribution to those, but I wonder whether the Government could consider a more structured approach.

The enabling power would allow local government in Northern Ireland to put economic development proposals together collectively, in groups of district councils. Under EC rules, such enterprises could enjoy considerable subvention. Would the Department be prepared to consider proposals for economic development from district councils in groups or as a whole? That would allow every pound spent by district councils to be quadrupled by European grants.

I know that the Department will be concerned that what district councils do should not duplicate what is being done by the Department of Economic Development or any of its agencies, but elected representatives in Northern Ireland have sufficient initiative to come up with schemes which would not duplicate activities and which would bring some local initiative into economic development.

Perhaps that would avoid some of the criticism levelled at the Government. They could rightly permit the money to be spent in that way, because any scheme would have to be approved by the Department of the Environment, the Department of Finance and Personnel and the Department of Economic Development before it could receive any money from Europe. I trust that the Minister's response will be positive. If it is, district councils will be encouraged to submit schemes to the Department.

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman about the miscellaneous provisions order, concerning local government's ability to engage in economic development, but is he aware that it now transpires that the alleged independence given to local government will be monitored in detail by the Local Enterprise Development Unit, and local government can now spend the money only with LEDU's approval? The central agency is now taking ratepayers' money and dictating where it will go. Does the hon. Gentleman not agree that that is not a desirable development, and that it cuts straight across both the spirit of the legislation and the ratepayers' independence in spending their money as they wish, in so far as it is theirs?

Mr. Robinson: I am happy to agree with the hon. Gentleman. I was arguing for the independence of spending within district councils when his party was trying to rap some Unionist councils over the knuckles for spending money in the way that it did not like. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has been converted and now thinks as I do on the subject. I trust that the Government, too, will think as we both now do about district councils' independence in spending their rateable product.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): What the hon. Gentleman is saying is important and significant in terms of local authorities' activities. It is pleasing to note that at least there is unity between the two parties on the issue. Has the hon. Gentleman read the Coopers and Lybrand report published in January? It contains a special feature on local economic development, and the report of a survey carried out within 24 district councils in Northern Ireland. The report is most encouraging about what is happening in district councils. The theme on which the hon. Gentleman has entered is constructive, and I suggest that all local authorities in Northern Ireland should have the Coopers and Lybrand report and build on what it says. Will the hon. Gentleman take note of that point, and has he any comment on the report?

Mr. Robinson: The House has heard that advertisement for Coopers and Lybrand. I have read parts of that report, which were contained in a study of economic development carried out by the Northern Ireland Centre in Europe. I commend it to the House.

The hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) should note that his council would be considered a neighbouring one to mine. I recognise that, when the European Community comes to consider economic development schemes, it will want those schemes to cover the entire Province, or groups of councils acting together. The Castlereagh council has already expressed an interest in such schemes, and if it was shared by Down council, I am sure that a group could be formed to put forward plans that might be attractive to the EC and the Department of Economic Development.

Vote 1 for the DOE—the department of everything, as it is called in Northern Ireland—which deals with roads, should be considered with vote 4, which deals with planning, because they are related.

In the past months, if not years, I am sure that every elected representative in Northern Ireland has received complaints about the state of some of our roads. Some of us feel slightly nauseated when Ministers responsible for that Department say, "Oh, but your roads are so much better than our own in Great Britain." I had thought that the general Tory philosophy might have led the Government to bring the standard of roads in Great Britain up to those of Northern Ireland, rather than bring ours down to their standard, but that seems to be the exercise upon which the Government are now engaged.

The DOE went through a lengthy process, which included much public consultation, that eventually resulted in the Belfast urban area plan 2001. I am saddened that it has failed to live up to the expectations in that plan, which represented a contract between the Government, who accepted the recommendations of the commissioners, and the community. Under that contract, the Government recognised that the plan represented the structure of planning for the city of Belfast and the Greater Belfast area. They accepted that houses should be built here, factories there and so forth. It was understood that the Government would provide the infrastructure so that that plan could proceed.

The Government did zone land for housing, factories and offices, but they did not provide the suitable infrastructure. We are now faced with a ludicrous situation. People travelling from the constituency of the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux), around the Carryduff area, come down the Saintfield road through the constituency of the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor). As any naturally sensible people would, they then try to get into east Belfast, but they find a massive road block along the way because the necessary infrastructure has not been put in place.

In key areas of the Belfast urban area plan, it was accepted that it was necessary to carry out road improvements, but while the Government have allowed the housing and factory development to go ahead, they have not provided the roads to allow people to move about. Because of the Government's failure to provide the necessary money, the planning department has said that, in 1993, it will have to consider stopping any further development.

Rev. Martin Smyth: The hon. Gentleman did a right turn into east Belfast, but does he recognise that we have faced a road planning problem for years? The centre of Belfast is in a mess because the roads in south Belfast have not been completed around Great Victoria street and Bankmore street. The problems caused by the lack of forward planning in the roads services department has been largely responsible for blight in the city and elsewhere.

Mr. Robinson: One of the great problems is the priority that the Government have placed on capital roads expenditure. The Government want to speed us on our way to Dublin and on the Newry bypass, phases one, two and all the way up to X. The Government have found plenty of money for that, but the road to Larne has not been improved, although that would help business men to get over to Scotland. None of the feeder roads into Belfast has been improved. The Government's priorities are completely wrong, because the vast majority of the business traffic would like to go through Larne rather than south. I suspect that the Government have political motives in mind when they provide money for the Newry bypass.

Those of us who represent the east Belfast/Castlereagh area received a communication from the Minister to say that the delayed start on a number of road schemes would be subject to further delay. The Belfast urban area plan set the future location of housing and factories between now and 2001, but the DOE has said simply that councils will not be given the money for road improvements. In other words, the planning services department will be unable to undertake development anywhere.

That, in effect, was the message in the letter from the divisional planning officer in Belfast. He made it clear that the southern approaches transportation strategy is the key element in deciding where future housing should be built. If the money for that strategy is not provided, it is clear that housing and factory development in the Castlereagh and outer east Belfast area will suffer.

[Mr. Robinson]

I and many of my colleagues in local government are discontented with the system of appeals to the planning service department. I am not criticising the Planning Appeals Commission, which does a good job. It does not always come to the decision that I would wish, but no one could impugn its impartiality. Long delays occur before one is granted a planning hearing, and an even greater delay occurs before one is given the result, but that commission is doing a good job.

The intermediate stage in the planning process, however, simply does not work, and by and large it is surplus to requirements. The planning system in Northern Ireland was changed so that district councils simply had a consultative role, and the DOE was given the lead one. That Department makes a recommendation as to what should happen to any given planning application to a district council. The DOE condescended to allow councils to give their view on that recommendation, but it then adjudicates and decides whether planning applications should be approved or rejected.

The district councils are entitled, however, to send applications to the planning directorate. That directorate is the planning godhead—three people sit around in Stormont who to all intents and purposes are the creatures of the DOE. Therefore, little impartiality is exercised when it comes to judging whether the decision of local departmental officials is accurate.

If one sends an application to the directorate for referral and asks for a meeting, one is told, "No, we will not meet you. We will hear the views of our planning department and they will put your view to us. We will then make our decision." What kind of tribunal inquiry can claim to judge an application impartially when it listens to only one side of the story? If the directorate is to be a meaningful part of the planning process, it must be forced by the Government to hear both sides of the argument.

Little extra time would be involved if those at the directorate were asked to attend district council meetings or invited council representatives to put their case. If that happened, much less use would be made of the article 31 procedure. Under a concession given by the present Governor of Hong Kong when he was the Minister responsible for the DOE in Northern Ireland, if two thirds of a district council support an objection to an application, a public hearing on it is allowed.

A better interim appeals system might result in less use being made of the article 31 procedure, with a reduction in the work load of the planning appeals commission. I trust that the Minister will not allow the vested interests in his Department simply to advise against my suggestion, but will judge it on its merits.

We have in my constituency a retained fire station at Cregagh, known as the Castlereagh station. It has been there for a long time and provides, in effect, two fire stations for Castlereagh, east Belfast and surrounding areas. Its members have carried out their work valiantly over the years, and deserve much praise. One thinks immediately of the tragedy at Belvoir, where the men were first on the scene and did first-class work to minimise the impact of the damage that had been caused.

It is sad to relate that, on the morning after the Belvoir disaster, the firemen of the Castlereagh station returned to their jobs to be handed an envelope—they expected it to contain thanks for the work they had done the previous day—explaining that it was proposed that their jobs should be done away with, that the station should be closed and that a new station should be established at Carryduff.

Those who know the basis on which firemen are retained will know that they are required to be within a certain distance of the fire station so that they can respond to a call within a given time. Moving the station from Castlereagh to Carryduff would not only reduce the fire cover from two to one pumps but would mean that the men employed at Castlereagh could no longer operate from the Carryduff station.

There are a number of essential buildings, including hospitals, in the surrounding area. At least, there are a number of hospitals there now, although one wonders whether, in view of the Government's policy, they will be there for long. There is clearly need for a quick response in fire cover terms. The Castlereagh station has always been a backup to Belfast and has a commendable record of covering what might be described as ordinary fires when the Belfast fire station has been covering emergency calls.

The area covered by the existing fire station is developing. The number of houses, businesses and facilities has substantially increased over the years, so a case could be made for more, rather than less, fire cover in the area. That is why those with knowledge of the area feel that the decision has been taken entirely on economic grounds rather than in terms of having the best fire cover for the area and essential services in it.

Education is close to the heart of the Minister who will reply to the debate. He has recently decided to take a magnifying glass to the education service and to review how it is operating, particularly in terms of the education and library boards. He will know that, when Ministers begin carrying out reviews, the people engaged in the services being reviewed become uneasy and uncertain. I urge caution on him as he carries out his review.

I hope that, in terms of the education and library boards' tasks, it will be a real review, and that he will not rule out the prospect that much of the work carried out by those boards could be done by elected representatives. In the past when Ministers have carried out reviews, reorganisations and reforms into every aspect of life in Northern Ireland, they have usually resulted in elected representatives being taken out of the process.

Health is a perfect example. The elected members were thrown off and put into second-rate health councils, where they had no real say or influence over major decisions. I hope that that is not what the Minister is contemplating, if he is contemplating anything. I trust that he will allow for the democratisation of the education and library boards, rather than the removal of the veneer of democracy that now exists.

Whether the Minister wants to review local councils, whether he has some idea up his sleeve about a Greater Ulster council for the whole of Northern Ireland, or whether he believes that peace will reign and we shall have stability in Northern Ireland, with the SDLP being less resistant to constructive proposals and talks resulting in devolved government, I do not know. Perhaps he will tell us. But we must have democratic control of education in Northern Ireland, that control going to the people there rather than to a Minister who, with the greatest respect, is not answerable directly to the people of Northern Ireland.

I say with the greatest respect to the Minister, because he is one Minister who is prepared to listen to people when constituents are taken to meet him. I am not buttering him up, although a group of people that I took to see him from the Bloomfield collegiate school will be happy if the capital expenditure programme which he will announce in the next few weeks includes provision for an extension to their school. They have a better case for such a development than any other school in Northern Ireland.

That case goes back many years. The school's population is growing, because it is a popular school—and, after all, the Government say that they want to encourage popular schools. It might be described as the people's, the parents' choice. Those responsible for the school decided some years ago that, because Government finance appeared to be restricted and the school needed an extension, they would do it themselves. They accepted that they could not provide the sort of high-flown extension that could be built at Lagan college with Government money, so they initiated an appeal to raise money for a somewhat lesser scheme.

They asked parents and former pupils to put their hands in their pockets, and the appeal for money proceeded. After a while, Government officials said, in effect, "We suggest that you stop what you are doing. Let us do the thing properly." So, halfway through the scheme, they called a halt to the appeal, took the advice of the officials and put in proposals to meet the Government's standard. They waited and waited, and they are still waiting—*[Interruption.]* There are many wise men in the east. The wisdom in that case will be judged by the generous response of the Minister to the appeal they made when they met him recently.

Another aspect of spending for which I will search when the Minister's much-awaited document is published is sporting provision. The Government have given up on sport in relation to district councils. They will meet existing commitments, but there appears to be nothing further in the pipeline. I suppose that we must wait for the lottery to begin and hope that some money from that will do the job that the Government should be doing for district councils.

We are in desperate need of a centre of excellence, a Northern Ireland sports centre, the case for which is irrefutable. Wales, Scotland and England have centres of excellence. England has several. Northern Ireland does not have one, yet, per head of population, Northern Ireland does much better at sport than other parts of the United Kingdom. A Government who believe in encouraging people to work on a cross-community basis should recognise the value of sport for cross-community contact.

However, I suspect that, in a few sports, the organisers discourage certain people in the community. That is reprehensible and, as someone interested in sport, I would encourage the Gaelic Athletic Association, who refuse admission to membership for certain people, particularly in the Crown services, to remove that obnoxious ban from their constitutions, and to come into the full world of sportsmen in the Province.

I hope that the Minister will look favourably on the sports centre committee's request for help with a Northern Ireland sports centre. We do not expect him to provide all the money. The sports centre committee has already set out proposals by means of which it will hope to get money from district councils, sponsors and the general public. It already has a £1 million start from the Foundation for Sport and the Arts, and it is looking for, I think, a few million pounds from the Minister.

At least he should prime the pump and show that the Government are on board. That will free the money from the district councils, which are at present a little nervous of giving their money in advance of seeing the colour of the Government's. It is not the amount that the Government will give us that is important but the fact that they give us that pump-priming money to show that they are on board and will see us through the whole scheme.

The House has been very patient as I have gone over these detailed matters. It is unusual for the Chamber to be used to deal with the intricacies of a constituency's business as this debate allows, but I trust it will not be long before, in another part of the House, we can deal much more often with more of the intricacies of Northern Ireland business, and have Ministers more accountable for the spending of their Departments.

6.21 pm

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): This is the first time for a considerable period that we have had the opportunity to discuss the finances of Northern Ireland. It is most significant that the autumn financial statement for Northern Ireland was not made in this House. Despite many requests at business question time for information to be given to Northern Ireland hon. Members so that they could debate it in the House, it was refused. The only people who were informed of the consequences of the detail of the autumn statement were members of various political parties in Northern Ireland who were not necessarily elected either to councils or to this House. I therefore welcome this opportunity, the first in a long time, to look at the various aspects of financial administration.

It is also appropriate, as other hon. Members have said, that our first concern should be the rise in unemployment in Great Britain and in Northern Ireland. In saying that, I think that I detect a certain degree of complacency when Ministers talk about Northern Ireland. They say that the recession is not biting so deeply in Northern Ireland this time as it is in Great Britain, but the comparison depends where one starts from. The simple story is that the economy of Northern Ireland was already considerably depressed before the new depression took place in Great Britain, so to use that unfortunate expression in a negative sense, Great Britain is, in a sense, catching up with Northern Ireland. In my own constituency, and this applies in many areas of Northern Ireland, we have had endemic unemployment running between 18 and 21 per cent., not just this year or even for five years, but for 20 years.

There were questions today about industrial development and inward investment. Envy was expressed about hon. Members who were complaining about having lost substantial substructures of industries in the past couple of years. Many areas of Northern Ireland have never had that substructure of industry to lose. My constituency is unfortunately one of them. I shall deal with that later with some statistics, if I may.

Notwithstanding talk about industrial and commercial inward investment and job creation, most of the base industry of Northern Ireland is still agriculture. It is not just the base industry: it is the cement that keeps our communities alive in what is basically a rural community

[Mr. Eddie McGrady]

of six counties. It is important that every Department of Government should recognise the basic, simple fact that a further degradation of the rural community would mean the total collapse of the agriculture industry with the rural communities and the ongoing consequential expenditure of a further drift to the towns and to the one or two cities that we have. It is a matter of good policy to sustain the agriculture industry, even at additional cost, because that will save money in the long run in terms of providing an infrastructure of every description to the different areas.

The hon. Member for East Derry (Mr. Ross) dealt in detail with some immediate problems facing the agriculture industry, which has hit just about its lowest ebb for many decades. He spoke about the potato industry. My constituency produces a lot of the seed potatoes to which he referred. The series of climatic conditions, the heavy rains in the autumn and early winter and the alternations between frost and rain, not only prevented the crop from being harvested but caused considerable rot to the seeds, which could not be lifted in time for storage. They also rotted in storage.

Compounding that, as the hon. Member said, was the export market. It is all export, but in Portugal and Cyprus that market has totally collapsed. In very early December I asked the Minister responsible—who lives or resides, or whatever he does, in another place—to provide a stock feed scheme to save the potato industry. That was rejected out of hand. I must put on the record that it was rejected out of hand on the advice of some of the farming unions; they are now scrambling for aid for the same industry, but they said at the time that no special treatment should be given to the potato industry. Now that the extent of the calamity is known, that is obviously not the way to go forward.

Allied to that was the debate that we had on Tuesday about the hill livestock compensatory allowance and all that that involves. When we talk about farming, as the hon. Member ~~for~~ East Derry did at some length—*[Interruption.]*—well, I prefer to call it Derry.

Rev. William McCrea (Mid-Ulster): It is Londonderry.

Mr. McGrady: I am addressed in this House as the Member for Down, South when it is recorded as South Down, so what is in a name?

The Ministry issued statistics of average incomes for the hill sheep farms. We are talking not about big farmers like those of south east England, but about those earning an average of £3,761 per annum according to the Department of Agriculture. On that figure, they are basically on income support. They are the type of person we want to keep in business. Allied to that was the introduction of the beef quotas last year for suckler cow herds and the iniquitous and anomalous continuation of the milk quotas. All those have militated against the viability of a basic industry, and the Department of Agriculture must have in mind to carry out an urgent, comprehensive review to aid that industry, or at least to put it into profitability so that it can aid itself. In my constituency, in particular, hill farming is allied with the fishing industry; the introduction in that industry of quotas and limited fishing time at sea by a so-called conservation Act means that farmers cannot even add to their income from the harvest of the sea. So here we have an industry which needs urgent and radical attention. I hope that the Minister will convey that to his colleagues and to the Department and have something done about it.

The next block of votes refers to economic development. I ask the Minister to draw the attention of his ministerial colleagues to the concern expressed in many quarters about the reappraisal of responsibilities between the Department of Economic Development, the Industrial Development Board and the Local Enterprise Development Unit. I suspect that we are getting it all wrong. Even the easiest way of preparing an organisational chart setting out where the responsibilities of the various organisations and the Department lie is a considerable one. The Industrial Development Board deals exclusively with inward investment from throughout the world into Northern Ireland while LEDU, suitably augmented and professionalised, deals with indigenous or internal job creation, preservation and enhancement. There is the basis for an easy and sensible demarcation which would stop the confusion that is about to enter the system.

I have an interest in trying to promote a Down-Chicago link. That involves, obviously, a linkage between Down and north America. I am told that I and the company involved must approach the LEDU office at Newry. That office is as relevant to Chicago as I am to the moon, though the lunatic connection might belie that. I maintain that that office has no relevance. The Department of Economic Development must undertake a rational and practical re-examination of the system. Perhaps a wee bit of empire building is going on which should be brought to book on the basis of practicality and good common sense.

I draw the Minister's attention again to the inequality of the distribution of inward investment in Northern Ireland. Parliamentary answers over the past three years show that there have been 875 first-time visits in relation to would-be industrial investment into Northern Ireland. There were 282 in 1989-90, 255 in 1990-91 and 338 in 1991-92. In each of those three years there were three, two and five visits to South Down respectively. In other words, an area only 20 miles from the Belfast docks received only 10 visitations out of 875. That is less than 1 per cent. The pattern was the same in the past. A great injustice continues to be perpetrated in the sharing out of industrial development. I do not accept that industrialists cannot be encouraged more positively to areas such as South Down. Areas which have been denied industrial development could be given more grant aid than areas which have been industrialised. In other words, there could be an element of zoning. Economic incentives could redirect industrialists.

We all know about the much-vaunted introduction of fibre optics to rural areas of Northern Ireland, including South Down. I am disappointed that the Government have not made a greater effort to create back-office transfer jobs not only from the south of England, where the process has taken place, but from the north American continent and Europe. There is the example of Castletown in County Kerry. That small village is responsible for the entire administration of an American insurance company. It is a most cost-effective arrangement. That is a good example of the opportunity for job creation in Northern Ireland.

How can we bring industrialists to an area which does not have an industrial site? I have been told, "Don't worry about that: if an industrialist wants to set up in your area, he can have a purpose-built factory in six to eight months; that is how good we are." The trouble is that there would be nowhere for the industrialist to build his factory. Not one industrial site is available in the constituency. Efforts have been made for the past two years to get one at Downpatrick, but it has not been secured. If an industrialist comes along, are we to tell him that he must wait two years for the legal implications to be worked out? The position at Kilkeel is exactly the same, as it is at Warrenpoint. No industrialist will tolerate a six to eight month start-up date because of the lack of industrial site provision. I am talking not about large land banks but about ordinary one-off sites which can be used as we go along. It is an issue which should be given immediate and practical attention. It has been said that the "department of everything" gives us the opportunity to discuss everything.

Mr. William Ross: The hon. Gentleman says that there has been a two-year search for an industrial site in his constituency. Was land not identified, or was it found and planning problems ensued of the kind experienced at Limavady?

Mr. McGrady: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving me an opportunity to emphasise the point once again. We did not even get to the stage of having a squabble with the planning authorities. We were bogged down with administrative nonsense. There was a great juggling act with figures and costs. In other words, no one was prepared to make a decision of the kind that would be made in business—in other words, to clinch a deal or to decide to move on to another site. The approach lacked precision.

Reference has been made to coastal flood protection, and I am concerned about coastal erosion. The east coast of Northern Ireland, particularly County Down as well as South Down, is softer than the North Antrim end. The men of Antrim are hard and so are the cliffs, but dangerous erosion is taking place along the south coast, especially in the South Down area, because of the soft nature of the coastal area. I am aware that it would be an extremely expensive operation to retain all that ground, but there must be a policy to protect it. If vital areas are not protected, they will disappear and communications will suffer. God knows, there are few enough roads at present —we do not want them to disappear into the sea.

An excellent statement was made on 4 February in London by one of the Minister's colleagues about a national roads investment plan which would involve the expenditure of £2,092 million, of which £1,148 million would be directed to major road works. I received a letter dated 3 February—almost the same date—from the Department of the Environment of Northern Ireland referring to the major roads programme for 1993-98 and setting out figures which could be described only as bizarre. I shall not ask the Minister to explain them because that would be unfair. The programme runs annually from 1993-94 to 1997-98 as follows: £7·4 million, £7·2 million—that seems consistent—£3·7 million—there is now a jump—£9·9 million and then an escalation to £17·7 million. I do not believe that statement for one moment. It seems to present the never-never land of public finance.

An undertaking has been given by the Department and by successive Ministers to remedy a bottleneck at Downpatrick. It would be a relatively small scheme involving expenditure of £1·2 million. Downpatrick has been crippled because nothing has been done to the roads in the area for the past 13 years. In that period, there has not been £1 of capital expenditure on a major roads programme in the area. Admittedly, part of South Down happens to cross the dual carriageway somewhere around Banbridge; I know Banbridge, and that is attributed to South Down, but in fact it is a Newry-Belfast route and has nothing to do with South Down per se.

This has been a matter of paralysis by analysis, and it has been going on for some 26 years. This is the history. In June 1990, it was on, and the finance was available in April 1991. It was then off in December 1991, on again in January 1992 and off again during 1992. It was on again for October 1992, and now it is to be five years hence. That is the most appalling record. The people in that street have been completely shattered by the news that it has been postponed for another five years. They have been paralysed by this constant shilly-shallying. Their businesses have been run down, and allied to that has been the fiasco of the closing of the next street. The town of Downpatrick has been shattered by it.

When one considers that the same Department has a regeneration programme for the town, one wonders whether the left hand knows what the right hand is doing. Very nice environmental lamps, arches and paving stones are being put in, but the traffic cannot get through the town. The environmental impact study was alleged to be the cause. This was because the traffic was coming in through one particular funnel. Surely the environmental pollution would be halved if half the traffic were directed elsewhere, as would the noise pollution, thus curing the problem.

I come now to the question of water privatisation——

Mr. William Ross: Before the hon. Gentleman leaves roads, did he notice in the letter that he received, which I assume is the same as the letter that the rest of us received, the very large number of bridge-strengthening programmes resulting purely and simply from European Community interference in how we spend our money in the United Kingdom? Some of that work may be very necessary, but quite a lot of the bridges would have been all right for a few years, and we would have been better off with a bypass than with a strengthened bridge.

Mr. McGrady: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that information, of which I was not aware. I am sure that he is right. Let us take that argument one step further. Let us take a couple of million pounds out of the maintenance budget for some of those schemes, which would contribute enormously to the potential economic development of certain areas.

I shall speak only very briefly about water privatisation because it is not a vital part of finance; I wish just to put down a marker. The people of Northern Ireland, all the Northern Ireland Members, I venture to say, and all the councils of Northern Ireland are totally and absolutely opposed to the proposed legislation, not only because we believe that water, particularly in Ireland, is a God-given right and should not be in private ownership, but should be in community—that is, Government—ownership, but also because we know full well that, as in the case of electricity, prices would escalate on the basis of profit motivation. Furthermore, we oppose water privatisation because of the need to protect our environment. Some of our most beautiful areas are the catchment areas for the

[Mr. McGrady]

reservoirs and treatment plants. As a Northern Irishman, I would be terrified if those lovely areas were handed over to private ownership by what could be a French or other foreign company. I am sure that the legislation will be resisted at every possible opportunity and in every way by the people of Northern Ireland and their representatives.

Regarding housing, the Minister will need to explain why there is a philosophical departure from providing housing for those in need to providing it for those who do not seem to be in the same degree of need. I refer to the strangulation of the housing sector budget by the absence of any increase for the next three years. As I understand it, a shortfall of £73 million in real terms is expected. The co-ownership body and the housing associations have had increased funds allocated to them, in line with the Government's dogmatic policy regarding home ownership. The effect of this is that those in need, on whom public money should be spent, are not getting the funding that would meet their housing needs.

In November 1992, out of 22,847 homes, 9,945 were classified as in urgent need of repair. Apart from that, from 1991 to 1993 the housing sector waiting lists increased by 1,029, to 21,851. It is very important that money be spent on public authority housing and concentrated on the areas of greatest need. The same thing happened to the housing associations before Christmas. Again it went, not on the areas of greatest need, but on the areas where home ownership was the target of the bodies' activities. As I have said, if public money is spent, it should be spent for the benefit of those people who cannot ever, in many cases, aspire to owning their own homes, but who deserve a better standard of accommodation.

I refer finally to health and social services and the chicanery that is going on in all the various boards at the moment. I have the problem of dealing with two boards—the Eastern health and social services board and the Southern health and social services board. We are supposed to be having a review of medicine, care in the community and preventive medicine on the basis of what is good for the patient. It appears to me that it is a purely economic and financial reappraisal.

Homes have been closed without ministerial consent; the Minister does not even know that they have been closed. There is a drive to close down all statutory provision. That is totally contrary to the patients charter, which states specifically that there should be a choice between statutory and private accommodation.

However, the big problem is coming with the closure of the hospitals, which will affect very many of us. Hon. Members who spoke earlier referred to their particular areas. The House will be relieved to know that I do not intend to go into detail about the Downpatrick group of hospitals, because I have dealt with that at some length before. I simply say that in the constituency of South Down, which covers some 780 square miles, three hospitals are threatened with closure. None will be left. Acute services have been transferred to the city centre, which is a total bottleneck no matter which way one looks at it. It is a bottleneck in terms of traffic, patient waiting lists and everything else one can think of.

If clinical effectiveness and cost effectiveness, together with accessibility for patients, are the criteria on which the Government are making decisions, the boards are going entirely the wrong way about it and defying the basic concepts and tenets of the patients charter. It is time that the Department woke up to the fact that it is misdirecting the boards in terms of its own policy.

On maternity provision, for instance, the Department has issued an edict stating that a hospital cannot have an effective maternity unit unless it has a throughput—that is what they call it, as though they were talking about cattle—of 2,000 births per annum. When I wrote to the Royal College of Gynaecologists and Obstetricians, I was told that that was not the case and that smaller units with under 1,000 births are quite acceptable if there is good communication and good teamwork by consultants, anaesthetists, midwives and gynaecologists. That is what we have; 31 per cent. of all births in Northern Ireland take place in small units, and we have achieved much greater birth safety than we have had for centuries. Now we may be destroying something good for something unnecessary which has to be proved, quite apart from the question of accessibility.

The Department should examine the criteria which have been used by the boards as an excuse for their proposals which in reality are a cost-cutting exercise. They have nothing to do with patient care or community care. It is a bookkeeping, budgetary exercise. The boards should adopt the patients charter with regard to cost effectiveness, allied to patient acceptability, and reconsider many of the damaging consultative documents which have been so depressing for our constituents and so demoralising for hospital staff from consultants down.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Does the hon. Gentleman know that, when the Select Committee on Health recommended that the Department should withdraw its circular, it refused to do so? Now there is to be a re-examination. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that is more likely to be an attempt to cover the Department's own tracks than to meet the needs of the people because on maternity provision the Department has been hoist with its own petard?

Mr. McGrady: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, and I agree with him totally. It is a paper exercise which has nothing to do with patient care. The Department should reconsider its proposals and bear in mind the comments of the Select Committee on Health.

I wish to refer to three areas where there is a lack of health provision. The opportunities for breast screening in the Southern board area are inadequate. Finance should be made available immediately to provide screening facilities. A study has been undertaken on cystic fibrosis. In a letter dated 23 November 1992 the Minister said that the study had been completed. I hope that its findings will be put into force so that cystic fibrosis sufferers and their carers may get all the help that they need. The provision of help should not be delayed by administrative hang-ups.

I also want to draw the Minister's attention to the comments of the Chest, Heart and Stroke Association, which has stated that 1,200 cardiac bypass operations are needed in Northern Ireland each year. The chief medical officer has recommended that only 800 operations—75 per cent.—should take place. Will the responsible Minister undertake that there will be a review of the provision for cardiac surgery? We have spoken about that before. The position has improved, but not sufficiently to cope with the real need in the community.

I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to put points to the Minister and his colleagues. There are conflicting demands on finance in each Department, but a reappraisal of some of the points mentioned in the debate might bear more fruit than the current programmes proposed by various Departments.

6.53 pm

Rev. William McCrea (Mid-Ulster): Sometimes when we debate Northern Ireland affairs, I note by their absence the keen interest of right hon. and hon Members on the Government and Opposition Benches. However, when the House is dealing with Northern Ireland questions—in other words, at prime television, photo-call time—Northern Ireland Members find it difficult to be called. At most, Northern Ireland Members will get one question, and the rest of the time will be allotted to Tory or Labour Members who are keenly interested at that time. However, they have little to offer in this debate. Yet representatives of Her Majesty's Government will seek public support in the local government elections in a few months' time.

Mr. Beggs: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is frustrating for hon. Members who regularly submit questions to discover that they do not come out of the ballot or the tombola, or that somehow the computer tends to overlook them? We are not unaware of the number of planted questions which are arranged to ensure that Ministers have an opportunity almost to provide press releases.

Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it would be helpful if the Opposition and the Government reached an agreement to restrict the number of questions submitted by their Members for Northern Ireland Question Time? The same should apply to Scottish and Welsh questions. Surely on those occasions, Members from the relevant regions should have more opportunity to raise issues.

Rev. William McCrea: I accept that intervention wholeheartedly. There must have been a planted question today, because an hon. Member, in asking his question, was able to mention a percentage, 38 per cent., instantaneously as if he had a calculator. Much research was needed to come up quickly with the exact figure. It sounded as if that was a planted question.

I do not object to the release of information which is of value to Northern Ireland Members. In recent times, some Members from Northern Ireland have been so disgusted about the listed questions, and the Members who have been called, that they no longer submit questions because they think that it is useless to do so. That is a sad commentary.

Many matters are in the hearts of Members from Northern Ireland. Today's debate is taking place under the shadow of disgraceful unemployment figures. We cannot specifically blame the Ministers on the Front Bench, because Northern Ireland, and especially my constituency, has a long history of unemployment. Even though we have appealed continually to successive Governments to intervene, they have not reduced basic unemployment.

We should remember that the figures are not just statistics. As my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) said, behind each of the unemployed there is hardship. We are talking about breadwinners who cannot provide for their families. Many of them want to do so. I acknowledge that some are happy to leave it to society to provide for them, but the vast majority of the unemployed earnestly wish to make a contribution to the community. They should be enabled to make that contributions. We are certainly enduring the ravages of the present recession, but my constituency has for many years suffered deplorable unemployment, which I condemn. The Government could do more.

When the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) was on his feet I was tempted to call him the hon. Member for Ballynahinch, as he did not have the courtesy to give the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) its proper name. Regardless of what the hon. Member for South Down thinks, Londonderry, East is the proper name of my hon. Friend's constituency. Surely the hon. Gentleman ought to be courteous enough to refer properly to the constituency of a fellow Northern Ireland Member, especially when the hon. Gentleman is taking part in a debate in London. He seems to think that mention of the word "London" as part of the name of Londonderry might burn his tongue. My hon. Friend and his constituents are entitled to some courtesy. It is obvious from voting figures that the vast majority of the people in that constituency want it to be called Londonderry, East. Nobody is entitled to deprive them of that right.

It is quite right that the hon. Member for South Down should be concerned about the level of unemployment in his constituency. I can assure him that Mid-Ulster suffers similarly. It seems that industrialists who are attracted to the Province are directed to certain areas, of which Mid-Ulster is not one. The west of the Province must be given its fair share, as must the constituency of the hon. Member for South Down.

No end of industrialists are paraded round the streets of Londonderry. They may get as far as Strabane, but they are not allowed to come over the bridge to see the greener grass of Mid-Ulster. I can assure the hon. Member for South Down that the grass of Mid-Ulster is indeed green. The Lord made it that way. If the hon. Gentleman knew anything about institutions to which some of us belong, he would realise that, in that context, green is a very important colour. However, that is a matter for another occasion.

Mid-Ulster has much to offer. It has able-bodied and highly skilled men and women, who are ready and willing to work. The industrialists who come to the Province should be encouraged to have a look at Mid-Ulster. They would be given a royal welcome. The councils and everyone else concerned would do everything possible to facilitate them. Omagh, which is at the heart of my constituency, has not only endured the blight of recession but also suffered the reorganisation—called rationalisation—of the Housing Executive, the electricity service, mental health services and maternity services. In these fields, there is a continuous jobs drain.

The regional office of the Housing Executive was transferred from Omagh to Londonderry, and there has been a great decline in the number of staff in the Tyrone and Fermanagh hospital, the main part of which is now lying vacant. It is a beautiful hospital with a tremendous history, and it should be ringing with the voices and the footsteps of patients and workers. Northern Ireland Electricity, too, is removing its area office from Omagh, and the Tyrone county hospital has been told that it must close down its maternity service.

[Rev. William McCrea]

These things cannot be blamed on the recession. We are confronted with what is called a rationalisation programme. The Government must do more to encourage the retention of main services in the west of the Province and in other areas of high unemployment, such as my own. The rate of unemployment in Cookstown is the second highest in the United Kingdom, yet one seldom hears hon. Members from this side of the water express concern about it. In this context, one often hears Strabane mentioned. Strabane does indeed have the highest rate of unemployment, but Cookstown has the second highest. It is right that the situation in Strabane should be highlighted, but other areas with similar problems should be given some recognition. This is a matter that ought to exercise the minds of all right hon. and hon. Members.

Unemployment is an awful scourge. It is a problem that must be tackled root and branch. It will continue to blight the Government unless they do something about it. I appreciate all the schemes that the Prime Minister mentioned at Question Time today, and all the action that various Ministers have taken, but we still have unemployment on a massive scale—a scale unknown to the vast majority of constituencies in the United Kingdom. I appeal for urgent action to help the constituency of Mid-Ulster.

The constituency that I have the honour to represent is in a state of shock. It does not know what the future holds. Maternity services are of vital importance. I make no apology for raising this matter yet again. Hon. Members —even Members from Northern Ireland constituencies —have fallen into the trap of pitting constituency against constituency. It may have been thought that, if the people of Omagh were to lose their maternity services, and the people of Enniskillen were to keep theirs, the matter would stop there—that it would be Mid-Ulster versus Fermanagh and South Tyrone.

How foolish. Once the ball starts rolling, it is very difficult to stop. Hon. Members who were not interested in the removal of maternity services from Omagh now realise that other health boards are re-examining provision in their areas. At a meeting with the board in the northern area, I was told that events in the western area were being watched carefully and that the authorities in the north area would learn from what was happening in the west.

Members of Parliament from all parts of Northern Ireland are seeing the disgraceful destruction of services that have been shown to be excellent and to have the absolute confidence of the community. Who is to cast such services aside so carelessly? Will the people concerned be acting on behalf of the community? Will they be the ones using the services? No. I should like to know how many of those who took the decision on the maternity service in Omagh had families actually using it, and how much they knew about it.

In reality, the service has been cast aside carelessly by a few non-elected Government yes men and women, with little knowledge of the local services, the excellence of which is acknowledged by the local community. The Western health and social services board has decided to close a viable and excellent community maternity unit at the Tyrone county hospital, stating:

> "A larger unit made available in a neighbouring county is more desirable and would improve the quality of maternity services."

The professional consultant medical staff of the county, supported by the Omagh and Strabane general practitioners, challenge such a contention and state:

> "There is no evidence that rationalisation to any one site in the Omagh Fermanagh district would enhance the quality of service."

Rather, they contend:

> "Such a decision will lead to a reduction in quality due to the markedly reduced accessibility to services for approximately 55,000 people."

My constituents are furious. We must deal with the heart of the problem at the scheduled meeting with the Prime Minister. Instead of one board waiting to see what the other does in response to the consultative paper, and the piecemeal closing of one unit here to satisfy another there, there should be a review of maternity services in the Province. The way in which that has been done by Government hatchetmen is despicable and disgraceful, and cannot be accepted in a system with any semblance of democracy. I condemn it. The area health council voted 17 to four, with one abstention, in favour of the retention of the maternity units in the Tyrone county and Erne hospitals.

Do patient choice and the patients charter mean anything? In reality, patients have no choice. The board decides. The Prime Minister may say, through the patients charter, that there must be patient choice, but the board rubbishes that in a few seconds.

The Select Committee on Health made a recommendation which, in two seconds, was cast into the bin by the board and its officers, never to be seen again. That is no way in which to deal with an honourable Committee of this House. There should have been due recognition of the recommendation of the House, and the issue is not finished yet. It will not go away until justice is done.

I am delighted to report that, despite the board's attempt to put a blight on the Tyrone county hospital, births in the maternity unit have remained at their previous high number. When a question mark is put over a hospital, people often vote with their feet, leading to a closure, but here the opposite has happened. A proper, earnest, genuine review is needed. Without it, justice will neither be done nor be seen to be done.

We must end the situation whereby the people of Northern Ireland are herded like sheep into a corner. There must be some democracy. It is about time that people were listened to through their democratically elected representatives. Church leaders, politicians from all political parties, general practitioners and consultants have spoken with one unanimous voice, yet the Government close their ears to what the people have to say.

Within two weeks of the Minister taking office, he gave his consent to that closure. Before the Minister had a full understanding of his job, and without researching the issues properly, he made a decision which affected the future and the lives of the children in my constituency.

What will be the future for those children? I draw to the attention of the House the important case of a child born prematurely at the Tyrone county hospital on 10 December 1992, who was subsequently transferred as an emergency case on the same day to the special care baby unit at Altnagelvin hospital in Londonderry. That child was returned to the maternity unit of the Tyrone county hospital on 18 December 1992.

I have in my possession the instructions given to the ambulance service on the treatment of infants. They say:

> "The premature baby and the low-weight child are among the top priority cases in the ambulance service. They are very susceptible to infection and heat loss."

But that child was returned to the Tyrone county hospital by voluntary care services. That is exactly what will happen when the service is taken away from Omagh. New-born babies, some of whom will be underweight, emergency transfers, will be carried in the back of a car.

On both transfers, the nurse accompanied the child. The Western health and social services board operates the voluntary car service on a large scale. In other words, a payment is made per mile covered by the service. It seems that the service will replace the ambulance service where an accident or emergency ambulance is not required.

I should be obliged if the Minister could tell us what consideration has been given to the condition of the patient. What about the risk of cross-infection between patients in the same vehicle? What about the distance of travel and the social and domestic needs of the patient? I have written to the Minister asking him such questions, and I draw them to the attention of the House, because there is deep concern at the way in which the Western health and services board is treating the mothers and babies in my constituency.

I had a visit from a doctor concerning a referral to a consultant. He gave me the documentation on the case, which I shall be taking further. On 11 February 1991, the doctor referred a patient to a consultant for an immediate examination. On 9 December 1992, nearly two years later, a letter arrived stating:

> "I am afraid that, as a result of extreme pressure from management regarding waiting list initiatives and the patients charter I am not in a position to see this particular patient any sooner as this would have a direct adverse effect on the overall outpatient waiting time."

Two years later, after the doctor had written again to ask for an appointment, the consultant wrote to say that he could not see the patient because of the extreme pressure from management as a result of the waiting list initiative and the patients charter. Instead of the patients charter working for the patient, it has worked against him. The doctor then had to advise the patient to pay for the treatment he needed, and the consultant was able to see that patient within a few days.

I also have the letters concerning that case. Those who pay for it get immediate attention; those who do not pay are put on a waiting list. Two years later, the patient received a letter saying that the consultant still could not see him, because of the waiting list initiative and the patients charter. It is a serious matter, and the medical fraternity are very angry that the patients charter is not working for the patient. This is a slight not on the consultant, but on the current system, which is totally unacceptable. The health service in my constituency needs urgent help.

Roads are another big problem. Maternity services are being taken away, sending mothers miles away along country roads. In the winter, those roads are neither gritted nor salted. We have the largest network of country roads in the Province, yet we cannot get road maintenance work done.

The Northern Ireland Audit Office at the Department of the Environment produced a report on the structure and maintenance of roads. I have referred to it before, and I do so again. It states that the maintenance backlog between 1985 and 1989 in the Omagh division increased from £22·45 million to £25·33 million. Instead of the maintenance of roads improving over the years, it has deteriorated. It is the only part of the Province where that has happened.

The report provides information on all the divisions from 1985 to 1989. The expenditure on roads is deplorable. It seems that there is more urgency to build the bypass at Newry than to build new roads throughout my constituency. It seems that there is plenty of money for the Dublin road but none for roads in Ulster.

My constituents are no longer willing to accept this. They have been treated as second-class citizens or worse, particularly in Mid-Ulster. We have made demands in the past, but now we shall make more vigorous demands for more than our fair share, so that the backlog is cleared. We have been treated in a disgraceful fashion, and we have the right to the money for the maintenance of our roads.

We have no major road works, yet the Minister tells us that the Omagh bypass will be coming up in 1995-96. We need a bypass in Cookstown as the lack of one is stifling the economy and industrial development. The community is crying out for it. We need a bypass in Newtonstewart and in Magherafelt. How can we be expected to meet the challenge of Europe when the money is not made available to us?

My hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, East suggested that there were those across the water here who said that more money was spent on roads in Northern Ireland than in the rest of the United Kingdom. Interestingly enough, the booklet from the Northern Ireland Audit Office is a mine of information. It states:

> "On all roads the expenditure in England and Wales was £3,181 per mile, compared with £1,961 in Northern Ireland."

It is always being thrown in our teeth that far more money is being spent in Northern Ireland, but it is not true.

I would not suggest that the Audit Office of the Department of the Environment is putting out deceptive documents, and its document suggests that expenditure in England and Wales was £3,181 per mile, compared with £1,961 in Northern Ireland. We urgently need road repairs and bypass roads if we are to face the challenge of the European market.

We have been promised that the open market in Europe will bring prosperity, that everything in the garden will be rosy, and that it will be a paradise for all. Instead, we are still treated as backwoodsmen because we come from a part of the United Kingdom with a large network of roads but no money to deal with it. I appeal to the Minister to take action.

Agriculture is also crying out for help. Today, the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), a former Minister at the Northern Ireland Office, tabled the following question:

> "To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will estimate the number of full and part-time farmers."

It is a very good question. If we leave it for a year, we will find out how many farmers there will be. If no help is given to the potato farmers and if there is to be a reduction in the headage payment, certainly in my constituency there will be far fewer full-time and part-time farmers. The farming industry in the Province is in dire need of financial help—and we have been promised cuts. All is not well in my constituency and the rest of the Province.

Can the Minister inform the House about the present position of the lignite development? Will it help our energy industry? What is the up-to-date decision? Is it going

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ahead, or does it cut across other Government policies? Many people in the Province are anxious that we take the industry seriously as it may help us face some of our costs.

My constituents are in a tragic situation. We have the second highest unemployment figure in the whole United Kingdom. As stated in the report, our roads are in the most deteriorated state ever. I will quote the report once again:

> "A high percentage of the roads in Northern Ireland were coming into the last quarter of their lives. Over the next few years rapid deterioration would become increasingly evident and in the Omagh division, serious deterioration has occurred."

That is the reality for my constituency. My constituents face high unemployment, a worse road network, hospital services being removed. What hope does the House give them? I suggest that the Government have urgently to help those people who are in vital need.

7.27 pm

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I shall begin in the same way as some other hon. Gentlemen, by commenting on the structure of the debate and the way in which it has been conducted. This is one of the few occasions during the year on which we can raise matters of constituency concern. Because of the almost total absence of any meaningful form of local government in Northern Ireland, as an hon. Gentleman said in response to a question from another hon. Member who popped into the Chamber for a few moments, they are county council matters which ought not to be considered on the Floor of the House. I agree with that. Such matters should be dealt with in the equivalent of county councils in Northern Ireland.

In the absence of much-needed local government reform in Northern Ireland, hon. Members should look again at the way in which we conduct the debate. When we get an appropriation order for legislation, we do not have the same diffuse, wide-ranging debates as we have today. An attempt is made to structure them, and perhaps that approach could be extended. The hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) mentioned the possibility of creating a Northern Ireland Select Committee. One ought to exist, because it is anomalous that the Northern Ireland Office is the only Department of state in respect of which there is no Select Committee; that situation should not continue much longer. That Department, more than any other, needs a Select Committee because of the absence of proper accountability in respect of Northern Ireland matters. I fully endorse the comments of the hon. Member for Belfast, East and was glad to hear them.

The Northern Ireland Committee, which is the equivalent of the Welsh Grand Committee and Scottish Grand Committee, might also be used for that purpose. Hon. Members representing Northern Ireland constituencies would welcome more structured and better-focused debates. Looking around the Chamber one sees the consequences of this consolation debate. We complain about the inadequate way in which Northern Ireland business is handled in the House, so the Whips, instead of allowing us 90 minutes from 10 pm to 11.30 pm—the strict entitlement to which we could be confined—arrange earlier in the day consideration of business of no great importance that will not run until 10 o'clock.

We saw that with the Foreign Compensation (Amendment) Bill this afternoon. I do not believe that I am breaching any tradition of the House or divulging anything untoward in saying that, because the usual channels do not operate in our case. It appears that the Whips decided to arrange business in such a way as to give more time to Northern Ireland—a gesture to mollify us after our criticisms.

Nevertheless, that is not a good approach. Giving us half a dozen hours to debate an appropriation order which is wide-ranging and diffuse—and which consequently empties the House—is not a satisfactory method of handling Northern Ireland business. I hope that serious consideration will be given to that issue.

We expect that during the next few days the Secretary of State for Scotland will make a statement that has been heralded by the press, and by the right hon. Gentleman himself, as being concerned with "enhancing", to use the word employed by the Secretary of State in Scottish Question Time last December, the way in which the House handles Scottish business. I hope that minds will be similarly concentrated on the way in which the House considers Northern Ireland business.

The hon. Member for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea) referred to the absence of other hon. Members from this debate. The electorate of Northern Ireland will see part of these proceedings and will notice that—*[Interruption.]* I notice that a Conservative Back Bencher has entered the Chamber as I speak, thus breaking the duck that has existed for some time. Viewers in Northern Ireland will notice the level of interest in Northern Ireland matters displayed by the Conservative party, and no doubt they will take that into account when they consider whether to vote for Conservative candidates in the forthcoming local government elections.

The hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) repeated his complaint about the way in which the Northern Ireland aspect of the autumn statement was handled, with the issue of press releases in Belfast rather than by statements in the House. That practice, too, must be reviewed. It happens with not only the autumn statement but many other announcements. When Scottish or Welsh matters are involved, statements are made in the House. Such statements would give Northern Ireland Members an opportunity to ask questions. Instead, a press release is issued, usually in Belfast—and that is unsatisfactory.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Does my hon. Friend agree that difficulties are created for Northern Ireland Members when newspaper and radio journalists in Belfast who do not know much about a subject telephone for our opinions on something that we have not even seen? That is one consequence of press releases being issued in Belfast without hon. Members who represent Northern Ireland constituencies being given any notification of their content.

Mr. Trimble: I entirely endorse my hon. Friend's observation.

Mr. Beggs: Perhaps I may give my hon. Friends some hope that things are changing. Already, a Minister has made a point of inviting some of us to discuss matters on which he is about to make a statement, before press releases are issued.

Mr. Trimble: I thank my hon. Friend for drawing attention to the first occasion on which the normal courtesies are being extended to Northern Ireland Members.

Mr. Mates: Whether or not it is the first time, I remind the hon. Gentleman that I made a point of inviting Northern Ireland party leaders to Stormont, so that they were fully briefed before anything was released to the press. That is a result of the developing relationship over the summer—the talks process—and I am glad to hear the hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs) acknowledge that that was helpful. I will always try to continue keeping hon. Members who represent Northern Ireland constituencies informed of decisions that we are taking and are about to announce. I understand the hon. Gentleman's point about statements to the House, but that matter is not for me.

Mr. Trimble: I thank the Minister for his remarks, and take his point about not being in control of statements in the House, or about decisions in that regard—although the hon. Gentleman is not without influence. I will, however, quarrel with his response to my hon. Friend the Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs). Usual courtesies and the procedures of the House ought not to be doled out by the Government as a reward for good conduct. They are something to which we are entitled as a right. If the Minister reads his remarks, he will understand my meaning.

The hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) and other hon. Members mentioned the impact of high electricity charges. I fully agree with those comments, and cite the example in my constituency of a firm that is suffering greatly as a result of rising electricity prices. The significant point is not so much the overall increase to industry as the growing differential between electricity prices in Northern Ireland and those in Great Britain.

In recent years, electricity charges to large users have risen from being 18 per cent. more expensive in Northern Ireland to 25 per cent. more expensive, which puts local industry at a disadvantage. The company in my constituency to which I refer is Lurgan Fibres—60 per cent. of whose output is sold on the English market. That firm is in competition with one other, in Yarmouth, but it is saddled with the massive handicap of paying electricity and energy prices 25 per cent. higher than those in England. Consequently, that company must push down the cost of its raw materials, endeavour to be more efficient —which it does—and review the wages that it pays. That reinforces the tendency for Northern Ireland to have a low-wage economy, which is clearly not desirable. Companies must find a way of counterbalancing the economic disadvantages that they suffer. Energy costs must be considered in a more energetic way.

Of course, it is better to be in a job than out of a job. The hon. Member for Wigan also mentioned unemployment. As the hon. Member for South Down suggested, the blasé statements issued by Northern Ireland Office Ministers—not that I wish to personalise matters—about Northern Ireland not suffering from the recession as much as other parts of the United Kingdom are very misleading. Our position continues to deteriorate. It may not be deteriorating quite as fast as the position in England and Wales, but, as the hon. Member for South Down pointed out, that is partly because they are catching up with us. It is also partly due to the large proportion of employment in Northern Ireland that is in the public sector.

Public-sector employment is not subject to the same pressure as private-sector employment. If private-sector employment is viewed separately, it is shown to be suffering from the recession just as badly as private-sector employment elsewhere—perhaps even worse. The further depression of the private sector, especially the manufacturing sector, is disastrous for Northern Ireland.

Having said that, let me add that Northern Ireland is faced with a tremendous unemployment problem, especially in the long term. Certain features of the unemployment figures are not altogether reliable. I am not referring to the familiar Labour point about the change in the basis of calculation to minimise those figures; I am talking about the way in which, in some respects, the Northern Ireland statistics overstate the problem of people on the dole.

It is a familiar problem. The hon. Member for Mid-Ulster said that the Cookstown area of his constituency had been recorded as having the second-highest unemployment rate. He will know that, if he goes down to the lough shore, he will observe that a number of people drawing the dole are fishermen doing the double. They are doing that by over-fishing Lough Neagh, thus doing great harm to the lough. The construction industry is also notorious for the extent to which its employees are on the double.

In certain areas—especially near the border—the normal administrative processes do not operate effectively. That means that more people are on the double. I believe that if those processes were effective and the number of people on the double could be reduced, the unemployment figures would fall slightly. Moreover, the structure of the statistics—the nature of the persons unemployed—would be different, and that would have policy implications for the Government.

I am sorry that the Minister responsible is not in the Chamber, but one aspect of the matter will present him with a challenge when he returns to Northern Ireland. Perhaps he will have a look at the figures, and find out whether Mr. Gerry Adams—who was elected to serve the constituency of Belfast, West, but never discharged his duties—is still drawing the dole. As everyone knows, Mr. Adams is a senior executive in a multi-million-pound business. I shall not describe the nature of that business, but hon. Members are familar with its nature. Mr. Adams ought not to be drawing unemployment benefit now. That question epitomises part of the difficulty, and illustrates my reason for wanting a more rigorous approach.

Let me now raise some constituency matters. First, I wish to follow the hon. Member for South Down by referring to health boards and hospitals. Other hon. Members have also mentioned the massive problems engendered by the way in which the health boards are operating, and by the way in which they are reviewing hospitals. My constituency falls within the Southern health board area, and I am therefore affected by the "Making Choices" review. The board is threatening to close two of the three hospitals in my constituency.

Of course, the review is on-going; it could be said that we must wait for the outcome. The review document, however, is written in a way that points to a particular outcome: it clearly indicates the future confinement of acute services to just three hospitals in the border area

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—Daisyhill hospital in Newry, the Craigavon central hospital and South Tyrone hospital. Moreover, it points to the closure of all the other small hospitals in the area, including, in my constituency, Lurgan and Banbridge hospitals. That would be a retrograde action.

An important part of Lurgan's hospital provision is continuing care for the elderly—a service which should be provided as locally as possible. Even if they have to travel another half-dozen miles, the relatives of the elderly may be affected, because they are often not particularly mobile themselves. Care should be provided as close as possible to the people concerned. Perhaps the principle of subsidiarity has an application here.

The position of Banbridge hospital is even worse, because it provides a wider range of services. It is in an area with a substantial population, which is growing rapidly. That in itself argues against closure. It is no good the Minister saying that this is a matter for the board, and that the Department will not become involved until later; I see a real need for the Department to be involved at this stage. I think that it should re-examine its own regional strategy framework, and to ensure that the reviews give appropriate weight to the question of accessibility.

The Department should also take consistency into account. I have reason to believe that, in the implementation of regional strategy, the Eastern health board is using different criteria from the Southern health board in measuring the delivery of acute and general hospital services. Greater weight should be given to advances in medical technology which now make it possible for an increasing number of surgical and medical treatments to be carried out locally. Local hospitals such as Banbridge could become centres of excellence in that regard: such developments have proved successful in the United States and in other European countries.

We need to ensure that the interests of patients are paramount in the review. Again, that raises the question of the structure of health boards, and the way in which they operate. I must question whether the way in which the health boards operate now makes patients' interests paramount. As the Minister knows, the structure of the boards has been changed to allow the removal of elected representatives and their replacement by nominated representatives. Generally, those who have been nominated are not representative of the community and—I hate to say it—they are not persons of character. They do not seem to be able to stand up to the officials and other board members. I am forced to conclude that the board's decisions are made in the interests of bureaucrats, consultants and those running the hospitals, rather than in the interests of patients.

Let me draw the Minister's attention to a couple of local government matters, one of which arises under the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, which relates to such matters as entertainment licences. I ask the Minister to consider the experience of Banbridge in regard to a nightclub known as Circus Circus, and the council's difficulty in trying to control the impact on the local community.

The Minister will know about the drug problem. The legislation was not adequate. Some progress was eventually made, but the maximum penalty clearly needs to be raised. It is only £2,000 in Northern Ireland I understand that it is £20,000 in England and Wales. Why can there not be parity?

We also need clearly defined grounds in the legislation for refusing licences. Perhaps the Minister will look at the analogous procedure relating to sex establishments. The legislation needs to be amended to make enforcement more effective by preventing entertainment from being provided without restriction when an appeal is lodged.

Another minor local government matter where enforcement is not effective concerns the byelaws on the consumption of alcohol in public places. The byelaws are not working because of the requirement, in the Department's model byelaw, that a warning must be given before prosecution. That is interpreted in the courts as meaning a warning with regard to the specific incident on that night. That is not adequate. The byelaws should be looked at again. I have raised that matter unsuccessfully with the Department. Therefore, I ask the Minister to look at it, too.

Another minor matter concerning entertainment relates to gaming machines. There is reason to believe that there is considerable abuse, particularly with gaming machines that have been altered to make illegal payouts. I have heard of gaming machines with maximum payouts of £1,000 being operated in back rooms of certain premises, where the police cannot easily get at them. Even if they do get there, it is difficult to detect whether a particular gaming machine is being operated illegally.

I referred earlier to Lough Neagh when dealing with fishing matters. May I draw the Minister's attention also to the Lough Neagh rescue service. Lough Neagh is the largest inland water in the British Isles, but the Royal National Lifeboat Institution does not operate there because it is an inland water. On this huge inland water there is substantial fishing activity as well as an increasing recreational activity. There is a marina at Kinnego in my constituency. There are marinas elsewhere, including the one at Ballyronan, Antrim.

Aldergrove international airport is fairly close to the lough. We have not yet had a serious incident, but we could. The next airliner that tries to land at Langford lodge by mistake—as one aeroplane did, memorably, a few years ago—might find that the runway at Langford lodge is not long enough and that it ends up in the water. Obviously one does not want that to happen, but there is a danger that it could.

The only rescue facilities available there are provided voluntarily by the Lough Neagh rescue service, which was formed a number of years ago with one boat on the east of the lough and another boat at Kinnego. The service is funded by the district councils. Some time ago the Department was kind enough to make a capital grant, but engines and boats need to be replaced. There is the possibility of a third boat being provided in Antrim. Capital expenditure will be required. I hope that when the Lough Neagh rescue service goes to the Department—which it may have to do shortly—it will receive a favourable response.

I referred earlier to Kinnego bay. There is a serious problem there with the discharge of effluent into the middle of the marina. I have mentioned this problem before. I received assurances from the Minister that something would be done about it, but the question is when. On page 35 of the supplementary estimates for Northern Ireland, we see that provision is made for long-term capital projects covering various sewage treatment works, but I see no sign of the Kinnego problem being dealt with in the period up to 1998. I hope that provision has been made for it elsewhere. Urgent action needs to be taken over the discharge of effluent from the Kinnego sewage treatment works into Kinnego bay. At the least, the outfall must be extended from Kinnego bay out into the lough, but the sewage treatment plant at Bullay's hill is not operating satisfactorily.

To turn to some development matters that affect my constituency in one form or another, the hon. Member for South Down complained about the land that has been provided for industrialists in the South Down area. It is just as bad in the portion of South Down that lies within the Upper Bann constituency. That brings me to the Banbridge area. No provision has been made there for industrial development. Discussions have taken place over several years between the Industrial Development Board, the council and others, but, as yet, no site has been provided.

I understand that the IDB has recommended a site adjacent to the main road between Newry and Belfast, commonly known as the Banbridge bypass. The council is prepared to support the site, if a new flyover can be constructed from the Banbridge bypass to the site. There is a bridge across the bypass which goes on to Bannview road, but the problem with the existing bridge is that it would bring inappropriate heavy industrial traffic through a residential area. For that reason, the council is anxious that a new bypass should be constructed. However, the construction of a new flyover may make the site expensive in terms of the way that the IDB looks at it. Nevertheless, I believe that a special case can be made out for that expenditure.

There is no industrial land in the Banbridge area. There was a small estate at Scarva road, but it is full. The planning service and the IDB acknowledge that a site is needed. They have been searching for over four years for a site, but, so far, no site other than this one appears to be suitable. I understand that already there are two businesses that would be interested in building factories if a site is located on the bypass.

That bypass is a strategically important route in Northern Ireland terms. It is the main A1 route from Belfast to Dublin. There is a feeling, rightly, in the Banbridge area that the town has not received as much industrial development money as adjacent councils and that it has been ignored by the IDB. That omission needs to be remedied.

As for the Craigavon area, the Minister knows of the proposals in the new town studies concerning both Portadown and Lurgan. However, they hinge on major road proposals. I was disappointed that in the Minister's recent statement on road proposals Portadown and Lurgan appeared nowhere on the list for the next five years. It is difficult to see how the town centre studies can make progress without there being some indication of a commitment to the road proposals.

Even if major road proposals cannot be implemented, important minor developments could go ahead. The Minister may be aware that the crucial point for Portadown is the development of the Irwin bakery site in the centre of Portadown. I understand that Irwin's will be moving in the near future to a green-field site. That large area will then be liberated. There are imaginative plans for developing a major shopping-related attraction, which would have an impact on the town and the surrounding area equivalent to that of the Richmond centre in Londonderry. For that to be successful, minor road adjustments have to be made, particularly at Mill avenue and the roundabout at Magowan's buildings.

In addition to those minor roadworks, progress needs to be made on the planning front. I understand that an application for outline planning permission was lodged with the Department 14 months ago. That development features strongly in the town centre study prepared for the Department by consultants. The development outlined in the consultants' report is the same as that for which the owners have sought outline planning permission. Yet 14 months after the application, we do not have a decision. The matter has been delayed. It is difficult to see how it can reasonably have been delayed because the purpose of outline planning permission is to enable the Department to give broad agreement in principle.

If there are difficulties with road matters, which clearly there will be until the Mill avenue and Magowan's buildings roundabouts are sorted out, they can be covered by simply reserving those matters for later detailed applications. Obtaining outline permission is an important stage for the developers and it is regrettable that we have had such a delay.

As the Minister will know, our major problem in Lurgan, apart from blight created by road proposals, which has existed in some areas for 20 years, is dealing with the consequence of the massive bomb almost a year ago. My hon. Friend the Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) discussed the problems that the bomb at Coleraine had produced for his area. Exactly the same problems continue to exist in Lurgan town centre.

I commented on another occasion on what appeared to be a favourable development in the policy that the Department adopted on major incidents. I am thinking in particular of the Belvoir bomb. The Department was responsible for encouraging the Housing Executive to make an immediate offer to sort out the properties of residents nearby. It tailored that response to the situation rather than sitting back and letting people apply for criminal damage or criminal injury compensation through the statutory procedures. I welcomed that because it was a good idea to tailor the response.

I should like to see more done. Care should also be taken in dealing with those whose trade suffers as a result of incidents. Businesses suffered a loss of trade as a result of the major bomb incident in Lurgan town centre. For many months after the incident, travel through the town was severely restricted. Many businesses that were not directly affected by the bomb suffered substantially through loss of trade. Many were family businesses and their financial future was threatened. Clearly, the income and living standard of those carrying on the businesses diminished sharply.

Consideration should be given to ways of giving help to people who suffer loss of trade as a resultt of incidents. I realise that it would require legislation. Such people could be given a rates holiday. When developers start a development and lease property, it is common to give rent holidays to enable them to start up the business. Similar help could be given through rates holidays. We could also consider a mix of grants or soft loans to assist people. Something needs to be done. The threat still exists of major bomb incidents in town centres. I realise that there would be implications for not only Northern Ireland, because

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similar problems could develop elsewhere. It would be a good idea for people to have their thinking caps on before dealing with the issue.

I have a major problem with the vexed matter of urban development in general. In addition to the Northern Ireland spring supplementary estimates, I shall refer to the document "Expenditure Plans and Priorities. The Government's Expenditure Plans", published as one of the departmental reports following the autumn statement. It is an interesting paper. It details the plans and proposals that are being implemented. Under the heading "Urban Regeneration" we find references such as:

> "Urban Development Grant is the principal urban regeneration measure in Northern Ireland, aimed at the most run down parts of Belfast and Londonderry."

There is the problem. UDG is aimed only at Belfast and Londonderry.

Paragraph 7.108 says:

> "UDG continues to be targeted in areas where regeneration has been slow to occur, in particular the areas covered by the Belfast Action Teams."

That reinforces the problem. The urban development grant exists only for Belfast and Londonderry. But they are not the only areas of need or the only areas where regeneration is slow to occur. There are other areas of need, but we do not have Government programmes for those areas.

I notice from the Northern Ireland spring supplementary estimates that even in the urban development grant there appear to have been substantial reductions of about £1·5 million in current expenditure and £1·5 million in capital expenditure. There appears to be an increase under another heading. Under heading B.3 entitled "Urban Regeneration", the document says that £2 million will be spent on community economic regeneration schemes in the current year.

A total of £3·4 million will be spent on the community regeneration improvement special programme. That looks good until one realises that those programmes are not directly administered by the Department. Indeed, CRISP does not even feature in the Government's expenditure plans, even though it seems to involve £3·4 million of taxpayers' money. The reason is that while the programme is funded by taxpayers' money it is not under Government control. It is transferred to the International Fund for Ireland, which administers it in Northern Ireland. It appears that the Government take no responsibility for decisions on those programmes.

In the past the Government have refused to answer questions that I have tabled about CRISP. No one appears to be accountable for the expenditure. It is run by the IFI. Indeed, I recall attending a conference more than a year ago organised by housing associations at which a representative of the IFI appeared. He was asked to make a statement about the programmes which he was responsible for administering. He is one of the four officers of the IFI who is responsible for a certain geographical area. He introduced the topic by telling the people at the conference that he had a sum to spend of many millons of pounds—the exact figure escapes me—and that he was not accountable to anyone. He could spend the money whatever way he liked. Yet half of what he spent was taxpayers' money. That is not satisfactory as a matter of principle and because the IFI administers some of the money under what it calls its development programme in a biased manner.

I shall give one example. There was a development in my constituency—in Killycomaine in the town of Portadown—where there are some run-down shops on a housing estate with flats over them. Some of the persons there approached the IFI for support. At the same time, some persons with a virtually identical problem in the Tunnel area of Portadown approached the IFI for support. Both applications were encouraged, but then the goalposts changed. The people in Killycomaine were told that they were too far out of the town and their project did not go ahead. But the project in the Tunnel went ahead.

I see the hon. Member for Mid-Ulster laughing. He is familiar with the local social geography. The project in the Nationalist area went ahead while that in the Unionist area was turned down. That example is repeated again and again when one looks at the report produced by the IFI. It operates in a biased manner. The IFI discriminates shamefully in its operation. That is intolerable.

I have complained that the IDB has failed to deal with parts of my constituency. I have complained also that the IFI has not been fair in its application within the constituency. There is a common factor and a common person between the two bodies. As the head of both the IDB and the IFI we find Mr. McGuckian. I had occasion to refer to him at our party conference. I said that he was appointed as head of the IDB at the insistence of the Irish Government. I underline the word "insistence". I said at that party conference many months ago that I had that information from a well-placed, authoritative and well-informed source. Afterwards, journalists said that they knew who the source was and agreed that my information was accurate. Of course, I shall not reveal the source, but it was accurate.

Mr. McGuckian was appointed at the insistence of the Irish Government. We can speculate why that happened, and what he is carrying out, but he heads the IFI, a body which consciously discriminates. I refer to that person in particular because I notice from the press that this week he has been quick to allege, without sufficient foundation or justification, that Queen's university has acted in a discriminatory manner. One's only comment about that allegation is: what cheek, for a man who heads an organisation which from its inception has been discriminatory and continues to be so, to try to pluck the mote out of someone else's eye.

Rev. William McCrea: Does the hon. Gentleman agree with me that many people in the Province cannot understand why that one person seems to be appointed to so many key posts? Is there no one else in the Province who is qualified to take some of those posts and assist the said gentleman with the heavy burden placed upon his shoulders?

Mr. Trimble: I note that point. On the other hand, I want to be fair and put a slightly different viewpoint for a moment. The gentleman is not without talents, skills and achievements. He is the sort of person whom one would have expected in the normal course of events to obtain certain public appointments. Nevertheless, the scale of preferment is remarkable, and when we know what one of the factors behind that scale of preferment is, question marks must arise. My main reason for referring to that matter now is the remarkable contradiction whereby a person complains about alleged discrimination while practising discrimination himself. As the hon. Member for Mid-Ulster said, the matter also raises major questions about the way in which Government appointments are made, which is also often discriminatory. However, that is a huge topic, and perhaps it is a topic for another day.

8.12 pm

Sir James Kilfedder (North Down): As the first, and perhaps the only, hon. Member to do so, I welcome the Minister of State's announcement last week about the Government's spending plans for Northern Ireland for the coming three financial years, 1993 to 1996, involving a total of £23.1 billion.

Of course, I could ask for more money. I have many projects in mind which are dear to my heart and which I should like to see implemented in Northern Ireland. Many problems in Northern Ireland could be rectified easily and quickly by an influx of money. None the less, it is right and proper to express appreciation of that total amount of money. I am sure that many people in other parts of the United Kingdom would say that Northern Ireland was getting a fair crack of the whip, but there are exceptional circumstances in Northern Ireland which require exceptional treatment. I have pointed out those factors in previous debates on appropriation, and some of them have been touched upon today.

The publication of the report entitled "Expenditure Plans and Priorities for Northern Ireland" was intended

> "to let the public know how we intend to spend these substantial resources and what we hope to achieve over the next three years".

The public—I use the word which appeared in the report —certainly have a right to know, but the matter should not stop there. Once a sum of money has been allocated to the Province, the people of Northern Ireland, through their elected representatives, should have the right to decide how taxpayers' money should be allocated between the various Government Departments and regions, and to choose the priorities to be adopted in Northern Ireland.

It is ludicrous that Ulster Members of Parliament have only this relatively short debate twice a year to discuss the Northern Ireland economy and all branches of the Northern Ireland administration. I shall not repeat what has been said already, but I accept what the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) and others have said about the nature of the issue and the need for a proper structured debate. Indeed, I believe that such matters can be properly discussed and examined, at least to start with, only by a Select Committee which could call witnesses and experts and undertake examinations of civil servants and Ministers.

After all, this is the Northern Ireland budget. The Budget for the rest of the United Kingdom is given plenty of time in the House, and we need a proper way of examining Northern Ireland's finances. It is important that Northern Ireland Members of Parliament should be given the opportunity fully to scrutinise Government expenditure and to probe Government policies. Only through the closest possible examination can we establish a degree of democratic responsibility. Again, I shall not refer to what has already been said about the fact that the administration in Northern Ireland lacks the full democratic element which exists in the rest of the United Kingdom.

The new figure for unemployment in Northern Ireland is, I believe, 108,009. That is a tragedy for so many people in the Province. Those are human beings and they deserve our compassion. They are men and women, husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, and sons and daughters, all of whom are out of work and seeking jobs. I say that most of them are seeking jobs. In Northern Ireland, as in other parts of the United Kingdom and throughout the world, there may be people who do not want to work and who are prepared to live on public money, but the unemployed people whom I know and who come to see me desperately need jobs. There are people with great skills or who have been to university yet cannot find a job, and other people who have left school and are seeking employment. Those young people leave their schools full of hope, idealism and ambition. They have every right to feel ambitious—yet they face an almost permanent place in the dole queue.

What applies to young people applies also to the man who expects to be the breadwinner for his family. He is demoralised and robbed of his dignity by being jobless. More must be done to deal with the dreadful situation of the unemployed. Unemployment is a terrible scourge. We must recognise that and, once we have done so, more must be done to remedy it.

I am thinking about unemployment throughout Northern Ireland, and I sympathise with anyone who is out of work, but I am thinking in particular about the unemployed people in my constituency of North Down. The Government and the Industrial Development Board seem to regard North Down as an affluent area which does not require special measures or efforts. I fear that Northern Ireland Office Ministers and senior officials move only among professional people and people with considerable wealth.

Without actually looking at him, I can sense that my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), who is sitting beside me, is shaking his head. However, I have not yet heard of any Minister or senior civil servant, or any senior member of the IDB or of anything else, calling in at what in England would be called working class homes—we do not have those class divisions in Northern Ireland, thank God. I have not heard of any such person coming to Kilcooley or any other estate. I should be delighted if any of my hon. Friends knew of anyone who had called in, not as a response to an invitation but just to have a cup of tea, a spot of lunch or some fish and chips.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): I would not want to disagree entirely with my hon. Friend, but I am sure that he would agree that many people in the Northern Ireland civil service and officials from various Departments spend a lot of time with ordinary people—many of them might be called ordinary people themselves—but his admonition to people like me, former Ministers, that we should meet local people more often could be accepted.

Sir James Kilfedder: I am glad that my hon. Friend agrees with me about the need for closer contact with ordinary people, most of whom have problems of one kind or another. It is good to have contact with them. I do not believe that I could be an adequate Member of Parliament unless I talked constantly to people of all varieties throughout my constituency and spent time calling in at their houses or meeting them at my surgery.

I could take Ministers to areas in my constituency, Bangor, Holywood, Dundonald and other parts, where

[Sir James Kilfedder]

the young and the old are frustrated by their long-term unemployment. In the press release issued today the Minister of State said:

> "It is also very encouraging that, despite these recessionary times, Northern Ireland continues to attract large inward investment projects."

I am sure that the Minister did not intend to give a false impression of the Northern Ireland economy, but I do not accept that it continues to attract large inward investment projects. There is a desperate need for more investment in my constituency. If we are to witness a fierce attack on the deplorable dole queues, the Government must take more strenuous steps to encourage potential investors and industrialists to establish new manufacturing industries in the Province. We certainly need them in North Down, which has a large population and a tremendous number of people out of work. More must be done to bring industry there. The hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) also said that new industries were needed in his area.

We need to mobilise the entire community in a radical campaign to revitalise the economy and to provide the jobs which are desperately needed. I accept that Ulster is suffering bitterly from a terrorist campaign that has lasted 23 years. Those terrorists not only slaughter innocent people and mutilate tens of thousands of others, but seek to destroy the Northern Ireland economy. I also accept that Northern Ireland is suffering from the recession in common with every other part of the United Kingdom and certain regions in the world. That recession continues to bite deeply in Northern Ireland. However, we must not allow either terrorism or the recession to provide a feeble excuse for a listless economy and a record number of unemployed.

Some years ago, in a similar debate on a Northern Ireland appropriation order, I offered to travel anywhere in the world with Ministers—that is offering something—and Opposition representatives to win investment and orders for Northern Ireland. I repeat that offer now. We must do more to bring industry and investment to Northern Ireland. We must do more to provide jobs for those who are desperately in need of work.

I remind the Minister that my constituency is composed of marvellous people with great skills and talents. We have schools and colleges that are among the best in Northern Ireland. Those people have a major contribution to make and it is a tragedy that their talents are being wasted. I am biased, but I think that the North Down area provides an ideal place for anyone who wishes to set up a light industry, particularly one that uses high technology. The local people have the ability and, if not, they can be trained to obtain the necessary skills. Anyone who comes to North Down is thrilled by the beauty of the area, which is washed by the blue waters of the Irish sea.

I have the impression that the IDB largely ignores the merits of North Down and, sadly, encourages industrialists to go elsewhere in the Province. That impression is shared by many others in my constituency. There also seems to be a reluctance on the part of the IDB to provide more finance to enable existing firms in North Down to expand and thus to provide more jobs.

I hope that the Minister will accept my invitation to meet a group of business people in my constituency. If the Government worked with them, it would be possible to galvanise the local economy to attract investment, new companies and more jobs. The local business men are not concerned about politics, so they are not competing for votes. That is their great merit. Like me, they wish to see business expansion and more jobs for the jobless. I plead with the Minister: let us show compassion for the jobless and let us engage in a drive which will bring employment and investment to Northern Ireland.

My other plea to the Minister relates to the great problem affecting shop owners in Bangor. The local chamber of commerce and the National Association of Shopkeepers have raised with me the unacceptable loss of income suffered by shop owners in the borough as a result of road works which have been undertaken in the past 12 months. Those works seem to me to have been going on for far longer than a year. The pavements and roads were dug up and traffic was restricted and diverted. Those difficulties lasted for a long time. Everyone accepts the need for road improvements and pavement renewal—that is the price of progress—but local shopkeepers in Main street and High street, Bangor, and in the adjoining roads and streets, should not be penalised. They pay large sums of money in rates—one might almost say that they are subject to exorbitant rates demands—and their rents are also reviewed upwards all the time. Many of the local shops are facing great difficulties already, and on top of all that they were faced with the impossible trading conditions created by the DOE road works scheme, which drove many customers from their doors. As a result, they have lost a great deal of money.

The heart of Bangor could end up being composed of insurance companies, banks, estate agents, building societies and similar businesses, which will not be so beneficial to the local people or those who visit Bangor. That would be disastrous for the heart of Bangor, and I urge the Minister to consider the plea that I am conveying to him on behalf of shop owners. In view of the work which has lasted so long and the tremendous losses that traders have suffered, the full amount of rates should be reimbursed for the period in question. Justice certainly demands that, and I demand it in the name of all the shopkeepers.

I request the Minister to come to Bangor. I know that he has been there many times. I know that he likes the place and its people—and the people like him. I appeal to him to come and meet representatives of the chamber of commerce, who will produce documentary evidence in support of that loss. When he is there, he can come to my home and meet the ordinary people of North Down.

8.30 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I support the remarks of the hon. Member for North Down (Sir J. Kilfedder) about the need for Ministers to meet the ordinary people of Northern Ireland. The last Minister that I recall visiting ordinary people in my constituency was the present Governor of Hong Kong, who came to the Annadale estate.

We in Northern Ireland have reached the position when a civil servant may advise us the day before, or even the morning of, an event that a Minister will be in our constituency. I am not sure whether civil servants expect us to be in a position to join the Minister at such short notice. Or are they just fulfilling all righteousness? I am sure that more courtesy is shown to hon. Members who represent other constituencies and that they are given more warning to enable them to be present with the Minister.

I suppose that it is all part of civil servants trying to corral Ministers. I recall a Minister visiting a part of south Belfast and making a promise to the residents. His advisers thereafter tried to rescue him from that promise. Indeed, they assured me that he had not given it. Those who were there at the time still believe that he gave it, but as I was not present, I cannot make an objective comment one way or the other.

Reference has been made to the nature of today's debate. The tragedy is that that mentality—of not extending to us the courtesy that hon. Members generally expect—has reduced those of us who represent Northern Ireland constituencies to the local council level. In short, we are not treated in the same way as Ministers treat other hon. Members.

As the debate has proceeded, I have been thinking that we are rather in the position of doctors in their surgeries. They are made aware of only the complaints and, in the main, meet people with problems. Hon. Members are in the same position, even though out there in the healthy world are constituents happy enough with what is happening in their lives. It is the nature of the game that, as we examine the situation, we bring problems into the open.

I should not like the debate to pass without tribute being paid to some of the excellent work that has been done in recent years by the more energetic Ministers in the Northern Ireland Office. I say that because there is a tendency on the part of some people to paint Northern Ireland so black that when people visit us they are utterly amazed to discover what a marvellous place it is. Indeed, I regret to say that public representatives sometimes join television people and others from the media and give a distorted picture of the Province. Fortunately, far more good things than bad are going on there.

I recall on one occasion being in the United States and being asked, "What is it like to live there?" I replied, "Not any worse than living in the lovely bay area of San Francisco, where 27 murders took place last weekend." We sometimes get the position out of proportion.

Even so, we are concerned about accountable democracy, and it is difficult to hold in one's head the various items in the Minister's statement as he glossed over the sweep of the order before the House and the sums being granted for the ensuing year. I was reminded of the occasion when, with others representing various parties in Northern Ireland, he briefed us on public expenditure issues. I asked at the time what would happen at the year end if there was a surplus. I was assured that there never was a surplus and that all the money was always spent.

Having been the chairman of the Northern Ireland finance committee at the time of the assembly, I was aware that that was not altogether true. To my utter amazement, I found on reading the report of the Comptroller and Auditor-General that in the last year for which figures are available, 1991-92, there was an underspend of about £50 million, which was returned to the Consolidated Fund. I could not understand how it could be said that we had spent all the money at a time when, for example, a decision had been taken in principle to resite a new hospital on a green-field site in Coleraine.

We had been urging that that resiting should be done in stages. About £12 million of underspend, according to my reading of the accounts, could have been used for that purpose. We live in an era of creative accountancy. Accountants and auditors, when drawing up reports and balance sheets, manage to obscure rather than reveal. One must be well-informed to find one's way through one of their labyrinthine reports. I hope that I have not misread the report to which I referred. If I have, the Minister will correct me. It seems wrong that when there is such a pressing need in the area of the Northern board area, some of that money cannot be spent on that project in Coleraine. After all, the plan is available and there is no question of having to start from scratch.

The Department of the Environment's vote 1 refers to money spent on parking. What is the state of play in the Department concerning residents' parking? Since 1983 I have been pressing for action on that front, but the only response I have received is to the effect that legislation to enable parking to be provided for residents is not available. I have said that, being the responsible Department, it should initiate the necessary legislation. The only answer I have been given is that the situation is more difficult than that.

I have constantly said that if legislation is available for residents's parking in England, it should be available in Northern Ireland. Eventually I was told that the Department had four pilot schemes in hand. Interestingly, they were supposed to be in south Belfast. I can appreciate why they might have been there. I gathered that one was to have been in east Belfast, but I could not understand why it should be in the area proposed when we were attempting to deal with traffic congestion.

If they were to have been in south Belfast in Stranmillis, Pakenham street and Joy street, those familiar with the area would have accepted that pilot schemes there would be worth while. But I could not comprehend why a scheme should be conducted in the Short Strand, in east Belfast, unless there was a particular section of overcrowding in the Short Strand area which was unknown to anybody else. What is the present position? The latest rumour is that no pilot schemes are being held and that the Department is not continuing its examination of residents' parking.

While I welcome, under that vote, the widening of roads and the belated upgrading of highways, I remember the words of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, who told me many years ago, "I have always told the Dublin Government that if they are that interested in a united Ireland, they should improve the road from Dublin to Belfast." I cannot understand why the Department is pouring so much money into the stretch of road south of Newry, creating a bottleneck in the Irish Republic, when money is urgently needed to upgrade the Larne road.

Ministers have told us that the CBI has been pressing for the upgrading of the Dublin road. The CBI and business people and some outside Northern Ireland have argued that the number one priority is the upgrading of the Belfast to Larne motorway. Even a dual carriageway would be a decided advantage.

Looking at vote 2 of the Department of the Environment, I ask whether it is not within the terms of grants for the upgrading of houses that occupiers, tenants, have a right to these grants. Or have restrictions been imposed so that only owners can get grants? An 80-year-old woman who has lived in her home for 40 or 50 years has been told that since she is only the occupier and not the owner she is not eligible for a grant to improve her home.

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

In the context of awareness of problems that have arisen constantly over decisions made without thinking through to the ultimate impact, may I raise with the Minister the question of the buy-back scheme? We are thankful that it was introduced and it obviously met with greater success in Northern Ireland than was expected, but I have pensioner constituents who saw the scheme advertised, and got in touch with the Housing Executive straight away. Their own estate agent was also in touch. The house was examined and surveyed and a price agreed. In the light of that agreement, a verbal understanding, all that was needed was for contracts to be signed. They went ahead with the purchase of a retirement home in North Down that suited them. Then their hopes were shattered when they were told "We are not buying your property", on the ground, I am told, that having met such demands on the scheme, the Housing Executive introduced a rationing scheme for the various areas of Northern Ireland and said that it was not going to purchase more than two homes in that area of my constituency. It seems to me that, even in this world of lowered moral standards, a man's word should be his bond and that a Government Department that gives a verbal understanding to purchase should not quibble because there is no written contract.

In vote 4, there is an amount of £141,000 shown as savings, a decrease. Why was that money not used to upgrade some of the unadopted rear entries which are a blight upon the environment? It is near time that we grappled with that problem. I recognise that it is a big problem, but we shall not tackle a big problem unless we start on it and I trust that where there is money of that nature available it will be used purposefully.

I welcome the increase that has been set aside under the health and social services heading but we need more understanding of where it is going. Under vote 1, how much has been spent on Project 2000 in Northern Ireland? I have seen the figures for England and Wales and I know that it is moving forward in Northern Ireland, but I have not yet discovered whether it is moving forward successfully or how much money is being spent. I recognise that there is a case for closing some units and cutting out wastage. I regret that the hon. Member for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea) is not here at present. I realise why that is, but he referred to the closure of the wards for mental patients in the Tyrone county hospital. I remember visiting that hospital and I pay tribute to the work that is done there. I also remember that a member of the local committee who had a child with mental health problems said to me "It is a pity that they did not let you see the locked up ward." I am delighted to see more and more people moved out into smaller units in the community rather than being locked up in some of these larger institutions.

If a building is not being properly used for something else, it is a detriment to the community, but not necessarily a detriment to those who have been in those institutions in the past.

May I ask the Minister on what objective grounds the Department directed a health board to go in a particular direction when it had had consultation and obstetricians and others had agreed with a system of maternity provision that would have allowed the maternity unit to continue in Downpatrick and would see the Jubilee being the main centre in Belfast. Now Downpatrick is to be closed and the Eastern board has said that it will not purchase services from the Jubilee hospital. About 1,200 babies born to mothers from south Belfast were delivered in the Jubilee last year. The Jubilee has had a proud record, not only of care and quality of provision but of cost. To close that hospital will necessitate spending capital money in upgrading facilities elsewhere. When one considers the length of time to travel, not just from Downpatrick but from Kilkeel, Newcastle and South Down right up to the nearest provision, which is now being mentioned as Lagan Valley—and I realise that I am on dangerous ground here since my right hon. Friend represents Lagan Valley—one realises that it is not the proper use of scarce capital to close an institution eight miles down the road and scatter the patients elsewhere. I would go further and say that it seems to be a monstrosity for a senior official—as I mentioned in Question Time today—to spend the past three years trying to dissuade GPs from going under the Jubilee hospital.

As some right hon. and hon. Members will recall, I have raised this matter in the past. The board denied that it had happened, but I said on that occasion that the people to whom it was said and the person about whom it was said knew who was telling lies. I now have definite evidence that a senior member of the board dealing with public health was going round general practitioners trying to dissuade them from going near the Jubilee hospital. Thank God that those GPs were wiser than that man. The women in east Belfast, certainly those in the city centre and over towards Cregagh and many from Antrim, still choose to come to one of the finest places of maternity provision in the United Kingdom. I hope that the Department and the board will have second thoughts.

I know that it is possible I shall be told that it is a matter for the board, but since he who pays the piper calls the tune, it is the responsibility of the Department. Why was the general manager of the Eastern health and social services board who was retiring and had consultancy lined up in Europe appointed for a further two years? Is it because, as someone put it to me, he has a job to do: to close units in the Royal and the City, to maintain the Mater because of his own position in the Knights of Columbanus?

Reference has been made to cardiac surgery. The Minister knows that I have been concerned about it for a long time. I was amazed this week to discover in the Park-Davis survey that Northern Ireland is not as high on the list of areas in need of such surgery as we were led to believe. I understand, of course, that there is a problem in Northern Ireland, but it lies in fifth place in the league behind Wales, Scotland—that is certainly in first position—and sections of northern England. Are we tackling the problem in the right way? Does the problem go beyond the lack of theatre space, which has been extended? Has it something to do with the promotional pattern in the Royal Victoria hospital and the unwillingness of senior registrars to work in the department? I understand that one such registrar moved to England and was appointed as a surgeon in Newcastle. We must ask these questions because too many people in Northern Ireland have been waiting far too long for cardiac surgery. If there is a problem, it should be tackled.

I hope that trusts will not remove choice and forestall the right of general practitioners to purchase provision where they believe that they can get the best service at the best price.

I pay tribute to the allocation of funds to the Independent Living Foundation. Where does the Department stand in following through the attempts made to have an extension of the Peto institute in Northern Ireland? How far has it been funding Donaghadee? Is it prepared to fund Dungannon, or is it putting most of its backing into the Rapid Action for Conductive Education movement in Birmingham? The people in Northern Ireland have worked hard to promote conductive education and I trust that the Department will at last give them purposeful backing.

8.52 pm

Mr. A. Cecil Walker (Belfast, North): I am sure that the Minister is aware of the recent television programme about the exodus of Protestants from north Belfast. The programme was fairly factual in presenting many aspects of the problem, but the main issue was not addressed, which is the lack of decent houses in Protestant areas for Protestant people.

Before commenting further, I wish to make it clear that I am not drawing comparisons with the Catholic constituents. Instead, I congratulate them on their efforts to attain excellent housing in many areas of my constituency and on their accomplishments in being fully consulted by their various community groups on the design and construction of their new houses. A development that immediately springs to mind is the Unity flats complex, which demonstrates up-to-date designs with the use of excellent materials.

I am not laying the blame directly on the Housing Executive, which must work with criteria laid down by the Government which do not address the problem of Protestants being forced to vacate houses which are, to say the least, not fit to live in. It is necessary to examine the reasons for the exodus, which vary widely according to areas. I know that the Minister has some knowledge of the deprivation in the areas about which I am talking. He has promised to visit one of them in the near future. I know that he has a busy schedule, but I suggest that he should visit others, where he will see the problems for himself.

In the Duncairn-Tiger's Bay area—thanks to the efforts of the Minister's predecessor—an encompassing development has been planned, which embraces housing, industrial development and social needs. Unfortunately, there have been problems in reaching a consensus. I appeal for urgent action to get the new housing started in an attempt to halt the drift of population from housing which no longer serves its purpose. It has fallen into disrepair and is of an unacceptable standard.

The area of Downview on the Antrim road also needs urgent attention. There are old Orlit houses that were the subject of the housing defects order. They have deteriorated to such an extent that they are now referred to as the Downview slums. Many of them are being blocked up as the tenants cannot live in them. Other occupiers are waiting to get out at the first opportunity. A decision has not yet been taken to replace them.

Just off the main Crumlin road in the area of Rosewood street, Yarrow street and Albertville drive there were excellent brick-built terrace houses which have been allowed to fall into disrepair. I have been endeavouring since 1983 to have these houses declared a housing action area project. There have been numerous appraisals amounting to nothing. In the meantime, the occupants have been forced to move, leaving the area semi-derelict.

Across the Crumlin road into the mid-Shankill area there has been a redevelopment programme, but it progressed at such a slow pace that it was impossible to retain the population. Consequently, phases planned for future development have been cancelled and the area has been sown with grass seed. It is prime housing land, but it is not being developed for much-needed housing, despite a waiting list in the area which will never be met.

Further up into the Woodvale-Ohio street-Enfield area there have been blighted housing conditions for the past 15 years. There was a reticence to do anything in the area. Responsibility was abrogated by declaring it to be a priority investment zone. There was, of course, no investment because of the conditions. Again, the Protestant population was forced to move out.

Another Protestant estate is situated in Glencairn. It was a jerry-built estate thrown up by cowboy contractors. The estate has suffered from that legacy ever since. The active community association has been vainly trying to have the estate upgraded, with the demolition of vacant maisonettes which have decayed to such an extent that the entire area is being brought into disrepute. It is another example of a reluctance or failure to provide basic living conditions.

The area of Alliance-Glenbryn has been allowed to fall into such disrepair that it is now almost a shell. There has been some effort to rehabilitate it, but that is not a solution. The area will have to be completely redeveloped if it is to be saved and if people are to be encouraged to return.

Many other areas in Protestant north Belfast will also require a sustained effort if they are to be saved, notably the Tyndale and Silverstream areas.

The Housing Executive cannot cope within its limited budget. Government funding will have to be specifically allocated to these areas if the exodus of Protestants is to be halted. Statutory agencies will also have to play a very large part in this process, as amenities will have to be provided to make for a balanced community at peace with itself.

In conclusion, I must draw attention to the terrible lack of employment opportunity in my constituency. I appeal for more enterprise zones to be declared. There are many deprived areas which could be used for this purpose and could provide local jobs for local people.

8.59 pm

Mr. Clifford Forsythe (Antrim, South): I will continue the litany of complaints that we have heard this evening. Unfortunately, this is the only forum in which we can bring them before Ministers, apart from writing to them or seeing them in our constituencies.

I will start with DOE vote 1 and refer to something that has to do with my own constituency, but also with the unemployment levels that other hon. Members have mentioned.

Can the Minister tell us why the Coopers and Lybrand report which was asked for by the Northern Ireland airport is to be kept secret, not only from those who are to be made redundant, but also from the trade union

[Mr. Clifford Forsythe]

representatives, and certainly from representatives of the public? If the reason is that it is a business tool, covered by business confidentiality, I foresee some difficulties in future if a trade sale, for instance, or a worker-management buy-out is considered for the airport. Where would that place certain employees of the airport? If it is covered by business confidentiality, surely there is some morality attached to it if some people have inside information and others have not.

Of course, if the airport is to be privatised—we do not agree that it should be, but believe that it should remain within the scope of the people of Northern Ireland—the only way to do it is by a share issue, which would allow all the people of Northern Ireland to have some say in the matter, considering all the public money that has been spent obtaining the international airport.

Will the Minister say why consultations with the work force did not take place before the announcement of the redundancies? It is not very good business practice to announce redundancies and then offer the work force opportunities to discuss matters that have already been decided. That is not consultation. Surely consultation should have taken place beforehand. Many workers at the airport will be made redundant, for whatever reason, on the basis of a report which no one is allowed to see. That is a very poor reward for those employees who have worked hard, given excellent service and been very loyal in difficult circumstances over many years.

On the Department of Social Security vote 4, I draw the Minister's attention to a problem which seems to have arisen in connection with housing benefit. When someone who is homeless applies to the Housing Executive to be housed, the applicant is told that his application cannot be accepted unless he gives an address. The Minister may think that it peculiar that someone who is homeless should be asked for an address, but that is the case.

This creates a problem for housing benefit, because, if an applicant gives an address and the occupier of that address is receiving DSS benefit, the person who has applied from that address simply to get on the housing list is reckoned to be living with the occupier, even though he or she is not doing so. Usually it is an accommodation address. Therefore, the housing benefit of the person who occupies the dwelling may be reduced by about £14 per week. That leaves the homeless in difficulty. They cannot apply for housing because they have not got an address, and they cannot make use of a friend's address because that affects the benefit which that person receives. The Minister should consider that carefully.

Like the rest of the United Kingdom, we have many problems with the disability living allowance. I congratulate the staff of the Department of Social Security, particularly those in the district offices who deal considerately with those applying for benefit. Leaving that on one side, there have been delays in Northern Ireland, as there have in the rest of the United Kingdom.

The forms are complicated. Applicants are so confused that they have no chance of getting benefit because of the way they complete the forms. As a member of the Select Committee on Social Services, I have said that it might be better if the box on the form about the need for assistance was at the end rather than the beginning. By the time people had gone through the form, they might realise that they needed help. Completing the form is as difficult for some people as voting by proportional representation.

It should be suggested to the director of the agency that Northern Ireland Members of Parliament have the use of a hotline to facilitate them in solving problems with the disability allowance, as is the case in the rest of the United Kingdom. When the Select Committee visited Blackpool, I was pleased to see that facility there.

The position on the social fund has not changed. When people in receipt of benefit have not got enough money to live on and are obliged to take a loan from the DSS to overcome their difficulties, a deduction is made from their benefit. The result is that they have even less to live on. Some people may say that money is not available to provide more benefit. Unfortunately, those in difficulty turn to money lenders who charge high interest rates. Then the people turn to drugs or drink and end up in a much worse position.

On my favourite subject, planning, which is covered by vote 4 of the Department of the Environment, advice from local councillors seems to be ignored completely. In some cases exactly the opposite is carried out.

There are numerous inconsistencies in the attitude of the roads service to planning applications. Often, when there is no other impediment to the granting of permission, the roads service, for no apparent reason, expresses vehement opposition. On the other hand, it often seems that a plan to build a house on a corner, where no one else thinks a house should be allowed, is not objected to by the service.

I should like to refer to the agriculture condition that is sometimes attached to planning permission. Like most of my colleagues, I am a supporter of the farming community. However, I have to say that, in respect of planning permission, that community seems to have an advantage over everyone else.

Let us suppose that a farmer has lived in an area for 60 years and that a plumber has lived just down the road for the same length of time. When the farmer retires, he can secure planning permission for a retirement dwelling on the farm. The plumber is not in that happy position.

I have often complained about this. The Department ought to look at the entire matter of the agriculture condition. It is quite clear that we shall have white elephants throughout the countryside if such dwellings become vacant. Indeed, there are some already. Because of the agriculture condition, no one else is allowed to live in such a dwelling. Unfortunately, the standards that apply differ from area to area.

Diversification of land use is one aspect of planning law that applies to the rest of the United Kingdom but does not seem to apply to Northern Ireland. A farmer and his family who are not doing so well may wish to open a farm shop or some other establishment connected with farming. Such a facility would be of service to the community, and people who make inquiries are encouraged by the planning service to apply for permission. However, the application is turned down out of hand.

At the same time, we all know of developments that do not appear to fulfil the conditions or have planning permission. It appears that people who defy the planning service are okay if they have sufficient finance to take on the authorities, but things are very different for an ordinary applicant. If such a person fails to satisfy one condition in respect of permission to build a bungalow, the

Department takes him as far as it can. I agree with what the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) said about local knowledge being ignored by the Planning Appeals Commission. Surely local people are in a position to assist planners.

I said that planning is one of my favourite subjects, but my real favourite is quangos. Will the Minister, under the citizens charter, publish the names on the standing list for appointment to quangos? We know that there is such a list and we know some of the people on it, because they are serving on quangos. All Northern Ireland representatives are well known because they are elected, and the names of those on the list should be made public so that everybody knows who they are. If all was above board in that way, it would be more acceptable.

Rev. William McCrea: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is only natural that the community should know who is making the decisions? The quangos are certainly making major decisions affecting the people of Northern Ireland, but the names of those who serve on them are not well known, and are often hidden.

Mr. Forsythe: I agree. I shall make a few other remarks in agreement with what the hon. Gentleman has said. Before I do, I ask the Minister to make available the names of those who have been released by their firms to serve on quangos and whose firms are then recompensed for the loss of their services. That is possible, for example, in the case of the tourist board. I should be interested to hear how much money has been spent in that way.

Will the Minister also provide us with the names of those who have dual membership—those who serve on more than one quango and those who have moved from ordinary membership to chairmanship, or from chairmanship to ordinary membership? That would also be interesting.

There is also the prickly question of those who have been appointed to quangos specifically with Dublin approval. I know that Dublin approval is given under the Anglo-Irish Agreement. I hope that, in the interests of openness, the Minister will make available the names of such persons.

Mr. Peter Robinson: Will the hon. Gentleman rephrase his question so that the Minister cannot avoid answering it? What is written into the Anglo-Irish Agreement is that the Government of the Irish Republic can make proposals for any of the quangos. The hon. Gentleman might like to ask the Minister to list all those who have been proposed by Dublin for each quango, and those who have been accepted.

Mr. Forsythe: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his suggestion. I am always prepared to take advice, and I do so on this occasion. I am sure that the Minister heard the hon. Gentleman's question, which I now put to him.

The membership of quangos is a great bone of contention in Northern Ireland. The Minister may say that that is just a bee in the bonnet of some Northern Ireland Members, but that is not the case. We have to listen to complaints from our constituents. It is terrible that bodies consisting of members who are not elected but appointed, sometimes on recommendation from outside the United Kingdom, are handling 10 times more money and employing 10 times more people than the councillors who are elected every four years. It is dreadful that quangos undergo no detailed scrutiny of any part of their operations. It is another shot in the locker for the Northern Ireland Select Committee. Even in that instance, a Select Committee would do a very good job.

Mr. William Ross: Perhaps my hon. Friend should also ask the Minister how the quangos are divided up on religious and political grounds. Whenever members of quangos are appointed in Great Britain, considerable information is given about their political affiliation. Surely the same information should be given in Northern Ireland. Because of the Fair Employment Commission, we should like to be assured that Ulster Unionists and members of the DUP were getting a fair crack of the whip. Perhaps we should be told how many members of those parties have been appointed.

Mr. Forsythe: I agree with my hon. Friend. We could ask for a great deal of information about quangos. The best solution could be not to have any quangos; then we might get on a lot better. But that is not quite true. Perhaps we should not malign those who have served well on them, although we disagree with the quangos.

I ask the Minister to pass on to his hon. Friend my congratulations on finally getting the Killead bypass on to this year's roads programme. Of course I am disappointed that the roads are not being improved in other parts of Northern Ireland. Perhaps I could be forgiven for mentioning the A26, which involves not only my constituency but getting patients from other constituencies to the new area hospital in Antrim. It is an essential road. It is most unfortunate that the road between Corrs Corner and the port of Larne is not in the programme. The work should have been done as soon as possible, to facilitate the journeys of the many people who travel through that port. Belfast and Larne complement each other, and I am sure that the people living in both of those ports would be happy to see them working fully all the time.

Unfortunately, there seems to be no overall strategy in the roads programme, as many hon. Members have said. One gets the impression that, if representatives of one particular roads section hammer the table, they will have more success during negotiations at a higher level for that area. I do not think that is the way to proceed. Surely it would have made much more sense for local councils to be responsible for repairing holes in the roads, street lights and drains, and for sweeping and repairing the footpaths. I suppose that we live in hope.

Water privatisation, which is right up my street—or perhaps that I should say, in my tool bag—is an unbelievable development. I know that the Community is setting water quality standards, but high-quality water is the one resource available to all citizens in Northern Ireland. It is one that they do not even think about, because it is always there. The long tradition of excellent service by the Northern Ireland water industry is well known. It goes back to the old days of the Belfast water commissioners, who were the standard bearers—and they could serve as an example to the rest of the United Kingdom.

In Northern Ireland, plumbers used to be registered. The rest of the United Kingdom never had that system. Unfortunately, when there was change, and Northern Ireland came under direct rule, plumbers no longer had to be registered. That was a great step back. There is no life

[Mr. Forsythe]

without water. The hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) will agree that even potatoes are 90 per cent. water.

Several constituents asked me what is to be privatised next. The suggestion is that it will be air. I hesitate to suggest that. I see the Minister writing busily on his pad, but I plead with him not to adopt that idea.

Opposition to water privatisation is one of the few issues that completely unify the people of Northern Ireland. Like the Scots, we have a great deal of common sense. Perhaps I should not mention Scottish water in the context of a Northern Ireland appropriation order, but I do so in passing. The Minister and the Northern Ireland Office will find that the people of Northern Ireland are wholly united, as we said earlier, in opposing water privatisation.

There are many subjects that I have not mentioned, but I will refrain from doing so, because it would mean detaining the House for a long time, and I want to allow my hon. Friend the Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs) to do a sweeper. He is a better sweeper than me, because I used to be a centre forward.

9.28 pm

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to this debate. Acknowledging that the supplementary estimates seek parliamentary authority for further expenditure to that already sought in previous estimates, it is not my intention to oppose the order—though I remain opposed to the Order in Council procedure. However, the additional funds being made available will be welcome and will bring advantages to all sections of the people of Northern Ireland.

It will have been noted that all right hon. and hon. Members representing Northern Ireland constituencies give the highest priority to achieving higher employment levels in all parts of Northern Ireland and to reducing the appalling misery and poverty suffered by the 110,000 unemployed in Northern Ireland and their families. It is true that that is a long-standing problem, but responsibility for it cannot be attributed solely to the fact that the birth rate in Northern Ireland is higher than the birth rate elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Unemployment has increased because of a lack of success in creating new job opportunities, and because of the lack of employment opportunities in Great Britain, to which so many generations of our young people have had to travel to find work.

I applaud the recent success of the joint approach of my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Walker) and the hon. Member for Belfast, West (Dr. Hendron). The success of their mission to the United States clearly demonstrated the ability of Ulster Unionists and constitutional nationalists to work together for the benefit of their constituents, Protestant and Roman Catholic alike. I hope that, when evaluating the valuable contribution of both hon. Members in support of officials of the Industrial Development Board seeking inward investment, the Minister will encourage similar co-operation between representatives of both communities in the search for future inward investment.

This year, we have heard some encouraging announcements about inward investment, including today's announcements. I believe that they reflect the energy expended by the former Minister, the hon. Member for Wiltshire, North (Mr. Needham), in his frequent travels overseas. I am delighted that the hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins) is reaping the fruit of that labour, and —having settled into his post as Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office—is now embarking on overseas missions. We wish him success in his efforts to attract inward investment.

Hon. Members are often asked for suggestions of job creation measures that will bring wealth and prosperity. I draw the Minister's attention to an early-day motion that I tabled barely three weeks ago, with the support of hon. Members on both sides of the House. Early-day motion 1225, entitled "British shipping industry".

[That this House is alarmed by the continuing decline in the British Merchant Fleet which, if not reversed, will damage the United Kingdom economy and threaten defence; notes with concern the decline in officer cadet training and recruitment; calls upon Her Majesty's Government to encourage the employment of British seafarers, and renewal and expansion of the Merchant Fleet by introducing in the next budget, (a) 100 per cent. ship allowance for depreciation and extended rollover relief for the sale and purchase of ships, (b) income tax and national insurance contribution alleviation for each British seafarer employed and (c) a package of incentives which will remove the disadvantages suffered by the British shipping industry when comparison is made with incentives in most European countries, until such time as steps towards harmonisation in all European countries of state aids to the shipping industry commences, and to establish maritime enterprise zones in Great Britain and Northern Ireland.]

The motion was published today, with 191 signatures. As I have said, it was supported by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

I trust that, between now and the Budget, the Secretary of State will act within the Cabinet, and will seek to influence those who make decisions to implement my suggestions. There is no doubt that that would be advantageous. There will be employment opportunities for British seafarers and for the highly skilled shipbuilding work forces, both in Northern Ireland and in Great Britain. There will also be employment opportunities in all the allied areas of commerce associated with the British shipbuilding industry. I hope that the Secretary of State will initiate action and that the Government will be prepared to listen to their own supporters and to Opposition Members.

The Minister referred to the allocation of additional funds in the agriculture budget for the purpose of disease eradication. Although I welcome the Minister's commitment, and that of the Department of Agriculture, to maintaining the internationally recognised disease-free status of livestock in Northern Ireland, I am concerned about the number of tuberculosis cases which still arise, especially in self-contained herds which had been disease-free for many years.

Can the Minister expand on the reason for the allocation of this additional money and assure us that tuberculosis, brucellosis and bovine spongiform encephalopathy, as well as all the other diseases, are well under control? Is he absolutely satisfied that the suspicions, sincerely held by some farmers, that badgers may be a source of TB and responsible for its spread are completely ill founded? What research is being done to clear up this matter once and for all?

I agree with what previous speakers said about the crisis that faces the potato industry and about the adverse effects of the decision to cut hill livestock compensatory allowances. I hope that the Minister will re-examine both issues after the debate.

I welcome the announcement of additional funding to reduce the time that patients have to wait for cardiac surgery. It will be a relief to those patients to have received an offer, even when they have to travel outside Northern Ireland for their operation and treatment, with all the attendant inconvenience and expense. Would it not make more sense, however, for an additional cardiac surgeon to be appointed so that money which goes out of Northern Ireland can be retained within it? It would help to sustain an already weak economy. Can the Minister confirm that delays in offering cardiac surgery are not in any way motivated by cost-benefit analysis of patients and by decisions being prioritised in such a way that some patients could die before they are able to obtain a life-extending operation?

I looked closely through the order and the other papers for an indication of specifically earmarked funds for roads in my constituency. I was disappointed not to find any provision for realignment of the B58 which runs from Carrickfergus to Ballynure. The road passed over a disused salt mine and was closed more than two years ago as a precaution after the collapse in 1990 of an abandoned salt mine in the Carrickfergus area. My constituents who have been affected by the road closure have been patient. They have suffered considerable inconvenience.

In June 1991 the then Minister, the hon. Member for Wiltshire, North, wrote to me to say:

> "Accordingly the DOE Roads Service has already prepared a contingency plan, including design and survey work for a realignment of the B58 road should it be found necessary not to reopen that road. As you will appreciate it would be imprudent to consider reopening the B58 road until the completion of the detailed investigatory work now proceeding and the analysis of the consultants interim report."

There was more correspondence the following year, and much correspondence in between and since, so it is disappointing that as yet no decision has been taken.

To the best of my knowledge, the reports have been completed. Measures costing more than £1 million are requested to realign the B58. I understand that a bid was made, but no funding is there for me to identify. Is the Minister in a position to say when the funding will be made available? When a road is closed, high priority should be given, once all the investigations have been carried out, to realigning it and reopening it. I hope that it will be given the priority that it deserves.

I must express disappointment that expenditure is not planned for the Larne-Belfast road until late 1997 or 1998, but at long last it is on the list. Larne, the second busiest ferry port in the United Kingdom, will finally have an upgraded road to and from the port. I hope that we shall all live to see it and will be able to be there when a Northern Ireland home-grown Minister performs the official opening ceremony.

Mr. Stott: A Labour Secretary of State.

Mr. Beggs: If the hon. Gentleman's party happens to be in power at the time, no doubt it will have taken steps to ensure that there will be a home-grown Northern Ireland Secretary of State in post.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Will my hon. Friend look again at the concept of home-grown? We are not thinking of an export, but of someone who is accountable to the electorate of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Beggs: I agree entirely with the remarks that my colleague has made. There is no doubt whatever as to what I meant.

I realise that many right hon. and hon. Members simply could not be here this evening, but I extend an invitation to them to come to Terrace Room B on 24 March, when they can have a cuppa or a little refreshment and an opportunity here within the precincts of the Palace to become better informed about the success and excellent standards that have been achieved at the port of Larne. I am sure that all our Scottish colleagues will seek to ensure that they have matching facilities on the Stranraer side.

So much for the commercial. Seriously, I want to thank personally all my colleagues from Northern Ireland, including district councillors and others, who have made representations to the Minister—and I thank the Minister himself for allowing a provision to be granted. Admittedly, it is a long-term provision, but at long last the upgrading of the busy road between Larne and Belfast is on the record. It is on the ladder, and now that it is there, although it is at the bottom, there is always the possibility of its moving up. That will be our next objective.

I make no apology for again asking the Minister to make an early decision to fund the relocation of the lime works at Glenarm in my constituency. The old lime works can be relocated behind the village, but at the moment it is a blight on that village and its continued presence prevents redevelopment at Glenarm, where there is high unemployment, and where real long-term secure employment could be provided by both public and private sector investment. I trust that that question will be considered seriously.

I realise that the Minister has been sitting in the Chamber for a long time and that many issues have been put to him. It would be unfortunate if he did not have the opportunity to respond to as many of those issues as possible and as fully as possible, so I shall finish my speech now.

9.46 pm

Mr. Jamie Cann (Ipswich): I assure hon. Members that I want to make only a few remarks, and that I shall not take long. The Northern Ireland Office invited me to Northern Ireland at the end of last autumn. Having received the last rites with my family before setting off, as most Englishmen who had never been to Northern Ireland before would have done, I was surprised and pleased at the normality of the Province compared with what most of us would have expected to find. That included Belfast—although we did not go to all parts of the city.

I am pleased to speak tonight as an Englishman and to say that, in my very limited experience, the Northern Ireland Office and the Ministers responsible for our affairs in Northern Ireland are doing a good job. The way in which they allow council houses to be built over there, support industry and work with their local communities,

[Mr. Jamie Cann]

with the public and the private sector together, is admirable. I wish that we could import it over here. I suggest that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland become the Prime Minister and that we send the Prime Minister to Northern Ireland.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Is he one of us?

Mr. Cann: He may not be one of us, but he does a lot of good things. That is what I would say in response to what I understand is called a sedentary interruption.

I am an Englishman—or rather, I am mainly English and part Welsh. We are paying the bill for Northern Ireland. We know that we are. I find it a little disappointing that so few English, Welsh and Scottish Members are here tonight to discuss Northern Ireland. We all pay for it directly—and indirectly, day in and day out, through terrorism and the cost of security. Let us all take Northern Ireland far more seriously.

9.49 pm

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): This has been an interesting debate. Hon. Members representing the constituencies of Northern Ireland have dealt with a great many subjects that deserve an evening's debate for themselves. There is a need, for example, to debate local government in Northern Ireland because we should try to ensure that those people who serve in it have a right and proper place in our debates on that subject.

Housing and planning also deserve lengthy debate because they are important and many people depend on them. Health and social services are also important and could be debated for hours, because the quality of life of so many in Northern Ireland depends upon them. Congratulations must therefore be offered to all hon. Members from Northern Ireland because they have covered the broad services on which the people of Northern Ireland depend.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) referred to the proposed privatisation of the electricity supply industry and the price rises that will result. Obviously that privatisation is not in the best interests of the Northern Ireland economy. The proposed privatisation of the water industry was also raised and the hon. Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe) said that it was one of the items in his tool bag. The hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) also expressed his concern about it. That subject is worthy of debate, and when the necessary legislation is brought forward I hope that we shall be able to debate it.

My main concern relates to chapter 7 on the environment in the lengthy document, "Expenditure Plans and Priorities for Northern Ireland". Chapter 9, which deals with health and social services, is also of significant interest because the quality of life of so many in Northern Ireland will be affected by the changes that will be initiated on 1 April relating to health provision and community care. The assessment of community care, the purchase of health care, targets and budgets will all have a bearing on the provision of services and thus the quality of life of the people of Northern Ireland. One could dwell for some time on those issues.

Because of the time constraint, I shall restrict my remarks to chapter 7 and the proposed privatisation of water. On 18 June 1992 we had a debate on a Northern Ireland appropriation order and the Minister of State, the hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins), said:

> "There is an excellent road network and an excellent supply of good, clean water. Some of my hon. Friends who represent constituencies in the south-east of England would be inordinately jealous of Northern Ireland's water supply" —[*Official Report*, 18 June 1992; Vol. 209, c. 1141.]

That is correct, and I think I see the Minister of State, the hon. Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates), nodding in assent. Why sell it? If it is so good and of so much value, there can be only one reason for the Government wanting to sell it: to present it as a gift to friends of the Conservatives.

Chapter 7 refers to water privatisation and highlights the failure of the Government to achieve their objective of establishing a Government-owned company prior to privatisation. The failure of that objective could prove expensive for us all, including the people of Northern Ireland.

We have no information about the capital value of the water services industry of Northern Ireland and no value has been placed on the water storage system there. Yet the Government are seriously considering disposing of the industry by a trade sale. In other words, it could be sold to an organisation or individual, not necessarily English or Irish——

Mr. Cann: Probably French.

Mr. O'Brien: My hon. Friend is right. It could go to a foreign organisation. By that means, we would lose that valuable Northern Ireland asset. If that procedure is followed and the asset is disposed of by a trade sale, the people of Northern Ireland will have been treated differently from the people of England and Wales, bearing in mind the sale of the 10 water authorities in 1989.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): Perhaps the hon. Gentleman is being unduly pessimistic and is jumping the gun about water privatisation. Northern Ireland Ministers take the view that they cannot alter the structure of government in Northern Ireland. Nothing can be agreed until everything is agreed. They cannot, for example, alter the structure of the Department of the Environment by giving that section of the road-mending, pothole-filling powers of the Department to, say, local councils. So given that nothing can be agreed until everything is agreed, the Government are not likely to go on with water privatisation. Nor are they likely to proceed with the privatisation of electricity. Everything is bound up in the one formula.

Mr. O'Brien: I hope that the right hon. Gentleman is correct because I do not want the water services of Northern Ireland to be privatised. If it is true that nothing can be done until certain matters are in place, that will be a blessing for the people of the Province. But the track record of the Conservatives leads us to wonder whether they will again move the goalposts and change the rules to fit the situation in which they find themselves. I fear that if a good contributor to the Tory party wishes to purchase the water service industry of Northern Ireland, the transaction will go ahead.

It should be made clear that if that trade sale goes ahead —let us remember that it is part of the Tory manifesto —the people of Northern Ireland will have been treated differently from the people of England and Wales. In

England and Wales there was a flotation and people who intended or wished to purchase shares in water authorities in 1989 were entitled to do so. That was the Government's policy of extending the share-owning democracy, but that principle will not apply to Northern Ireland if the present proposals go ahead. One has to ask why we are treating people in Northern Ireland differently from those in England and Wales.

May I also draw attention to the fact that, when we look at the proposals in the document for a trade sale and compare that to the document published on the Scottish sale of water, we find that in Scotland there are options for the people. They suggest placing the services with the new unitary authorities, in other words, leaving them with local government. That should be considered for Northern Ireland. The Scottish document also suggests creating joint boards of new unitary authorities; in other words, keeping locally elected representatives involved with the water supply industry. The document mentions a lead authority structure, which could be a local authority structure. So in Scotland there is a consultative document which is offering alternatives to the people of Scotland.

I say to the Minister that if we believe in fairness and want to demonstrate that Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom under the present set-up, the people there should be treated exactly the same as people in other parts of the United Kingdom.

What about the share-owning democracy in Northern Ireland? Can I take it that that no longer applies, or is it another Government U-turn on how to dispose of the water services in Northern Ireland? As I say, perhaps some organisations or individual will come along and the sale will go through without any reference to the people in the communities. Whatever the Government's proposals, there is a clear and precise message to the people of Northern Ireland, and a message from the people of Northern Ireland that has been expressed more than once tonight—that no one in Northern Ireland wishes the sale of the water service industry to any individual or organisation. The message from the people of Northern Ireland is clear, whether it is given to the Minister or any other person who goes there: they want to keep the water services industry in the public sector.

Mr. Beggs: I think that it is an appropriate time to reveal the secret of this little document that I have in my hand. *[Interruption.]* I am very pleased that all Northern Ireland elected representatives agree. We are confident that Members of the European Parliament of all parties, and elected councillors, will be supporting this short statement on water privatisation. We are simply saying:

> "We, the undersigned elected representatives at European, Westminster and local government level in Northern Ireland declare our opposition to any proposal to privatise water and sewerage services in Northern Ireland.
>
> We call upon the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to acknowledge and respect our opinion on this issue and not to proceed with water privatisation proposals against the wishes of the greater number of people living in Northern Ireland."

If the present Government, through the Secretary of State, are genuine in wishing to see co-operation between Unionists and constitutional Nationalists and people right across the Province, when we demonstrate, let us hope that he will be honourable and respond to the spirit of the representations made.

Mr. O'Brien: I support the sentiments that have been expressed by the hon. Gentleman. The views of the people of Northern Ireland and their representatives must be taken into account.

There is no support anywhere in Northern Ireland for privatisation. If the Secretary of State or any other Minister wishes to ensure that there is democracy in Northern Ireland, let him retain water services in public ownership and allow locally elected representatives to participate in the administration and running of those services. Local people also should be involved.

The build-up to the big sale and privatisation itself will mean hurt and hardship to people and businesses in Northern Ireland. No one will escape the price increases that will follow. Many people in the communities in Northern Ireland could suffer hardship.

I speak from experience in the area which I represent. There will be customer billing this year. Standing charges will be introduced, and unfairness will ensue. Water metering will be introduced. Pre-payment water metering is being considered by the Yorkshire water authority. If that system is introduced, those on low incomes who are already suffering hardship will have to endure further hardship. It has been said already that there is no alternative to water and that everyone needs water. Yet people will have to put a coin in a meter before they can have water. Such a system should not be introduced, but water authorities in England are talking about it. We know that if it is introduced in Yorkshire and other areas, it will be introduced in Northern Ireland.

Water services are provided by the Department of the Environment, which means that we can question Ministers. There may be a monopoly, but Ministers can be questioned. If water services are placed in private hands, we shall be unable to question anyone. There will be no competition in the privatised and monopolistic structure.

Families that are in need and face hardship will have their water supply disconnected. Over the past three years since privatisation, disconnections have increased five, six and seven fold. The people who are without water can ill afford to be in that position. Young families and others are facing hardship. Hardship will follow the privatisation of water services.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): Where does all this come in?

Mr. O'Brien: I am talking about what is happening in England and Wales now. Compulsory water metering was introduced to an area in my constituency. That is an example of the treatment that people will receive if the water industry in Northern Ireland is privatised.

A small business in the area that is covered by the Yorkshire water authority received a bill for water for the third quarter of 1992-93, which it paid a month ago. The charge for the water used was £1·04, but standing charges amounted to £34·89. That is the sort of charging that will take place in Northern Ireland if privatisation is allowed to go ahead. Small businesses will suffer. If there is privatisation, the cost of water will not reflect the value of the service that has been provided. Instead, it will be the price that people will have to pay. If the Minister feels that I am wrong, he can say, when he replies, that this situation will not apply, and I am prepared to accept that there will not be these charges.

[Mr. O'Brien]

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) has noted that there is an item under Department of the Environment about expenditure by the Department on water, sewerage and related services. I am making the point that water, sewerage and related services are in their programme for privatisation. I know that it is a subject which they do not want to discuss or hear about, but I have described the situation that applies at present in my own area and I am warning the people of Northern Ireland that they will have the same treatment. Indeed, perhaps that treatment will be worse than the treatment we are receiving now.

The small business area is one of the areas in which people who are having difficulty making ends meet could be pressed still further, because privatisation will mean that there is no relationship between charges and the services that are provided.

I therefore say to Northern Ireland Members that we must resist privatisation, because the first act of the new owner will be to dispense with quite a number of the work force by reducing the services that apply now. Then we will see that some Conservative Members will be appointed to the board of the new organisation. This happens so often with these industries that are sold and become a private monopoly. We will see jobs lost, massive salary increases for the people at the top and appointments for Conservative Members who vote for privatisation.

The same thing will apply with the privatisation or sale of the Belfast port. Here again, we will see a scheme whereby jobs will be cut and job opportunities will be lost, yet there will be an increase in salary for the people at the top and opportunities for people to join the board. Yet the harbour is working more efficiently than ever before. Even in this period of recession, there is an increase in trade through the port. So there [illegible] no justification whatsoever for the Government's privatising these efficient and worthwhile services in Northern Ireland.

The same is true of Belfast international airport. There is no justification for privatising its activities.

I will withdraw my comments if the Minister assures us that these services and businesses will not be privatised, but until we get that assurance, we have an obligation to fight to retain the jobs, services and businesses in Northern Ireland.

If the Government are sincere in their efforts to bring prosperity to Northern Ireland and do away with the divisions there, the best way to do that is to drop the privatisation programme, particularly for the water industry.

10.13 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): I shall attempt, within the time available, to answer some of the points raised today, but clearly it would be impossible to answer every point raised. I have been listening throughout the debate, apart from a brief period of 15 minutes in the middle of the speech by the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble); I apologise to him, but there was plenty both before I left and after I returned. I assure hon. Members that on issues which are specific to a particular Minister's responsibility, I will make that Minister aware of the points raised so that a full departmental reply may be sent. It is still a tradition of debates on appropriation that I should answer as many points as I can within a reasonable time.

Mr. William Ross *rose*——

Mr. Hanley: It is a little unfair of the hon. Gentleman to intervene so soon.

Mr. Ross: It is about the Minister's reply. He is well aware that anything that he says at the Dispatch Box will be recorded in *Hansard* and all hon. Members will be able to read it. If, however, a Minister replies to me but does not let all those who took part in the debate know what his reply is, hon. Members will be as much in the dark as ever, and we shall all have to put down lots of questions. Perhaps the Minister could ensure that all hon. Members get the same reply, albeit long.

Mr. Hanley: I remember well that in Committee the hon. Gentleman once stood up, after I had written to him a nine-page letter, and read the letter into the record so that his colleagues could see it. He could have done the same with a Xerox. I do not think that the House would bear with me if I were to follow him down that path. I understand his point, and I hope that any hon. Member who receives a letter as a result of the debate will show it to his colleagues.

Although Northern Ireland generally reflects the performance of the national economy, it is widely recognised that the Province has held up well in the face of adverse national and global economic conditions.

The hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott), in his usual robust way, started off by talking about unemployment, which is indeed disappointingly high in Northern Ireland, and the state of the economy. With glee, the hon. Gentleman latched on the January report of Coopers and Lybrand. It is marvellous how, almost with delight, he leapt on that one report rather than any of the many other reports over the last few months, all of which have been positive, to try to exploit the negative. The Coopers and Lybrand report of December was also positive. No one should read one report and draw total conclusions therefrom. We should take a series of reports and look at the statistics over a period of months.

In the year to September 1992, there was a 1 per cent. decrease in local employment compared with a 3·3 per cent. fall nationally, and over the year unemployment showed an increase of 3,200 to 14·6 per cent. of the work force—a rise of only 0·4 per cent. compared with 1·4 per cent. in the United Kingdom as a whole.

The deterioration in Northern Ireland's principal economic variables began later and has been less pronounced than for the rest of the United Kingdom. In addition, output in the United Kingdom for the third quarter of 1992 fell by 0·6 per cent. but the corresponding figure for Northern Ireland rose by 1·8 per cent. It is therefore no surprise to learn that recent independent surveys, in addition to those mentioned by the hon. Member for Wigan, have recorded a marked improvement in confidence among the Province's business community. While none of us can afford to be complacent in the present harsh environment, those indicators provide solid evidence of the resilience not only of the Northern Ireland economy but of the people who work and live in it.

The Government are not complacent. For example, we have committed £450 million to the Department of

Economic Development in the current financial year to be used directly and indirectly to assist Northern Ireland's economy. It is encouraging that the increase in the seasonally adjusted figure for Northern Ireland still shows an average decline of only 200 over the last three months.

There is particularly good news on the investment front. Since 1988, a total of over 6,800 jobs have been provided through inward investment. I am grateful for the contribution of hon. Members from all parties in Northern Ireland to that. Pan European Textiles is the latest and brightest spark in that story. The key to the future of Northern Ireland is the same as the key for the United Kingdom as a whole. It is to have competitive companies able to meet the needs of the market place. Northern Ireland is in a good position to achieve that.

Mr. Cann: With Government help.

Mr. Hanley: The hon. Gentleman says, "With Government help.". That is what I have just been saying.

Economic growth in Northern Ireland is very good indeed. Northern Ireland experienced nine consecutive years of sustained economic growth—the period 1981-90. That matches what happened at national level. Over the year to September 1992, the outputs of the Northern Ireland production industry and manufacturing industry rose by 2 per cent. and 1 per cent. respectively. The comparable figures for the United Kingdom as a whole declined by 1 per cent. in both case. As Northern Ireland's manufacturing output over the past five years has risen by 16 per cent., and as the output of the production industries has increased by the same magnitude, growth in the Province compares very favourably with what has happened at national level.

The hon. Member for Wigan raised a number of issues. I do not have time to deal with some of his more general questions, such as the one concerning the abolition of the wages councils. The argument in Northern Ireland is the same as the argument here: we believe that wages councils distorted the working of the labour market and that their abolition should help to create conditions in which the economy can grow and jobs can be created.

The hon. Gentleman said that there was absolutely no co-operation with the Northern Ireland Co-operative Development Agency. In fact, the Department of Economic Development has given financial support to the Co-operative Development Agency since its inception. In the current year it has provided more than £200,000. The prolonged, seven-year, pilot project is due to finish on 31 March 1993.

Mr. McNamara: Will the Government keep it going?

Mr. Hanley: If the hon. Gentleman allows me to proceed, he will get an answer to his question.

Officials of the Department of Economic Development have been discussing NICDA's future role with representatives of the agency. It has been agreed that the agency should become a more broadly based community economic development organisation, while retaining its focus on co-operative development. Detailed discussions on the future funding of NICDA are ongoing.

The hon. Member for Wigan raised the question of education reforms. I do not think that anyone, apart from teachers themselves, has been quite so personally involved with the education reforms as I have been. The hon. Gentleman said that I had not consulted teachers. In fact, I have met many, many teachers over the past few months. As one hon. Member was kind enough to say today, I am a listening Minister. I hope very much that I have not only listened but also acted upon what I have heard. That is why I have made a number of statements about slowing down the pace of change. There is no question of my having made some sort of U-turn. There are always people who gleefully make that charge. I have acted in response to people who do not believe that the Government listen, who do not believe that the Government tailor reforms to meet the demands of those who have to implement new systems.

We shall continue to listen carefully to people's views on the progress of changes. Of course, if people co-operate by trying changes and actually working new systems, we shall learn all the more and be able to make changes to meet the needs not only of teachers but also of children. I expect that once the new requirements become established as part of the normal education provision, the pressures will ease considerably. I am very grateful for the efforts of teachers in Northern Ireland. Many of them are trying very hard indeed because they understand that what we are doing is for the benefit of the children.

Mr. Stott: I hear what the hon. Gentleman is saying. He inherited the problem that his predecessor, the hon. Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney), created. I fully acknowledge that the current Minister has listened to teachers and has slowed down the pace of education reform in Northern Ireland. My point is simply that when the education reform legislation went through this House three years ago, with the former Minister at the Dispatch Box, every Northern Ireland Member told the Minister that the proposals would not work, that they were totally unacceptable. I said so from this Dispatch Box. We managed to unite all the Northern Ireland parties in opposition to the proposals. In future, the Government should listen to what the people say before provisions are enacted. I am not blaming the current Minister; I am blaming the previous Minister.

Mr. Hanley: The hon. Gentleman is being less than fair to my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney). He has forgotten that my hon. Friend said that the reforms would be introduced by way of a pilot from which we would learn, that we would consult widely and introduce changes if necessary. The hon. Gentleman remembers only the block of concrete, not the sculpture which has since emerged from it. Every day sees refinements, turning the image into one that people will admire.

The hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) referred, along with others, to assistance to potato growers in Northern Ireland. It should be remembered that potato guarantee arrangements are still in place. They have not been triggered because the cumulative average price of ware potatoes sold for human consumption is still well above the target price of £46 per tonne. We have not yet broken the £46 per tonne limit. Unless there is a significant fall in prices, it is unlikely that the guarantee arrangements —the stock feed scheme as it has been called—will be triggered.

Problems caused by the weather are, as we all know, a risk that farmers take. The weather in Northern Ireland can be severe, but it can also be extremely pleasant. The

[Mr. Hanley]

Government cannot be expected to cover the cost of any losses caused by the weather. The trigger mechanism is there to help, should it be required—and that we stand by.

Mr. William Ross: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hanley: I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman did not intervene; otherwise, I shall not get to the end of my speech.

Mr. Ross: That is a pity, because I was talking about seed potatoes—not potato stock.

Mr. Hanley: In that case, my noble Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will write to the hon. Gentleman on that point.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to hill livestock compensatory allowances, on which we had an enjoyable early morning debate two days ago. Several hon. Members have said that they were deeply offended not to be called in that debate but, as was pointed out, it related purely to Great Britain. Therefore, I am glad that some hon. Members took the opportunity to raise the subject today.

I acknowledge the concern about the reduction of HLCAs for hill sheep, but we cannot ignore the fact that the incomes of mixed livestock farms in Northern Ireland's less-favoured areas have improved substantially, albeit from a dismally low base, for a second successive year. I know that there are people who refuse to recognise that improvements have occurred, but no one has queried the statistics which have been collected in the past, so I hope that they will believe them now.

Hill livestock compensatory allowances are a form of income support, and at this time of financial stringency for the economy as a whole, the Government could not ignore those factors in deciding the rates for 1993. Nor could we ignore the ewe premium. One hon. Member said that we should be talking only about HLCAs and not about the other forms of support, but that is wrong. Most sheep in Northern Ireland are in the less-favoured areas and will receive not only a higher ewe premium but the special LFA supplement which has increased from £3·12 to £6·57 per ewe.

The average net farm income in the severely disadvantaged areas in the LFA, those affected by the HLCA reduction, is estimated to have increased by 70 per cent. in the last year in Northern Ireland. Admittedly, that is from £4,000 to £6,800, which is not great, but it is nevertheless an increase. Those affected by the HLCA reduction will get relief as a result of the general rise in support rates resulting from recent green pound devaluations—18 per cent. and 3 per cent.—and they will benefit from the much higher ewe premium for 1992 and the increased LFA supplement.

Therefore, total support per hardy breed ewe in the severely disadvantaged areas will be £34·45 compared with £32 in 1991. Many farmers will also benefit from the higher suckler cow premium. Hon. Members will know that many sheep farmers are also suckler cow farmers and so will gain from the extension of the environmentally sensitive areas, particularly in County Antrim and County Fermanagh where the extensions have taken place. Therefore, total support for hill livestock farmers in Northern Ireland is growing. Through HLCAs, ewe premiums and suckler cow premiums the total support will be around £65 million in 1992, which is an increase of some £8 million on the previous year. The suckler cow premium is also guaranteed to increase over the next three years. That commitment by the Government should be acceptable.

HLCAs cannot be considered in total isolation. Some 70 per cent. of farms in the LFA have some additional source of income. I admire people who manage to earn other money if they can, but of course there are social security payments and pensions. Some farmers find that the average off-farm income is estimated at around £5,000 per annum. That is not for everyone, but if hon. Members looked at the total support rather than one line within that support, they might sing a different song.

The hon. Member for Londonderry, East also asked about assistance for invention. I shall ask my hon. Friend the Minister of State to write to him about that.

The hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) complained about the lack of scrutiny of Northern Ireland business and mentioned a plea which has been entered by many today. The hon. Members for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) and for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe), who are both distinguished members of Select Committees, have shown not only that Northern Ireland politicians are capable of being selected for Select Committees in the House, but that those Select Committees can deal with matters which cover Northern Ireland business. It is therefore an exaggeration to suggest that Departments for which we are responsible are not subject to parliamentary scrutiny. They are certainly capable of that.

Many hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Belfast, East, mentioned financial provision for roads. Investments in roads and related facilities continue to run at a significant level. Maintenance, which accounts for about half the roads budget, remains the top functional priority, but within the budget increased emphasis is being placed on minor works and on bridge improvement and maintenance schemes to ensure that the most effective use is made of the existing network and that roads are as safe as possible.

I regret very much that there is no extra money to spend on new roads, more schools, sporting facilities and everything else that has been mentioned today, but if hon. Members add up the shopping list that has been given us today, it is probably four or five times greater than the variable shopping list that we are able to expend in a year. That does not mean that the cases have not been proved, but simply that we have to cut our cloth accordingly.

Road infrastructure schemes can be promoted only to the extent that financial resources permit. That is one of the reasons we regret the postponement of road works on housing developments in the constituency of the hon. Member for Belfast, East. We recognise that the rescheduling of the major works programme had an unfortunate effect on certain developments in his constituency, but the situation is being kept under close review and the Minister of State will write to him about it.

The hon. Member for Belfast, East mentioned pump-priming funds for the National Sports Training Centre. We had a meeting and we are considering his representations. I understand his point that a contribution from the Government could help to unlock resources from elsewhere.

The hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) had to leave to catch a plane earlier and asked that his apologies be given to the House. He mentioned industrial development in his constituency and accepted from me that we would write to him rather than deal with the matter now.

The hon. Member for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea) criticised waiting times in the health service. When I was the Minister responsible for health in Northern Ireland, I helped to create the waiting list initiative in September 1991 and we made additional funds of £1·2 million available to the boards in 1991-92 to reduce what I regarded as unacceptably long waiting lists—far worse than in other parts of the United Kingdom. In 1992-93 a further £1 million was provided, and that was repeated for 1993-94.

Since that initiative was launched, the number waiting more than two years has reduced from almost 5,000 to one third that figure. We managed to provide an extra cardiac surgeon for bypass and other operations, at a cost of £1 million. The number of operations increased from 630 to 840 and over two years the waiting list fell from 400 to today's figure of 170. As I said at Question Time this afternoon, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has just authorised an additional £2·75 million for 1993-94, which should help to wipe out the waiting list. There is no attitude to the effect that a person who has to wait a long time may die and therefore come off the list. That is a despicable suggestion and one that I utterly refute.

The reforms are not a cost-cutting exercise. The money saved is put back into patient care—and that goes for education reforms as well.

Obstetrics were mentioned by a number of hon. Members. The Select Committee report basically said that many mothers wanted to choose home birth. While being cautious about that change, we recognise the need for a more flexible application of existing policies. A number of studies have been announced and are under way, and Northern Ireland is included in those initiatives.

Rev. William McCrea: The Government's reaction to that report came after the Western board's decision. Will the Government ask the board to wait and to reconsider its decision in the light of the Government's promise?

Mr. Hanley: I will draw the hon. Gentleman's words to the attention of my noble Friend the Minister and ask him to contact the hon. Gentleman as a matter of urgency. I know that my noble Friend is giving great consideration to that matter, as is my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State.

The hon. Member for South Down said that the Housing Executive's public expenditure allocation will be cut by £73 million over the next three years. I want to make it clear to all right hon. and hon. Members that that is not at all true. It was the executive's bid which was cut—and that is very different. If a body puts in a bid and it is not met, it is because competing priorities have meant that there is a difference between the figure sought and that which was affordable. That is not a cut. I will write to the hon. Member for Mid-Ulster about lignite.

I am sorry that I missed part of the speech of the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble). As to the health review, I mentioned during Question Time the document "Making Choices". The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Banbridge night club, Circus Circus—a most attractive location of which I was ignorant before tonight. It was drawn to my attention by the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates), with a light in his eye. With a look of John Travolta, he told me the story. My hon. Friend the Minister said that he was particularly sympathetic to the hon. Gentleman's argument, and gave a pledge that he would draw it to the attention of the other Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins). We will consider the hon. Gentleman's comments carefully.

I thoroughly agree with the need for Lough Neagh rescue. We must look properly at that case, and I will do so.

As to appointments to boards and quangos, we value the opinions of anyone in respect of suitable candidates. If any hon. Members of Northern Ireland parties or of other parties—such as Labour, which does not stand in Northern Ireland—want to suggest names, we shall consider them most carefully. However, we will give no guarantees to anyone that such nominees will be appointed by right. That right does not exist. I hope that members of Northern Ireland parties will submit a wide range of names. In particular, I could do with a few more women on public bodies. I should be grateful if the lists reflected modern needs.

The question of residents' parking schemes is being considered now. Project 2000 is widely welcomed, but I cannot give a breakdown of the costs tonight. My hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South-East (Mr. Lightbown)—the Government Whip, who is sitting on my right—is becoming slightly impatient, but then he needs his beauty sleep; in fact, it looks as though he could do with three or four days of it.

My noble Friend the health Minister will write to the hon. Member for Belfast, South about the Peto institute and the Buddy Bear trust. We shall also write to him about the Independent Living Foundation, which is making very good progress.

The hon. Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe) mentioned a report by Coopers and Lybrand about the airport. That report was not made because of the privatisation; it was an efficiency report, which should be seen in isolation from any possible privatisation of the airport.

I was amazed by what was said by the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien). He said that if the Government did not do what he said we were going to do, that would constitute a Government U-turn. It seems that we now have a new definition of a Government U-turn: it is what happens when the Government do not do what the hon. Member for Normanton said that they were going to do. I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman was trying to whip up fears where they should not exist. We are looking at all the options.

Mr. O'Brien: I said earlier that, if the Minister did not agree with what I said, he should come forward. If he is saying that what I said about the consequences of water privatisation is not true, I am prepared to withdraw my remarks; if it is true, however, I hope that the Minister will do something about it.

Mr. Hanley: The hon. Gentleman invited me to refute what he had said, and I am taking him up on his invitation. What he cited is not the policy that has been decided for Northern Ireland as of now; we are out for consultation

[Mr. Hanley]

and, so far, no decisions have been made. In saying that decisions have been made, the hon. Gentleman is clearly wrong.

I can tell the hon. Member for Antrim, South that great progress has been made on the disability living allowance.

I conclude with two short statements. First, I wish to apologise for my failure to cover any matters with which I have not dealt in my brief response. I know that a number of issues are involved. Secondly, I thank the hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Cann) for his contribution, brief though it was. He and the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) visited Northern Ireland recently, and showed great interest. I hope that many other hon. Members will show the same interest—not a patronising interest, not a wish to go and gawp at how these strange people manage to eke out an existence, but a wish to look at a part of the United Kingdom, and to find out how people live courageously in difficult circumstances in an area where there is deprivation. Of course such deprivation exists in other parts of the United Kingdom, but the problems of Northern Ireland add to the difficulties. I know that those hon. Members appreciated the beauty that is Northern Ireland, and the 1·5 million hospitable and friendly people who represent the real Northern Ireland—not the 600 or 700 swine who ruin it for all the rest of us.

Rev. Martin Smyth: The Minister paid tribute to hon. Members who visited Northern Ireland and took an interest in it. He said that the debate which took place the other night dealt with Great Britain. I do not think that that was necessarily a reason for excluding Northern Ireland Members who wanted to participate in a debate concerning their future.

Mr. Hanley: I thoroughly agree with the hon. Gentleman. I greatly regret that Northern Ireland did not feature in the debate. I was merely stating a fact—that the prayer against that order was a prayer against an order affecting Great Britain only. Although it had a complete read-across, I think that it was wrong that Northern Ireland Members did not have the opportunity to take part in the debate. That is why I took the opportunity today to state that I was grateful that Northern Ireland Members had taken this opportunity——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. The Minister is getting very close to criticising the Chair. The Chair decides who takes part in debates.

Mr. Hanley: In no way, Mr. Deputy Speaker, am I saying that I criticise the Chair for not drawing in Northern Ireland Members. What I am saying is that Northern Ireland Members could not take part in the debate because the debate was on Great Britain alone, not on Northern Ireland. [HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] Because it was a limited debate, it may have been felt that they did not have a chance to contribute.

I am grateful that Northern Ireland Members took the opportunity today to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that therefore they used the time, which just happened not to be available to them the other day, in a most constructive way.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order 1993, which was laid before this House on 15th February, be approved.

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

JUDGES (NORTHERN IRELAND)

That the draft Maximum Number of Judges (Northern Ireland) Order 1993, which was laid before this House on 21st January, be approved.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

Question agreed to.

M25 (Widening)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

10.45 pm

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (Surrey, East): I wish to raise a matter that is of considerable and growing concern not only to my constituents in Surrey, East but to people throughout Surrey and the whole of the south-eastern region whose homes, towns, villages, fields and woodlands are close to the M25.

Although it is in Surrey that the Department of Transport's proposals are at present most keenly felt, since it is in Surrey that the link roads proposal has its being and in Surrey that the fourth lane proposals are at their most advanced, this subject clearly raises issues that have implications reaching far beyond the confines of a single county and touch on matters of national, and even international, interest.

I know that the Minister will believe me when I say that I am not anti-cars or anti-roads and road building. It would be the height of folly simply to ignore the central role that roads presently play in the economic and social life of the country. We depend upon an efficient, fast and smooth-flowing transport infrastructure for the goods and services that we have come to expect, at the prices that we demand. The M25, which represents some 6 per cent. of the national and motorway network but which carries some 15 per cent. of the total motorway volume, has a key role to play.

It is undeniable, too, that there have been considerable benefits from the development of motorways in the past to towns and villages whose high streets were previously choked with traffic. I am well aware, for example, that the opening of the M25 in the area covered by my constituency led to falls of up to 75 per cent. in traffic volumes on the A25 which passes through a number of villages nearby. I am also well aware that the M25 is a heavily congested road—the most heavily congested road in the country—and that, with demand for private car use expected to continue to rise, it is likely to become more congested. In these circumstances, to take no action at all is simply not an option.

The chief issue that I wish to raise is whether the action proposed by the Department of Transport—in brief, to widen the M25 by a further six lanes by way of link roads between junctions 12 and 15, and to increase capacity on 80 per cent. of the remaining motorway by the addition of a fourth lane—represents the right action. In order to achieve the right answer, it is crucial that we ask the right questons. It must be open to doubt whether, in fact, for many years the Department of Transport has been doing that.

If the question is simply how do we ease traffic congestion on the M25, it prompts the equally simple answer: we widen it. But even within its own very limited ambit, is that answer really satisfactory? We all know what happens when an existing road is widened or a relief road is built. All too often, that road simply fills up. A few years later—I was going to say "down the road"—the problem has not been solved. It has simply been enlarged.

I submit to the Minister that the key question he faces and, indeed, we all face, is how to reconcile the apparently ever-rising demand for private car use with the damage that cars are known to do to the environment and are believed to do to health. Until that question is resolved, important aspects of transport, environment and health policy will remain which cannot be reconciled.

I will not pretend that this is not a hugely complex problem for the Minister. My chief criticism of the solution currently proposed by the Department of Transport is that it is too simple. It is also out of date. I do not wish to imply any criticism of my hon. Friend. Successive Governments have followed a demand-led transport investment policy since the end of world war 1, when the Ministry of Roads was originally established. It is at least arguable that that policy no longer represents, if it ever did, an adequate response to a problem the aspects of which have multiplied over the years.

A demand-led approach begins by building a six-lane motorway, in a few years moves to an eight-lane motorway, and not long afterwards recommends, as is now the case with junctions 12 to 15 of the M25, a 14-lane motorway.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): Does my hon. Friend agree that, when the number of motorway lanes is increased to perhaps four, six or 10, the enhanced reputation of the road and increased circulation thereof leads to greater usage? So by increasing the number of lanes, we may face the problem of increased usage of the motorway, which could enhance the problem.

Mr. Ainsworth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. We certainly need to consider carefully the issue of created traffic, which is the problem to which she refers.

What happens when the capacity envisaged under the proposals for junctions 12 to 15 of the M25 fills up? Do we enlarge again and again? We are talking about a road on green belt land. My hon. Friend will undoubtedly share my view that no Government in our history have done more to protect and enhance the environment and to encourage sustainable economic development and the protection of our natural heritage. For example, the size of the green belt has doubled in recent years.

However, I hope that the Minister will understand me when I say that there is at least something perverse about a system which can make it extraordinarily difficult to build a modest home extension yet enable the construction of a 14-lane highway in the next-door field, albeit following an environmental assessment.

The Surrey Wildlife Trust has estimated that the addition of link roads between junctions 12 and 15 of the M25 would destroy 23 designated sites of special scientific interest. In my constituency, where I am assured that link roads are not presently under active consideration, the same body has identified no fewer than 10 designated areas of outstanding natural beauty and two sites of special scientific interest which it says would be adversely affected by the development of the M25.

The Minister may be aware that the Prince of Wales, as patron of the Royal Society for Nature Conservation, last summer urged people to challenge new road schemes—not to mention so-called improvements—that fail to take account of long-term considerations. It is hard to think of any consideration which is more long-term than the preservation of the natural environment which our generation will hand down to its children.

Nor is the impact of road building visual alone. The internal combustion engine is responsible for 30 per cent.

[Mr. Ainsworth]

of all the energy we consume in the United Kingdom. Road traffic produces 85 per cent. of the United Kingdom's carbon monoxide emissions, 48 per cent. of nitrogen oxide emissions and some 19 per cent.—over 100,000,000 tonnes a year—of the greenhouse gas, carbon dioxide.

My hon. Friend will be aware of the concern increasingly being expressed about the effects that vehicle exhaust pollutants are having on human health. The matter was first taken up with Ministers in connection with my constituency by my predecessor, Lord Howe.

A survey recently conducted by a school in Bletchingley found that 40 of the 161 children whose families responded —about 25 per cent.—were suffering from some form of respiratory disorder. Thirty-six were regular users of inhalers. Inevitably, because Bletchingley is close to the M25, and also near the M23, the finger of blame has been levelled at motorway pollution.

The local health authority has been persuaded to take the matter up, and once we have scientifically established the facts, we can hope to begin to examine the causes of the problem. It is true that no absolute causal link has yet been formally accepted between vehicle exhaust and ill health. It would be inappropriate to leap to premature conclusions, as some have done—I am afraid that it is open season for scaremongering—but it does not take a PhD in chemistry to work out that what comes out of the back end of a car is bad for people.

I hope that my hon. Friend will understand that, against the background that I have described, it is not unnatural for people whose homes are around the M25 to express anxiety at his proposals to increase the capacity of the road.

A further aspect of concern has been considered by several hon. Members whose constituencies are affected, and also by local authorities. The view has been eloquently expressed by the district council, Surrey county council, the South-East Regional Planning Committee and others that the plans for link roads conflict with the overall regional strategy which they have been at pains to develop under the aegis of the Department of the Environment.

It seems reasonable to ask whether proposals substantially to increase the capacity of the motorway, which have undeniably important implications for regional strategy, should be developed in apparent isolation. One of the chief criticisms advanced is that the current proposals are being introduced on a piecemeal basis. My hon. Friend will be familiar with that argument. That may be the easiest method for the Department of Transport, but is it really the right method?

Is it not true that, especially as it is an orbital road, decisions taken regarding any one stretch of the motorway have repercussions on other stretches? Is there not a compelling case for the Department to introduce its proposals for the motorway as a whole? Inevitably, decisions are being taken on various parts of the road, and, as that happens, the options for the remaining parts of the road are closing down.

I hope that I have been able to convey to my hon. Friend some idea of how keenly my constituents feel the problem, and of the multi-faceted complexity of the problem that we all face. It would be surprising indeed if such a set of problems gave rise to a simple solution; the plain fact is that they do not. It is certainly not a solution simply to stop building and widening roads such as the M25 altogether, as some have suggested, but nor should the addition of a fourth lane be seen as a solution in its own right.

Incidentally, that prospect needs to be carefully examined from a safety point of view, and I should welcome any reassurance that my hon. Friend can give me about it. The link roads seem to me so excessive that they do not constitute a contribution to the search for a solution at all.

Just as we face a combination of problems, so we need a combination of responses. First, we need to be reassured that enough is being done to manage the traffic on the motorway and maximise the road's efficiency and existing capacity. That means much greater use of high-technology traffic management systems in order further to reduce the risk of accidents, which, together with road works, are a primary cause of congestion. The Department has recognised the importance of devices such as automatic incident detection monitors, and I hope that we shall see many more of those.

Variable speed limits and variable message signs are also welcome, although they are rather scarce at present. I hope that it will be possible to do much more to control future levels of demand. I welcome the research that my hon. Friend is now undertaking into that.

There is, of course, a need for caution. If road pricing were applied crudely to the motorway, it could simply drive traffic back on to the surrounding roads. A flexible system of road pricing—related, for example, to the time of journeys and distance travelled—could usefully spread the flow of traffic. It could reduce congestion at the busiest times and encourage local drivers, on local journeys, to use local roads rather than to junction-hop as they do now.

Greater co-ordination is required between the Department of Transport and regional and local planners. They have, after all, a common aim in maintaining and improving the quality of life.

Public transport options need to be carefully considered and further upgraded as part of an overall package aimed at maintaining necessary mobility while cutting down on unnecessary journeys. Investment in public transport alone cannot constitute an answer to the problem, as some maintain. In addition, we need to harness scientific development as a vital ally. In that regard, there is considerable scope for optimism. Cars are becoming cleaner and quieter, and road surfaces are also improving. I know that my hon. Friend takes a keen interest in the extension of quieter, porous surfaces.

We have a duty to ensure that enough encouragement is given to motor manufacturers to speed up the introduction of a more friendly product, whether it is developed from internal combustion or from some other form of energy source.

None of the ideas, individually, represents a solution. A combination of them may well add up to the solution we are seeking. I know that my hon. Friend has some very much in mind. The trouble is that, as the link road concept shows all too plainly, I fear, those ideas are not being given sufficient priority when we get to policy implementation.

By focusing too narrowly on the problem of traffic congestion, the Department of Transport is in the process of delivering what I fear will be a doomed solution, for which future generations are unlikely to thank us.

11.1 pm

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Kenneth Carlisle): I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth) secured this debate. I have been very impressed by the way in which my hon. Friend, in his short time in the House, has brought his concern about his constituency and its road problems to me, and the fervour with which he has protected his constituents' interests. I was greatly impressed by the scope of his speech tonight, which shows the depth of thought that he has given to the problem. I am also glad to see here my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan), whose constituency is also next to the M25.

My hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East raised many aspects of road policy and sketched on a broad canvas. I should very much like to have the time to go into all the philosophical and practical points that he raised, but I believe that it would be more helpful if I stuck to the M25. I hope that my hon. Friend will understand.

The facts are clear. The M25, which is a very important road, has become our most heavily used road since its construction in 1986. It is carrying far more traffic than was forecast when it was planned and, as we know, suffers particularly from serious congestion at peak times. Nevertheless, as my hon. Friend said, that road has brought significant relief to nearby towns and villages, and it has succeeded in its objective of taking through traffic out of London. The motorway has already been subject to some improvements to widen it to tackle some of the worst congestion, but, of course, more needs to be done.

I should emphasise that a good M25, free from congestion, is important not only to London traffic, but to the whole country. I receive representations from the midlands, the north and even Scotland from people who wish to export their goods. They are suffering because of congestion on the M25, so we have a duty to see that traffic flows well around it, for the benefit not only of London, but of the country.

There has been a great deal of consultation about, and study of, the M25 corridor. In 1988, consultants were commissioned to look at the options for the future of the M25. In July 1989, they reported, and rightly said that many sections of the motorway were already congested at peak times—as we already knew, from the "Today" programme and other sources, including from my own experience—and they estimated that traffic would grow substantially, and would nearly double, by 2007. They said that we would have to do something to relieve congestion in the future.

In December 1990, we published our M25 action plan, and the present proposals stem from that plan and our conclusions on it. We announced in September 1991 our measures for widening to dual four lanes within the existing boundaries, together with improving capacity by various traffic management measures on various sections of the M25.

Plans for widening to dual four-lane carriageways within the highway boundary do not affect the sections between junctions 11 and 15, which are already dual four-lane, or the sections south of junction 28 to junction 5, which have improved following the opening of the bridge over the Thames at Dartford.

We were satisfied then, as we are now, that the work of widening to four lanes is urgently needed to relieve congestion on the motorway, and our aim is to ensure that 80 per cent. of the M25 is dual four lanes within about six years. We can do that without taking more land. While doing it, we can take measures to mitigate the effects of the widened motorway, and in some cases we can make improvements by using new techniques.

Mrs. Gillan *rose*——

Mr. Carlisle: I will not give way. I wish to answer my hon. Friend's points, and little time remains.

The first scheme between junctions 15 and 16 started in January and, as with all improvements, an environmental statement concerning the scheme was published in 1991. Our decision to proceed with the widening was taken in March last year, after considering the comments and submissions that had been put forward. The work between junctions 15 and 16 to improve to four lanes will now take less than four years.

The Secretary of State announced to the House on 4 February that he was authorising the start of construction in the coming financial year of 41 new road schemes. Those included two schemes on the M25 to add a fourth lane along about eight miles between junctions 7 and 8, bordering my hon. Friend's constituency, and between junctions 10 and 11. We expect to publish the environmental statement for the section bordering his constituency within the next month.

As widening work within the highway continues, time will be allowed between the contracts to prevent a build-up of roadworks and to prevent congestion. We shall manage those works carefully—this is important for my hon. Friend's constituents and those who use the road—to minimise delays.

As well as widening work, we aim, as my hon. Friend desires, to get maximum capacity out of the space that is available. Such measures include improving traffic flow on and off the motorway at junctions by traffic signals, by upgrading lighting and by better signs and signals. Variable message signs, which have an important role to play in the future, have already been installed between junctions 10 and 12, and others will follow elsewhere. By that means, information is given about hazards such as fog and incidents that cause queuing and jams.

Those improvements, together with the widening work, will significantly improve conditions for drivers on the M25 and communities near the motorway, including communities in my hon. Friend's constituency. It is worth emphasising that it is hugely important for those communities beside the road that we have a congestion-free M25. If it becomes congested, traffic will flow from it, through the towns and villages of my hon. Friend's constituency, as it will have to do. Also, as he says, some of his communities have relief of three quarters of their traffic because of the existence of the M25.

We are hoping to improve the M25 along its length within existing boundaries. My hon. Friend mentioned the link roads. We are proposing them between junctions 12 and 15, on the most congested part of the road, which carries about 200,000 vehicles a day. The link roads are truly needed if we are to cope with that traffic. One advantage of them is that they are on the existing route. We are not building a new route out into open green countryside, but are using an existing traffic route. That is very important. Those roads will cope with local traffic. Two thirds of the traffic which goes down that section is local. Two thirds comes on at the M3 and goes off at or

[Mr. Carlisle]

before the M4. The centre of the road will carry the through traffic, and this increased capacity will relieve local communities.

It is important, in the short time available, that I talk about the environment. It is important that these roads fit in with the environment, and one way in which we seek to do that is first to consult very carefully. One purpose of consultation is to get the views of local people, and wider views about the road. On the link road, we have gone out to consultation and put forward the various proposals and we listen carefully.

It is when we come to the order publication stage that we provide much fuller detail, because it is at that stage that we have to go before a public inquiry and an independent inspector. All views are welcome, and we listen carefully to those views. The inspector listens carefully. He does not always agree with the Department: he sometimes turns us down. That is a good thing. He is an independent inspector, and will at all times listen to the views of my hon. Friend's constituents and to those of my hon. Friend.

Apart from the link roads, we have no commitment to provide further capacity beyond widening to dual four-lane on other sections of the M25. We would not do so unless we could find acceptable ways of doing it.

The M25 is not just a single route. The length between the M3 and the M43 is very much a local road. One has to look at each section separately. There may be a different solution for each section. We have to look at the needs of each section; we have to consult and to provide thorough environmental statements. We take great care to avoid sites of special scientific interest wherever we can. They are a major constraint. If we have to touch an SSSI, we try to provide some other benefit elsewhere.

We listen to all representations very carefully; take into account all new methods of managing traffic, as my hon. Friend wanted; and look at ways of mitigating the problems caused by the road. There is great scope for reducing the noise the road causes. A wider road, by the use of porous asphalt, can become quieter. There is much better landscaping of these roads now, and we provide new environmental barriers. With new techniques, we can hope to improve the condition of roads substantially.

We have to accept that we cannot just accept continuing growth in traffic. In the M25, we have a major economic route for the country. It is crucial for prosperity and for jobs that traffic flows freely down this route. Wherever possible, we improve existing routes. When we widen roads, we shall take every care sensitively to look after the environment. We shall not proceed without listening to my hon. Friend's constituents, and we shall do everything possible to mitigate the adverse affects.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising such an important subject, and I know that we shall return to it and to him. I hope that we can work together to ensure that an important economic route serves the country generally, and my hon. Friend's constituents.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fifteen minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 19 February 1993

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Orders of the Day

Right to Know Bill

Order for Second Reading Read.

9.34 am

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Sir Humphrey, permanent secretary to the right hon. Jim Hacker, said in the very first edition of "Yes Minister":

> "Open government is a contradiction in terms. You can have openness. Or you can have government. You can't have both."

The Bill seeks to prove Sir Humphrey wrong. It asserts that openness and freedom of information are essential if we are to have an efficient democracy in which people can be involved.

Recently, the public learned that some apple juice made from windfalls contained a chemical, patulin, which is toxic and could cause cancer if taken in enormous quantities. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food had known that information for some months, but had not published it. It was a small earthquake in the history of public information and, as far as we know, no one was hurt—but the reactions of the Government and of the public were contrasting and rather interesting.

The Government could see nothing wrong in keeping that information to themselves. "Leave it to us," they said. "Trust us—we decide what is good for you. Only we really understand the scientific evidence, and to have published it would just have stirred up anxiety." The press took a different attitude and were fairly angry: "If that information was so innocuous, why not publish it? Let us know what is and is not in apple juice. Let us judge whether to buy it for ourselves and our children."

That incident encapsulated some of the attitudes and concerns behind the Bill, which focuses on two key questions. The first is, who should know? Should it be the Government and civil servants, or all of us? The second is, who should decide what we know? Should it be Ministers or a form of independent arbitration?

The principle behind the Bill is straightforward and simple. In a democracy, free access to information should be a basic, fundamental right. That principle is enshrined in the United Nations declaration of human rights and in the European convention on human rights. It was well expressed by the early American President, James Madison:

> "A people who mean to be their own Government must arm themselves with the power knowledge gives."

The Bill is based on the belief that we, the public, have a right to know what the Government are doing in our name, with our money, on our behalf.

That is necessary because Britain is still one of the most secretive societies in the western world and one of the few democracies not to have some form of freedom of information legislation. Neither the public nor Members of Parliament have an absolute right to information. We receive it by the grace and favour of Ministers and civil servants, and right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House will have noticed the increasing use, when parliamentary questions are answered, of replies such as "This information is not available," or "This information is too expensive to compile," or "This information is no longer centrally collected". Usually, the questions are reasonable, and the answers would be of assistance to the quality of understanding and public debate. But Ministers and civil servants decide what is good for us—not our needs or rights.

The Bill tries to correct that, in a practical, legislative form. It has its origins in the Official Information Bill introduced by a former Liberal Member of Parliament, Sir Clement Freud, in 1979, and in several Bills introduced by other hon. Members—some of whom, I am glad to note, are present in the Chamber. They include my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) and, most notably, the hon. Member for Aldridge and Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) who has often carried the flag for the issue on the Government Benches—if not alone, at least with enormous tenacity and conviction.

They also include my hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), whom I am glad to see in his place, and for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett), and my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley). Birmingham Members have an extremely good record of introducing in the 1980s freedom of information measures that, although small, made important gains.

The Bill owes much to the work outside the House of journalists such as Mr. Peter Hennessy and Mr. Richard Norton-Taylor. Above all, hon. Members will recognise that it owes its present shape and existence, which has grown gradually throughout the 1980s, to the Campaign for Freedom of Information, which was established in 1984 as a result of the generosity of Mr. Geoffrey Bradman, and particularly to the director of the campaign, Mr. Maurice Frankel. When—I emphasise when rather than if—the people of Britain get the right to know, they should thank Mr. Frankel above all others. The House and the public owe him a considerable debt.

The Bill is sponsored by hon. Members on both sides of the House, and I [illegible] grateful for their support, which I value. In going to the heart of our democracy, this issue should, and indeed does, go beyond party politics. It should appeal to libertarian conservatives who wish to empower the individual against the corporate state as much as it does to liberals who want to attain greater freedom and to socialists who want to give people stronger rights and to provoke them, through information, to question those in authority, and thus perhaps to change society.

[Mr. Mark Fisher]

The Bill leans heavily on the experience of Australia, Canada and New Zealand, all of which introduced freedom of information legislation in 1984 and which have similar parliamentary and judicial systems to ours.

In a press release, the Minister said that the Bill is lengthy and complicated. It is somewhat long for a private Member's Bill, but it is not very complicated. The essence of the Bill can be described quite simply and straightforwardly. It gives people access to all the information and records that are held by Government Departments, local councils and bodies that are financed or regulated by the state.

Those bodies will be obliged to publish schedules or directories of the information they hold, so that the public know what is available and can apply to see the information they want. That should be produced within 30 days. Individuals will be able to see all their medical records, including those before 1991, and personal files such as employment records. At present, Ministers and civil servants decide and control what we should see. The Bill will transfer that power to the public and give them the right to know.

Certain categories of information are exempted if publishing them would cause significant damage, particularly to national security, defence and international relations, the enforcement of the law, personal privacy and commercial confidentiality. The strategic policy advice given to Ministers by civil servants is also exempt, but not the information or material by which ministerial decisions are made, or expert and technical advice.

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): I recognise that there must be exemptions, but my hon. Friend mentioned commercial confidentiality. Who will decide whether something is commercially confidential? I am thinking particularly of something that makes me very angry indeed. Government money is provided to training and enterprise councils and local enterprise companies for training purposes, but we have no right to know what is being offered, to whom or at what price. The public have no right to know what the TECs and LECs are doing to train our young people. Would the Bill deal with that issue?

Mr. Fisher: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The exemption of commercial confidentiality will probably be tested more than any other. Experience in Australia shows that legislation is most used to gain access to personal files and records, but probably the most contentious area is commercial confidentiality, because it is so difficult to describe.

There is quite proper commercial confidentiality, but it can be used as a smokescreen. I am thinking of the time that my hon. Friends and I went to try to talk to the chariman of British Coal about the pits that are in danger of being closed. We asked for detailed information pit by pit, but were told that it was impossible, because it would be commercially confidential. It is hard to understand that, in an industry that has a virtual monopoly, there may be some concern about the negotiation of gas prices and contracts.

"Commercial confidentiality" is an elastic phrase; to answer the question by my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington), adjudication would be by an independent tribunal and commissioner, but I shall elaborate on that in a moment.

Policy advice by civil servants is properly exempt, although not the technical and expert advice that they may receive. For instance, the various legal opinions that the Government sought this week on the interpretation of the Maastricht treaty would be made public and would not be exempt under the Bill, but the advice given by civil servants to the Attorney-General or the Foreign Secretary about how and when best to release it to cause the minimum embarrassment to the Government—if such a thing were possible after Monday—would be exempt. The advice that a Minister receives on how to use information is a matter for Ministers and civil servants, but the technical advice that the Government receive is not.

It is proper that we should see those contrasting legal opinions, and I regret that the Prime Minister has written today to my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition saying that he is not prepared to release them. What could we lose? They are interesting and proper opinions, which concern all hon. Members. Perhaps the House does not need to see that advice, certainly not so far as embarrassment goes, as its results were written clearly in the blushes of the Foreign Secretary on Monday night. But for the greater understanding of what is going on, it would be good to see that advice.

Hon. Members may consider—my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie does—that the exemptions, which are modelled on those in operation in other countries with freedom of information legislation, provide considerable opportunities for loopholes to evade at least the spirit of the Bill; they certainly do that, but it is impossible to draft legislation that closes those loopholes. Therefore, the enforcement of the Bill—the adjudication mechanism when the disclosure of information is challenged or withheld—is crucial if it is to have any meaning.

The Bill provides, first, for a process of voluntary internal review. If that is not deemed satisfactory, it establishes an independent tribunal and commissioner appointed by Her Majesty on the recommendation of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and a Select Committee. The commissioner and tribunal shall have the powers of the court to call for information or records and their findings will have the same force as a court order. The commissioner will lay a report before the House annually.

The creation of a tribunal and commissioner is important, as the power and responsibility for deciding what the public should know should be taken away from politicians and given to an arm's-length, independent body. Information is too powerful and important to be left in the hands of any politicians. When Ministers make a mistake, whatever party is in office, there is always a temptation to save their embarrassment. I know that a Labour Government have taken that route in the past and that, if Labour were in power again without this legislation, it would take that route again. It is right that that power should be taken away. Otherwise, the essence of the legislation falls.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): I understand what the hon. Gentleman is saying, but is he aware that he may be taking from Parliament a power that he would not wish to take —the power to assess, monitor and question the tribunal?

If the Bill became law, how would Parliament monitor the workings of the tribunal to ensure that the system was working properly if we could not question it?

Mr. Fisher: As I said, the commissioner will lay an annual report before Parliament and we hope that the Leader of the House will provide an opportunity for us to debate it. However, the workings of the tribunal and the commissioner would also be subject to the scrutiny of the Select Committee which appoints the commissioner in the first place. Those provisions and ministerial accountability would mean that the House had plenty of opportunity to scrutinise, and to maintain the House's scrutiny of, the workings of the tribunal.

The Bill would also reform the Official Secrets Act 1989, which is perhaps getting into more controversial territory, by ending the absolute offence of any disclosure, however justified, and by providing the possibility of a public interest defence such as that allowed by the courts to Clive Ponting, and a defence, when necessary, of prior publication.

Finally, the Bill would amend the Companies Act 1985. For this part of the Bill, I am especially indebted to the pioneering work of my hon. Friend the Member for Perry Barr. It would require companies to publish in their annual report all instances of their being found to be in breach of legislation on environmental protection, health and safety, discrimination, trades description and other consumer protections listed. In addition to the annual accounts that they lodge with Companies House, companies would be required to provide a list of injuries and fatalities to their work force during the year.

It seems right and proper that, when the private sector is becoming more and more powerful—75 per cent. of world trade is dominated by 500 multinational companies, probably giving them far greater power than most Governments—there should be a rudimentary social audit so that the public, shareholders and the press can know which companies deliberately and flagrantly breach the law and find it cheaper to pay the fines than to amend their actions.

I hope that all hon. Members will consider that such provisions show good common sense and, I trust, sweet reason. However, there is no doubt that they would change things—I believe, for the better. They would lead to better public debate, because it would be based on information and informed choices. Information would be shared generally by the public and by all hon. Members, and not only by Government Departments and Ministers.

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): My hon. Friend refers to the need for and importance of public debate. Does he agree that the public's right to know must be accompanied by the means to know? Although a great deal of information can be communicated between an authority and an individual on a personal basis, the dissemination of much information to the public also depends on free and rigorous media, especially a free and rigorous press. Does he agree that, to be effective, the Bill, which I strongly support, needs to be accompanied by changes that would make it possible to create a freer and more pluralistic press, whereas, at the moment, there is a tendency to move in the opposite direction? I am thinking especially of the most discouraging actions of Mirror Group Newspapers.

Mr. Fisher: I agree with much of what my hon. Friend says. There is a commonly held view—a misapprehension—that we have a very strong press in Britain. In fact, the reverse is true—we have one of the most constrained presses in the western world. Our laws of libel and contempt of court hedge around the press to restrict their commenting in the way that other presses can in the public interest. Our press's lack of ability to get the truth of a story means that much of its investigative role is blunted. The Bill would undoubtedly strengthen the press, which I agree is desirable and necessary.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): My hon. Friend and the House have surely taken note of the important judgment yesterday that public authorities, especially elected authorities, cannot use the laws of libel against those who seek to criticise them. The fact that such a case was brought in the first place by Derbyshire county council means that there is a climate in which such an action to try to muzzle the press or individuals would be acceptable. The Bill would contribute to the opening up of the press, but the House must also send other signals to the Government and other elected authorities that the press is entitled to comment freely and openly on the actions of democratically elected authorities.

Mr. Fisher: I agree with my hon. Friend. I was relieved to learn of yesterday's judgment that an elected authority such as Derbyshire authority cannot win such a case. It is an important and interesting precedent.

I was talking about the improvement in public debate on an informed basis, so that we have a level playing field of information. I referred to the pit closure programme. Those of us who have been fighting for the pits have been frustrated by not being able to get detailed information pit by pit. It has meant that public debate on a key industrial issue has, on the whole, been conducted by assertion from the Government and counter-assertion from the Opposition, not on an informed, detailed understanding and knowledge of the pits. If we, as a society, are to judge and make a decision on such a key issue, it surely makes sense for us to have all the figures on each pit, so that we can make up our own minds. However, that is not the case at the moment.

The Bill would lead to better decisions being taken by Ministers and local authority departments. The minds of Ministers, civil servants, local government officials and leaders would be wonderfully concentrated by the thought that the public had access to the information and records on which they made their decisions. Surely there is nothing wrong with that, if the information was not exempt. It would imbue caution and thought, which are not always present. At the moment, Ministers merely have to come up with answers to political problems, but, to return to mathematics lessons at school, if they had to show their workings and knew that the information on which they based their decisions was open to scrutiny, things would change considerably.

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): Does my hon. Friend agree that it would also be very useful from the point of view of shining the rather tarnished image of politicians? We are going through a period in which people are fearful of what will happen to legal aid, but they are witnessing what appears to be a plot when three of the most senior civil servants in Whitehall did not tell the Comptroller and Auditor General that they were going to pay the legal fees

[Dr. Kim Howells]

of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. We found out only because a whistleblower contacted a newspaper. Surely that does nothing for the reputation of Government or for open government or the citizens charter.

Mr. Fisher: My hon. Friend anticipates my next point, and makes a telling point himself.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): He lowers the tone.

Mr. Fisher: No, he does not lower the tone. With greater accountability and shared information will inevitably come greater credibility for politicians, not only in such high-profile and contentious cases. When they return to their constituencies at the weekend, all hon. Members must be only too painfully aware that the standing and credibility of politicians of all parties are probably at an all-time low. People feel alienated from the political process and unless we understand that, I suspect that we are deluding ourselves. It is not a question of which party they support; I believe that the credibility of the Government and politicans, local and national, is at an all-time low.

Freedom of information cannot in itself change that, but it would alter the fact that, when people turn on their television and watch the proceedings of the House, they get bored by assertion and counter-assertion, the "yah-boo, sucks" of politics, and the lack of detailed and serious debate. If it improves the quality of that debate, freedom of information will mean that it will be less a case of prejudice battering against prejudice; it will considerably improve the credibility of politicians and the political process, and we should all be better off for that.

There is a further way in which the Bill would help. This is a rather Thatcherite argument, which may be surprising from an Opposition Member. Freedom of information would undoubtedly help to make a better and more efficient use of whatever Government expenditure was available.

Health is an example in my constituency. The constituency has an industrial profile, so many constituents have lung disease from working down the pits or in the pot banks. Every man of my age or older has his lungs full of dust. When the men come to my surgery on Friday nights, they breathe through volumes of water. Both the local authority and the health authority have general policies to try to deal with the problem, and they work with employers for better conditions at work.

It was only three years ago, when the university of Leeds was commissioned by the health authority and by the local authority to carry out a detailed study, that we suddenly knew information that we did not have before. A ward-by-ward profile revealed that, in one ward in my constituency, 52 per cent. of men died before they reached retirement age.

It was only when the huge variations around the city were seen that public opinion and the policy-making process began to be galvanised. The health authority, the housing department and others were brought together. We realised that the problem was related to the dampness of the houses and to our attempts to modernise them by putting in central heating, which increased condensation and made the problem worse.

It was only the information that triggered the determination and the resourcing. We did not get any money, and we could not find any more money, but we are now using the money more efficiently because we know more about the incidence of a problem about which we have known for 100 years, but which we have never understood in detail. The efficient use of money as a result of information is a key point.

I have talked about macro-issues, such as the press, democracy and credibility. More than anything else, the important point is that the Bill would empower individuals. When I began to promote the Bill, and went round the country listening and talking to people, I did not appreciate that point enough. It has been the point that has most impressed me during the campaign.

The Bill would give greater choice to people and it would give them greater knowledge with which to make the choices in their lives. It would also give people more ownership over their lives. *[Interruption.]* Does the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) want to intervene?

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): No.

Mr. Fisher: I thought that the right hon. Gentleman was rising in his place. I say the words "choice" and "ownership" to him, and he leaves his place immediately. I am sad to see him go.

Choice does not apply simply to matters of food and food safety, important though they are. There are sometimes tragic consequences from not having information and from not making choices. Hon. Members will recall the fire at Bradford football club. It was only after the fire, in which more than 50 people died, that it was learnt that the local authority had been in correspondence with the football club for some months and had pointed out to it that the stand was an unacceptable fire hazard. We cannot guarantee that the fire would not have happened if the information had been in the public domain, but it would have been surprising if the media in Bradford had not put pressure on the Health and Safety Executive, on the fire authority and on the club. Things would have changed.

The people who went to watch their football club and who died did so without making an informed choice. They might have gone even if they had known the risks, but at least they would have had a chance to make a choice. They did not have that choice, and they died. The same is true of the King's Cross fire, of the Herald of Free Enterprise disaster and of many other tragedies in which people did not know the risks involved.

In the case of King's Cross, the Fennell report shows that the risks were known to the various authorities long before the fire and were debated between them. However, the information was never in the public domain. It cannot be right that our constituents risk their lives in ignorance of the safety record of places such as British Rail stations and London Underground stations.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): There was another fire in Bradford recently, in which, mercifully, no one was killed. There is a major chemical works in my constituency called Allied Colloids. There was a conflagration there for which, to give my hon. Friend and idea of the scale, 35 appliances turned out. Several hundred firemen combated a serious chemical fire.

Many of my constituents are concerned that the composition of the chemicals stored on the site is not known. One of the reasons why I am a strong supporter of the Bill is that such information needs to be known not only by the workers, who have the right to knowledge, but by residents in the surrounding area. They are apprehensive about the risks involved.

Mr. Fisher: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend, because he makes a telling point. I expect that many hon. Members would find similar circumstances in their constituencies. It is wrong that our constituents should be ignorant of potentially lethal dangers in their communities.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): The nuclear industry provides a fairly controversial example of what the hon. Gentleman describes. The nuclear industry has done damage to itself by being unnecessarily secretive at times. That has led people to be suspicious even if there has been no need to be.

Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the main arguments in favour of the Bill is the need to get away from the style of management in which management have information that other people do not have? Management tend to make decisions on the availability of information, and they keep information to themselves. Far better decisions will be taken when information is generally available.

Mr. Fisher: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. Nuclear power raises a crucial distinction, at the heart of the Bill, between information and public relations. Sellafield has done a superb job, in its terms, of opening itself to the public, inviting people to come to the visitors' centre and advertising on television. All that is to be welcomed.

However, the public should be aware that there is a great difference between knowing all the facts and being presented with a public relations exercise which includes a lot of welcome facts. That is rather different from having a wide range of information which would allow the public not only to go to Sellafield and to hear the case put by British Nuclear Fuels, but to put the information into context so that they can make their own judgment in a more informed way. The distinction between public relations information and the whole range of information is the key to our assessment of our children's schools, of health authorities, of hospitals and of many other matters. Hon. Members will understand that key distinction.

The Bill would affect individuals in terms of choice and in terms of ownership. The question of medical records and of employment records has especially changed my attitude when working on the Bill. Hon. Members may have seen a recent edition of Ms. Joan Bakewell's television programme "Heart of the Matter", in which she studied terminally ill patients and their knowledge of their health and life expectancy, in relation to the Bill and to freedom of information.

One especially moving and tragic case was that of a woman who had had slowly creeping multiple sclerosis for 20 years. Her husband and her general practitioner had got together to keep that fact from her. When she eventually found out the truth, she had to rethink her whole life. She had believed that she was less than competent as a mother, as a housekeeper, as a wife and as a friend. Each year, she could do less, and her self-esteem went down. She thought that she was stupid, incompetent and not very able. When she discovered that she was ill and that the information had been kept from her, she suddenly felt that she had lost all control over and ownership of her life. That story can be replicated around the country, and it is extremely worrying and tragic.

The same is true of employment records, because our identity as people is so much tied up with work. If there is wrong information on an employee's file, he has no control over his work life. Self-esteem and the judgment of one's own ability may be affected by the inability to win promotion, although what is blocking an employee may be simply wrong information, which, if made available, could be put right. That is wrong and must be put right.

Better decisions, better understanding, the more efficient use of money and an improvement for individuals add up to a case for saying that the Bill will change the culture of decision making and will begin to put an end to secrecy, which is a creeping British disease.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): The hon. Gentleman has referred to the culture in which decisions are made, and thereby to the quality of public debate. Does he agree that the great prize to be had from freedom of information is the better opportunity and encouragement that it would give the press and broadcasters to engage in serious and substantial discussion of the important issues concerning the state of society and public policy? They would be better able to resist the pressure to trivialise placed on them by competition, and all too often, as has been mentioned, by the circumstances of the ownership of the media.

Mr. Fisher: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman and I welcome an observation of that kind from the Conservative Benches. His views are probably shared on both sides of the House.

Although I have outlined a fairly substantial case, how can anyone object to the sweet reason of that case? Judging from the press release that the Minister's office issued on 9 February, I fear that he will argue against it. As he will speak after me, I shall try to anticipate some of his reservations, criticisms and arguments.

I fear that the Minister will try to claim that the legislation is too bureaucratic. He will say that it may be well intentioned, but that it is too bureaucratic and a typical Labour initiative.

As the Minister will be aware from his research, there is no evidence of too great a bureaucracy in Australia, Canada and New Zealand. When Australia introduced its freedom of information legislation, it allowed for about 800 civil servants. It did not appoint half that number, and, within months, it reduced the number by 200 or 300. There are now about 200 or 300 civil servants in total. There is no evidence that the legislation is hugely bureaucratic. The office of Sir John Grace, the information commissioner in Canada, is very small. The Minister is aware of that, and he will be hard put to justify criticism on those grounds.

The Minister may claim that we cannot afford the legislation. Again, the figures are not on his side. In 1990-91, the legislation in Canada cost £11·5 million. As that figure includes the cost of administering the Canadian privacy legislation and all its ramifications, it is probably an over-estimate. In 1991-92, the legislation in Australia cost £5·8 million.

If we aggregate the figures on that basis to a country the size of ours, we could anticipate that legislation in this country would cost between £20 million and £30 million a

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year. That figure seems to be in line with the estimates of Mr. Robert Hazell who, when he was a civil servant, carried out research in the countries that I have mentioned and in this country for the Home Office. If that figure is correct, that £20 million or £30 million would be very well spent indeed.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Would that figure not be a very small fraction of the cost of the decisions that have been taken? If the decisions are better made, there may be a considerable net saving and no cost at all.

Mr. Fisher: There is anecdotal evidence in Australia that some major public initiatives or large infrastructure initiatives affecting the environment have, as a result of the Australian legislation and public scrutiny, proved unnecessary and undesirable and were therefore dropped. The anecdotal evidence is that that saved hundreds of millions of pounds. I believe that that experience would be replicated here.

The legislation can save money and make more efficient use of money. It will cost money. However, there is perhaps the more trivial and party political case that, in respect of initiatives such as the citizens charter—costing £7 million in advertising this year—the citizens charter unit—costing an estimated £23 million over the next three years—and, quite rightly, the Central Office of Information, which costs £150 million, the £20 million or £30 million which the legislation would cost would be one of the best investments that the Government could possibly make in our future.

The Minister may also claim that the legislation is a lawyer's charter, but there is no evidence for that. In Australia, 74 per cent. of applications every year are granted in full; 22 per cent. are granted in part, and only 4 per cent. are denied. Of 25,000 applications for information, only 68 go to appeal. Admittedly, at the appeal stage and particularly with an independent tribunal and commissioner, the case against the Government Department or local authority should properly be argued by lawyers. However, if there are going to be only 60 or 100 cases a year in Britain, that can hardly constitute a lawyer's charter.

Finally, the Minister may say that the legislation might be a barrack room lawyer's charter, and that there will be a huge number of voluminous, frivolous and mischievous applications—people might come along and say, "I want to see everything you've got under that heading."

However, the Bill anticipates that. Clause 27 states that when there are substantial and unreasonable demands on an authority, that can be a reason for refusing to give information. If that were challenged, the case could be taken to the independent tribunal or commissioner. I do not believe that that body would have any truck with frivolous and mischievous applications.

The nub of the Minister's case against the Bill will be that, in his view, it is the wrong methodology and wrong type of legislation. When the Minister finally negotiates his White Paper, I suspect that he will propose some form of voluntary means of releasing more information, perhaps supported by an ombudman. Essentially, the power of whether information should enter the public domain will still remain with Ministers and Government. There is in that respect a substantial and fundamental difference between the Minister and me.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): The hon. Gentleman paid tribute earlier to Mr. Maurice Frankel, the director of the Campaign for Freedom of Information. Will he acknowledge that last July in *The Guardian*, Mr. Frankel paid tribute to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister for his open government initiative?

Mr. Fisher: He certainly did. I welcome the Prime Minister's rhetoric. I believe that he is the first Prime Minister in this country to say on the record that he wants to blow away at least some of the cobwebs of secrecy in our society. Many of us feel that that is a rather timid remark, from a rather timid Prime Minister, but the remark is welcome. I welcome the Chancellor of the Duchy's statement that he is not in principle against legislation, although he may not favour the recommendations in my Bill.

The comments of the Prime Minister and of the Chancellor of the Duchy are a huge improvement on the attitude of previous Governments, but their words have yet to be substantiated by deeds. They have not yet been susbstantiated by a White Paper. I believe that the Chancellor of the Duchy is having difficulty negotiating with some Departments.

There is a big difference between a genuinely open system that takes power from the hands of Ministers, and the voluntary system, which I suspect that the Government favour, which will still maintain the essence of the present situation, in which Ministers control and tell us what we ought to know.

The Minister will say, "Trust us. We will be a better Government." He may demonstrate that with some small, but welcome, initiatives, but that is no longer enough. The public no longer want to trust politicans. They want an absolute right to know. With sensible exemptions and caveats, the public should have the right to know.

I suspect that there is a major difference in methodology between the Minister and the Bill. However, the right hon. Gentleman will concede that there is much common ground in principle, in direction and in much of the detail in the Bill. That leaves him with a rather interesting problem in responding.

I suspect that the Minister's rather large brief will say, in effect, "Be kind, but kill it." I suspect that his civil service advice, which of course would be exempt under the terms of the Bill because it is private between the Chancellor's civil servants and himself, will state, from the Minister's own favourite Sir Humphrey, something along the lines of: "The Government doesn't want to be seen to be against the principle of the Bill. To do so would make nonsense of an oft-repeated claim by the Prime Minister and the Chancellor to be serious about openness and 'blowing away some of the cobwebs of secrecy.' However, Sir Robin Butler in No. 10 Downing street has made it quite clear that this Bill shall not become law"—underlined several times—"in any form"—underlined several more times. "The Permanent Secretaries at the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food insist on this. The Bill will be allowed, or may be allowed, a Second Reading today, but its progress into Committee must be impeded and, at worst, delayed, until it is too late for it to have any chance of completing its stages through Parliament. If it gets into Committee, it must be filibustered. If it gets to Report and Third Reading, it must be sunk by a mass of friendly and constructive amendments. If it gets to the Lords, heads will roll in this Department. This Bill must have no right to go any further."

I suspect that the advice is something along those lines. It may also say, "However, the Minister may usefully use the threat of this further progress to encourage the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to ease their opposition to the White Paper and resistance to the Minister's preferred option of a voluntary system and an ombudsman." I am not sure whether I have got all the words right in the Minister's brief, but we shall hear in a minute whether there has been a leak. I assure the Minister that there has not. Mine is an active imagination, but not a great one.

If that is the gist of the Minister's case, it is not good enough. He knows in his heart of hearts that he has lost the argument. Times have changed. Now that we can see the Australian, Canadian and New Zealand examples, many of his fears have been proven practically in those countries to be groundless. There has been a campaign around the country, with thousands of postcards and letters sent to hon. Members on both sides of the House, and there has been a wide debate in the national press recently, as well as public meetings all over the country, in which hon. Members have participated. We have seen the campaign of Charter 88, the Campaign for Freedom of Information, article 19 and Liberty.

The Minister knows that he has lost the public argument and that people want the right to know. It is not that people do not want to trust Ministers or be dependent on Ministers or local government officials any longer. The Minister knows that the game is up and that things must change. In doing so, we will end the nanny state and begin to open up government—I think that the Minister sincerely wants that—and end secrecy. Secrecy is genuinely a corrosive disease in us, both as individuals and as society. It is not only dark secrecy. It is difficult and painful when one tries to hide things.

As children, we find that one of the processes of growing up is coming to terms with secrets and dark and unknown areas in people, facing difficult areas and opening them up to the light, and gaining control and ownership of oneself. If that is a description in part of the experience of many people going from childhood to adulthood, it should also be an adequate description of a democracy going from childhood to adulthood. Surely it is time that we grew up in this society and had the right to share information which is paid for with taxpayers' money and collected in our name but withheld from us.

Let us be brave today as we begin to open up democracy and government. After all, this is only a small step. The debate today is about the principle, but the public debate should not be about the principle of whether we have freedom of information in the United Kingdom: the intelligent debate for an intelligent democracy is about what form, what controls and what administration we should have. That is the serious debate on the issue—it is not whether we should have it.

Surely it is manifestly true that we should have freedom of information. The real challenge is not getting freedom of information—it will come whether the Minister allows us to have it this year or next year—but how we use it when we have it. Mr. Robert Hazell, in his assessment which is in front of the Minister and in his published articles, made that clear, when he said that probably the worst thing that could happen would be if it were forced on a reluctant Government who did not back it, were not enthusiastic about it and killed it with neglect.

If we are to have freedom of information, as we will and as we must, we must have a Government who are enthusiastic about it. I suspect that the Minister is enthusiastic about freedom of information and goes out and promotes its opportunities as enthusiastically as he promoted his citizens charter initiatives. That is what the Government and the country need. We must begin to open up democracy, stimulate people to ask questions and begin to change society for the better. Whatever the political ways in which we wish to change society, we must change it, because we know that we are not doing as well as we should be. Today gives us that chance.

We have everything to gain: better democracy, better debate, better decisions, better efficiency, better accountability and even greater credibility. I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House will agree to approve the principle of the Bill and give it a Second Reading. In doing so, they will start the process of giving people the right to know.

10.25 am

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. William Waldegrave): That was a most eloquent and persuasive speech. Of course, I shall be instituting the usual leak inquiry after the debate. I begin by picking up something that the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) said at the end of his speech when he quoted Robert Hazell. It shows a profound truth: whatever we do in legislation, nothing ultimately changes unless the culture of organisations genuinely changes. It is always possible to find a way round rules if those working within them really want to. That is a fair point, whatever approach we take to the matter.

There has been a certain symmetry in these debates over the years. I have been reading some of the debates in the past few days, as one would expect. Governments of all parties tend to argue one way and Oppositions of all parties tend to argue another way. Great departmental mandarins tend to argue one way until they leave their Departments, in which case they tend to argue the other way. Journalists—when they are talking about the workings of government, though not quite so much when they are talking about the workings of their own newspapers—tend to argue one way and business people the other. There are exceptions, and honourable exceptions in all cases, and I am sure that they can be found.

There are two responses to this issue. One is a response of total cyncism: everybody is corrupt. The other is a more realistic response which is to say that there are people playing different roles honourably in different parts of a civil society and they look at things from their different points of view. The resolution of those conflicting and legitimate interests is what this argument is all about.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central is an eloquent representative of one of the legitimate and ancient strands of the argument. The argument goes back to Wilkes; it is not a new one. Over the centuries, I suppose that getting the balance right has been partly what the growth of democracy has been all about. I sincerely

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congratulate the hon. Gentleman and the Campaign for Freedom of Information which has helped him to present the Bill. I join him in paying tribute to the courtesy and competence of Maurice Frankel.

The hon. Gentleman uses the language of the right to know. One can make the argument in other languages, but let us use that language today. The conflicting interests that must be resolved can be well expressed in this language. One conflicting interest has been discussed in the House recently—the right to privacy. That is a right and a need which musters campaigners. Those campaigners were rightly heard in the House a few Fridays ago.

There is also a right, which was much in evidence in the recent American election, to fair trade. Why should jobs be at risk because foreigners have different rules from us? It is not difficult to rouse a campaign for that. Great trade union interests can and do legitimately campaign for that right. As the hon. Gentleman said, a level of commercial confidentiality comparable to that of their overseas rivals may often be one of their demands.

A fourth right is the least easy for which to campaign. Indeed, I have never heard of a campaign for it, although I believe that most people instinctively understand it. It is the right to have a system of government that is organised in a way which makes it possible to take efficient decisions. All freedom of information campaigners who are serious recognise those conflicting rights—the hon. Gentleman certainly does—and try to order them in some sort of hierarchy.

It is not surprising that, when we are engaged in a debate led by the proponet of the right to know, that right tends to come rather dramatically to the top of the pile. I shall argue that the other rights are a little too far behind. It is not surprising that those who put the arguments from the Government side—that Governments, if they are to fulfil their duties to citizens, have a duty to maintain some secrets—have perhaps the hardest time of it. Parliaments are there to limit the Executive—it is their essence—and to call Executives to account. The press live off information. A banner reading "Hands off Government secrets" would not immediately fill Trafalgar square.

In this debate, it is our duty to balance all those rights and their attendant duties together—and there are others. It is for us, while marching to those other more catchy tunes, to remember that they have a counterpoint. In "Troilus and Cressida", Ulysses said:

> "There is a mystery—with whom relation Durst never meddle—in the soul of state".

Shakespeare drafted it even better than Lord Franks. In a free society, most government is a matter of negotiation. Totalitarian governments do not have to negotiate; they just tell you. Negotiation must take place not only with other Governments but constantly at home with warring and contradictory pressure groups, financial markets and Parliament. Anyone who has ever run anything, from a corner shop to a great Department of state, knows that administration in a free society, in which one cannot compel people, except exceptionally and with the powers given by the legislature, is much more like playing poker than playing chess. One cannot always have all the cards face up.

What is more, when Governments use compulsion with powers given by the legislature, they often do so for the collection of information from people who are unwilling to give it in the first place. Such people believe, in some cases rightly, that they retain rights over it. The Inland Revenue, the Department of Social Security, a variety of regulators and inspectors and compilers of statistics may be unwilling to provide information.

In many cases, information taken by power should be covered by privacy. No one has such powers of invasion of privacy as do Governments.

Mr. Rooker: I do not disagree with anything that the Minister has just said, but I wish to give him two examples of where the suspicion is borne out because of what happens in the culture of government. Following the change of Government in 1979, when Sir Clive Whitmore was Mrs. Thatcher's private secretary, a letter was sent around Whitehall about openness. It told people to be more open. That letter was classified and will not be available until the year 2010.

In 1977 when the Croham directive was issued under the previous Labour Government, it was a hell of a job to get it published. A wheeze had to be used to put it in *Hansard*. When such things happen, they naturally breed suspicion that other matters that legitimately could be open are not opened up. That culture within the Government needs to be changed. So far there is no sign that it has changed.

Mr. Waldegrave: I can give the hon. Gentleman some other examples. I read his speech in the 1979 debate. I can give him another example. Lord Hinton—a great man—was given by Mr. Attlee the power to build an atom bomb. The Government of the day did not mention the matter to Parliament or even to the Cabinet. He was given a piece of paper which said that he was allowed to requisition anything to get the great task done. It appears in the official history of the Atomic Energy Authority written by Margaret Gowing—an extremely good book. Unfortunately, the piece of paper was classified as a nuclear secret so he was unable to show it to anyone. So no progress was made.

I do not believe that I have said anything so far that sensible freedom of information campaigners would not admit in principle. The difficult issue is where and how the balance is struck. That is what the House is addressing today. I am rather easily persuaded that the balance is not right in Britain. We keep too many secrets. We make secrets of matters that should not be secret. That, incidentally, makes it more difficult to keep real secrets when it is legitimate to do so.

I admit that there is a tendency in all organisations—Government Departments are not immune—to use secrecy for convenience if they can get away with it. There is much more to be done. That is why last May the Prime Minister asked me to start the process of diminishing unnecessary secrecy which was foreshadowed in our manifesto. The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central was generous in his tribute to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

Contrary to some mythology, there has been steady progress in the past 10 years. I argue that we have done more than previous Administrations, although it will be for the historians to judge that. We began with a task that was not earth shattering but, for those like the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) who know the culture of government, it was a sea change. We published the details of ministerial committees and the memorandum "Questions of Procedure for Ministers". We have acknowledged the Secret Intelligence Service and have promised legislation to put SIS and GCHQ on a statutory basis. We shall keep that promise. No previous Administration have taken those steps. The arguments have not changed, but we have set the balance differently.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central was fair in saying that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister had acted with different instincts from those of his predecessors. I mentioned historians. In June last year, I invited historians to say which Government records they would like to be available. The matter is not unimportant because it affects the relationship between serious students and the state.

Departments are reviewing the documents identified by historians to decide whether they can be put into the public domain. That initiative has been warmly welcomed by the Institute of Contemporary British History and by Peter Hennessy who, as the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central said, is a doughty campaigner for freedom of information. The release of those documents is under way. Papers released to date include the Hess papers, Shingle Street, Derek Bentley, John Christie and Timothy Evans papers, further papers on Suez, and Home Office files about the occupation of the Channel Islands. The Opposition spokesman on the citizens charter was fair in describing that release as a major breakthrough in the opening up of that period.

There is more to come. [HON. MEMBERS: "Tell us."] Very well, I shall. For example, the papers of Professor R. V. Jones and the SOE archive are among those under review. I have announced that the Joint Intelligence Committee papers will no longer be withheld automatically under the blanket ban. In addition, the Lord Chancellor is reviewing the criteria presently used to withhold public records from public scrutiny. I do not envisage that the objective study undertaken as part of that review will lead to a tightening of the criteria.

We have introduced and supported several legislative measures. The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central referred to some of them. Some of the measures on the statute book were private Members' Bills, often drafted by the Campaign for Freedom of Information as part of its policy of going alternatively for sweeteners and the grand slam. I mention in particular, as did the hon. Gentleman, the work of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood). I would add the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire), with whom I co-operated on the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, which extended access to local authority meetings and documents. That was a course pioneered by the then hon. Member for Finchley in 1960. We have recently been able to read some of the discussions surrounding that, which have been released under the 30-year rule.

As frequently happens, not all the legislation went as far as its sponsors originally asked. Nevertheless, measures were introduced. It was under our Government that the House approved those measures. As well as the Acts that I have mentioned, the legislation includes the Access to Medical Records Act 1988, which gives access to GPs' reports to employers; the Access to Personal Files Act 1987, which gives access to records held by local housing and social services authorities; and the Access to Health Records Act 1990.

In addition to our supporting such measures, there has been important Government legislation. In 1984 we introduced a right of access allowing individuals for the first time to see records held on them on computer. The Education Reform Act 1988 gave pupils and parents access to certain school records. We have introduced measures requiring information relevant to environmental and safety concerns to be made more public. The Environmental Protection Act 1990 springs to mind. It includes pretty rigorous requirements for the maintenance of public registers in the important matter of environmental pollution. I sympathise with what the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) said about that. He was right to say that we could find similar concerns in other constituencies around Britain.

Most recently, the Environmental Regulations 1992 came into force on 30 December 1992. They are a considerable step, deriving from a European instrument. They give a right of general public access to information on the environment for the first time.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Given the rather good record that the Minister has just described, does he agree that the records of various Secretaries of State for Employment have been contradictory to that record? They have consistently denied the right of trade union representatives to know whether they were blacklisted by organisations such as the Economic League. The Government introduced legislation to allow people to know what was kept on record about them on computer, but it did not protect people whose records are kept by other means. So organisations such as the Economic League have been getting away with destroying people's lives and opportunities to work for many years.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Bill of the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central, unlike previous Bills, takes a wide power which goes across not only the Government but the private sector, to look at personal records.

I shall not disguise the fact that I have considerable sympathy with much of what the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) says as regards Government personnel files. Perhaps other hon. Members could say whether there has been consultation with industry. The power is pretty widespread and goes further than in most other countries, but I know of the problem that the hon. Member mentioned. I am grateful to her for saying that there has been progress.

My friend Hugo Young, who is a fine journalist, wrote yesterday that the Government really deserve no credit for any of this—and produced a self-fulfilling circular argument to prove it. He says that all of the things of which he approved were forced out of the Government, who freely chose all those things of which he disapproved. That argument seems to have a tendency towards bias, and seems like that deployed by Freudians—if one does not like Freudian theory one has an anti-Freud complex. There is no answer to that—and I did not mean Clement.

I genuinely believe that the fact that the Government have made progress is not a result of tremendous pressures. Some hon. Members of whom Ministers are extremely nervous—above all, my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd)—are doughty campaigners on this and many other matters.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): Nonsense.

Mr. Waldegrave: But we are not so nervous that we cannot resist him if we choose.

Mr. Shepherd: That is why I said nonsense.

Mr. Waldegrave: Perhaps we are more nervous than my hon. Friend understands.

Progress has perhaps come about because of the changes in zeitgeist to which the hon. Member for Perry Barr referred. Opinion has steadily changed on such matters and the Government have responded to it. I shall not make many party points in this speech, but the proof that one can easily resist pressure groups on freedom of information if one wants to is to be found in the behaviour of the last Labour Government. They managed to put a commitment to a freedom of information Act in nearly every Queen's Speech, but they never carried it out. In many respects, I have great admiration for Lord Callaghan, but I am not sure that that aspect of public policy was his strongest suit.

An objective survey of progress during the past 40 years would show an acceleration in recent years and it is not unfair for the Government to take some credit for that.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. Friend is fully entitled to claim credit for the advances that have been made, not least in recent years. But what is therein the zeitgeist, or what argument of principle would he advance, to justify limiting individuals' rights of access to information stored on computer but not in manila files?

Mr. Waldegrave: Such a view strikes a chord with me, but one must consider the other side of the argument. For example, in personal files there could be a problem over the frankness of references and an argument about whether protection should be given to third-party information. However, I am not wholly out of sympathy with my hon. Friend's view.

Incidentally, we were right to move quickly on electronic data because of the dangers of hacking into computer files. Expertise in hacking meant that such a step had to be taken relatively quickly.

Some legislation, such as the Local Government Act 1992, the Education (Schools) Act 1992 and the Competition and Services (Utilities) Act 1992 stem from the citizens charter. Under that charter, the Government have a comprehensive campaign for opening up information because, as the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central said, behind the theory of the campaign is the idea that the citizen should be empowered to use properly the services that he owns and he cannot do so unless he has usable information. He has to have comparative information that enables him to know what the numbers mean, and that is why we believe so strongly in league tables. In all the 30 published charters, information and performance indicators are crucial factors, against which people can be called to account.

In November, the Government published comparative information on school examination results, to provide parents with the information that they need to make more informed choices about their children's educations. The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central welcomed that, but the overall reaction from the Labour party was somewhat less enthusiastic than we may be led to believe by some of the speeches today. Perhaps this will be my other party point—some Labour Members have an inherent tendency to look to producer, professional and trades union interests in such matters and to say that it would be unfair to release all the information if it is not carefully interpreted. I cannot accuse the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central of that because he was brave enought to say that we should publish the information and supported us.

Mr. Worthington: I understand the Minister's argument, but the gains seem to be dwarfed by the extent to which huge areas of information that used to be in the public domain have been removed from it by the Government's privatisation programme. There are huge areas that we now do not know about. Do not the Government condemn the practice whereby they choose a consultant, who is no doubt sympathetic to them, use public money to pay him or her an undisclosed amount, receive the report and quote selectively from it? I am thinking of the Government's Scottish water privatisation proposals. If the consultant's report is good, it must be the best research that has been commissioned to decide an important area of public policy, but the public are denied access to the report. Is not that why we need freedom of information?

Mr. Waldegrave: The regulators of former nationalised industries, which still need regulation because there may be imperfect or no competition in the marketplace, are the right route to information about former public utilities. More may have to be done on that respect.

Ms. Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): If I may refer the right hon. Gentleman back to school league tables, surely the essential question is the accuracy of published information. In the case of Parliament Hill school in my constituency, the results were inaccurate and, on three separate occasions, we failed to get the Department for Education to submit the correct figures for publication.

Mr. Waldegrave: I know that there were some inaccuracies, but I am a little suspicious of that argument. During the past 10 years I have co-operated fully with all the civil servants who have worked for me and I remember that on some occasions people have argued for almost interminable delays in publication, on the ground that one cannot publish until the information is perfect. It is better to get the information out.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): So, one publishes the wrong information.

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Member is trivialising. I am not saying that we should publish the wrong information. There were hundreds of thousands of pieces of correct information and one or two mistakes. If we did not do anything until it was perfect we would be falling for a very "Yes Minister-ish" ploy.

Mr. Fisher: The Minister will realise that selectivity, as well as inaccuracy, is a problem. He quoted me correctly in saying that I supported publication of the figures, but he will recall that I went on to say that they should be published in the context of all the relevant information. There is nothing wrong with the Government's having performance indicators and saying that those are the preferred statistics and criteria, which should be considered. It is perfectly fair and reasonable for the Government to focus attention on policies in that way. What is wrong is that it is not done in the context of all the relevant information. Performance indicators without freedom of information and knowing the whole picture, diminish the Government's case rather than making it.

Mr. Waldegrave: Just for a moment I suffered a surrealist shift because the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central suddenly started to sound just like Sir Humphrey: "Yes Minister we are in favour of publication; however I have to tell you that unless all the information is to be published I would really advise against the publication of this information."

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Waldegrave: May I press on because I suspect that some extremely good speeches are waiting to be made and I do not want to delay them.

I must not be unfair, but perhaps I should give an example from another Department, which is not traditionally thought of as being in the forefront as regards freedom of information. Under the 30-year rule, I direct hon. Members to the pleasure of reading the engaging file of Professor Sam Beer, who published a book about the Treasury.

In recent years the Treasury has made great steps forward. Hon. Members may have thought that the documents beside me are part of my brief, but that is not so. I know that we are not allowed to use visual aids in the House, but I should like to point out the difference in the scale of the information about public expenditure. In my right hand I have the two documents about public expenditure that were published for 1978-79. The information that is published about public expenditure now is not in my left hand because I cannot lift it. The amount of information published about public expenditure has increased greatly, and it is used by the House and Select Committees to our gain. I assure hon. Members that the weight of current documentation is not just the packaging and, however thick the covers of the little documents published for 1978-79, much more information is now available.

Mrs. Barbara Roche (Hornsey and Wood Green): I am most impressed by the right hon. Gentleman's visual aids. My hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) mentioned privatisation. Opposition Members have had great difficulty in obtaining any information about the Wolds prison, which has been privatised, because what we have requested has been covered by rules governing commercial sensitivity. How does that square with the right hon. Gentleman's claim that the Government are releasing information?

Mr. Waldegrave: I believe that there is a consensus on both sides of the House, with some exceptions, that it is legitimate for the Government to look to a wide variety of suppliers to obtain good public services. I do not want to divert the debate into one about contracting out, but many Labour councillors in local government and many on the Opposition Front Bench believe that the fact that the Government are the supplier does not mean that everything must be provided in-house. I believe that there is more work to be done on the possible obligations of private-sector suppliers to meet public sector need. I have not got the solution today, and I suspect that more work could be done on it.

Mrs. Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the programme to contract out local government services has had a retrograde effect because it is now out of order and illegal for the public authority to know anything about the employment set-up of the various contractors, private and public, that tender for the services?

In Sheffield, we had instituted a system whereby we insisted that private firms had to meet their responsibilities on training by operating a ratio of one trainee to 10 employees. That system was accepted by private firms as well as the council, but, after the contracting out legislation was passed, it was illegal for the public authority to continue to operate that system. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that that one retrograde step could be reversed quickly?

Mr. Waldegrave: I remember well the debates on whether we should use contract compliance—a method sometimes used in the United States—to insist on various policies being carried out in the private sector. At that time, the House decided that if we wanted the private sector to do things, we should pass the necessary laws to make it do them.

I have considerable sympathy for the point raised by the hon. Member for Bradford, South about health and safety. I have received hundreds of postcards from those campaigning for the Bill and it would be fair to say that 90 per cent. of the requests were for information about health and safety and other broadly consumerist issues. That is understandable because that is what people are really interested in. I have some sympathy for those requests.

Today we must decide whether the next logical steps are best taken by a blockbuster Bill of this kind or by a steady increase in the pragmatic steps that we have taken and will continue to take. The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central has rightly predicted my response.

The Bill is large. I have been unable to find out whether it is the biggest private Member's Bill, but it must be among the largest. It is a Christmas tree of a Bill because it is equivalent to four or five Bills put together. It calls for a new Act to replace the Official Secrets Act 1989. I cannot recommend that to the House, given the lengthy debates that we had on that subject. The present Act should be left on the statute book to work.

Even the much-quoted Australians and Canadians progressed incrementally with the necessary legislation, which first dealt with the Federal Government and agencies. Legislation was then introduced for the provinces, one by one. Under the provincial system, those provinces are responsible for rather more functions than those for which our local government is responsible. The Australian access rights are not, in general, fully retrospective, as those in the Bill would be after no more than a year.

Many of the exemptions contained in the Bill are more heavily qualified than the equivalents in overseas legislation and the practical consequences of that have not been thought through.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): A few years ago there was an accident in my constituency in which a lorry carrying ammunition caught fire. I put down questions asking what ammunition was being carried and stored in my constituency and nearby. I was told that it was not the practice of the Government to provide such information.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): Hear, hear.

Mr. Paul Flynn: Well, let me continue.

I persuaded a Congressman to put down a similar question in Congress and the answer was provided within a fortnight, because the base in question is American. Surely that is nonsense. It illustrates the difference between the freedom of information provided in America and that given here. Does not that diminish the role of the House and its Members?

Mr. Waldegrave: That issue needs much more careful thought. It would somewhat diminish the role of the House if, whenever someone published any kind of freedom of information legislation anywhere in the world, we automatically followed it. Let us say that America experiences far less of a problem with terrorism than we face from the IRA. Would it not be right for the House, after considering the matter, perhaps to have a different regime governing such matters? It does not seem to be absolutely obvious that it would be out of the question for the House to take a different view from a different legislature in a different situation.

Many of the exemptions contained in the Bill are more heavily qualified than equivalents in overseas legislation. I am not sure what the consequences would be for the security of our penal institutions or the effectiveness of our regulatory authorities. I am not sure whether we have considered properly what proportion of time we want the police or health service employees to spend providing access to internal papers. Other similar legislation makes specific provisions to protect such vital services from fruitless diversion of effort. Despite what the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central has said, I am not sure that the Bill does that. It goes far further than overseas legislation.

I do not want to go into too much detail now, because such matters are best dealt with in Committee, if the House gives the Bill its Second Reading. Again and again, however, the Bill seems to make the ordinary process of administration very difficult.

The exemptions in clause 19 seem to relate only to requirements of enforcing the criminal law and it leaves untouched the important area of the enforcement of regulations under civil law. The clause seems to open up the danger that, where a decision has been taken not to proceed with a prosecution after an investigation, the individual concerned could, in effect, suffer trial by other means on the basis of material released under the terms of the Bill. That, too, may be a Committee point, but I wonder. I suspect that it is more fundamental than that.

It is right that I should say a little more about commercial confidentiality. Clause 26 states that information given to a public authority in confidence is not exempt from disclosure if it is given for the purposes of applying for a grant. That represents a huge shift in practice. When a company puts in such an application it will often need to include detailed financial and non-financial information, which would be of direct benefit to a competitor. If we adopted that policy we would steadily widen the exemptions. We would then return to the same problem, which could be addressed more effectively by measures focused on individual subjects.

Dr. Tony Wright (Cannock and Burntwood): I thank the Minister for giving way; he has raised a key issue. He seeks to suggest that the differences are technical—the destination is agreed, but the routes different. However, surely there is a fundamental difference of principle. Either the Government will continue to decide what to release on their terms or there will be a presumption of openness, with the Government having to justify non-disclosure. Surely, that is the point of principle to be decided today.

Mr. Waldegrave: I do not believe that it is even as simple as that. The Government have accepted statutory regimes in some spheres. We have not ruled out statutory regimes in relation to personal records on electronic data. I am not saying that statute law cannot be involved in all sectors.

One issue of high principle is the relationship between Parliament and the commissioner and the tribunal. It is a familiar, but real, argument. The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central gave a clear account of how that would work. The commissioner and, on appeal, the tribunal, would balance different public interests. The commissioner would have the power to override the judgment of the House, which could do nothing about it.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central said something that one does not usually hear from a socialist, although one does hear it from high Tories. He said that some matters were so important that they should not be entrusted to the House or democracy——

Mr. Fisher: Information.

Mr. Waldegrave: Yes, information. That is an old-fashioned high Tory doctrine—that democracy is just one part of the weft and warp of life. It is a surprising argument to hear from a socialist, and we should consider it carefully.

I shall not propose the cost argument as one of high principle. I think that the Campaign for Freedom of Information has made some clever manoeuvres in its briefing. If we consider the Australian and Canadian freedom of information Acts, we must also consider the provincial and local authorities, as that is where freedom of information bites. Local government receives far more applications than central Government, because most of the services that we are discussing today are not run at a federal or central level in those countries. Therefore, the cost is considerably more. However, cost—which I estimate to be about £50 million—is not the final argument.

Therefore, for some reasons of principle and some reasons which, initially, seem to be small, but, on examination, are shown to be much greater, I cannot recommend the Bill's structure or approach to the House. However, we shall publish the conclusions of our study on greater openness in a White Paper——

Mr. Bennett: When?

Mr. Waldegrave: Before the summer break, I can promise—[HON. MEMBERS: "That is rash."] It may be rash, but I hope that I can promise that. [HON. MEMBERS: "Which summer recess?"] Opposition Members are asking me which summer recess, and saying that I am being rash —perhaps they are correct. I intend to publish the White Paper before this summer break.

The Bill has given us an opportunity to focus national debate and I genuinely welcome it for that reason. We shall return to the subject, whatever the Bill's fate. I do not believe that it will be the end of the story—there is more to do, but the Bill is not the best way of doing it.

Mr. Cryer: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is usual for statements to be made at 11 am. However, would it be possible for one to be made later by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in view of the story on the front page of *The Guardian* that £17,000 of taxpayers' money has been spent secretly, against the wishes of the Government, on the Minister's private property? It would be appropriate for the Minister to make a statement on a day aimed at exposing the secret activities of the Government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): I have not been informed that the Government intend to make such a statement.

11.5 am

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): I give a 100 per cent. endorsement of the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher). I also agreed with much of the Minister's speech, except when he began to build false arguments only to seek to knock them down, which was disingenuous. He was probably tussling with the two sides of his mind—first, as an individual democrat who is committed to a degree of openness and, secondly, as a man who has to collect the Queen's shilling at the end of the day. That was his dilemma.

I intend to concentrate on one aspect of the Bill, but I shall first raise a couple of general issues. My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central was right to call his Bill the Right to Know Bill. When he told me about the title, my instinctive reaction was that, under the procedures, it would not be allowed. We cannot pick and choose the titles of Bills, but have to follow a set of rules.

The title chosen by my hon. Friend is much more friendly to the public than the title, "Freedom of Information". Over the years, people who have campaigned for freedom of information have been asked by Ministers what they want to know. That is an old argument. Turning the title round the other way and stating that people have a right to know—which is implied in the phrase, "freedom of information"—is a clever means of highlighting the crux of the issue. The title sends out a good signal, will gain support among the public and, one hopes, bring greater change. When I have been asked to describe freedom of information I have found it difficult. I have described the subject as having two limbs —to further the free interchange of opinions and to enhance public enlightenment.

There are plenty of opinions on the subject, many based on prejudice, which would be fine in a closed, totalitarian state. However, in a democracy—especially one that prides itself on being mature—where we discuss, decide and check to confirm that what we have decided is working, without closing the debate, we should have an interchange of opinions. If that interchange is to be meaningful, the opinions must be informed. We need information to clear away the prejudice. That information must be accessible to both sides of the argument or there will not be a meaningful exchange of opinions. We shall not have a free interchange of opinion in the House next Monday unless the legal opinion available to the Government is made available to all those who wish to participate in the argument.

The second limb of my description involved public enlightenment. In a democracy, opinions can be exchanged between those in the know until the sun sets each day, but unless those whom we seek to serve can share in the discussions, democracy becomes a sham. However good we or outside experts think our ideas are, those ideas will fizzle out if we seek to impose them on a public who, by and large, are kept in ignorance, they will not be accepted. It is crucial that the public should be enlightened about why and how decisions are made.

The public must be able to test and challenge so-called informed opinion. That is why I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central that the House should not be the controller of information. We must be subject to the same checks and balances by the public as the experts outside the House, whether in local government, medicine or any other field of endeavour. We must be challenged in the same way.

I have broken a self-imposed rule during the debate. Over the years, there have been many debates on freedom of information and many Bills on the subject. For today's debate, I looked not only through my early files, but through some of my own speeches. That is a dangerous practice. I refer to the 1970s, not the 1980s, which shows that the matter has not just popped up.

I should like to share with hon. Members extracts from a long speech that I gave to a Conservative audience—the Birmingham Bow Group, in 1978. The hon. Member for Berkshire, East (Mr. MacKay) was at that meeting and at that time he represented Birmingham, Stechford. If my memory serves me right, I was there at his invitation. I chose as my theme:

> "Labour priorities in the field of individual rights".

It appears that fashion is catching up with me. In part of my address, I linked changes in technology, a highly centralised state with patronage and secrecy and the archaic machinery of government and said that a package of measures was crucial to protect and advance the rights of citizens as individuals. My speech went down well because I was able to quote the manifesto on which I had arrived in the House with a Labour Government holding that commitment that we know so well.

I intend to concentrate on part VIII of the Bill, which seems to be just a couple of clauses but is actually a Bill in itself as it mirrors what I sought to introduce just over a year ago. I have re-read my speech to the Bow Group 15 years ago and can find no better way to explain the position. I said:

> "In a complex technologically based society there has to be a 'right to know' for our citizens. In Labour's last manifesto we promised to replace the Official Secrets Act by a measure to put the burden on the public authorities to justify withholding the information.
>
> This is a very important change and one which worries the ruling establishment both elected and non-elected alike."

I was speaking three months before the commitment was abandoned in July 1978 and as a Back Bencher of only four years. I have not changed my mind much. I told the Bow Group that the machinery of government in the operation of secrecy was on a par with that of the 19th century high-class whorehouse in terms of the protection of its clients. I said that without freedom of information, there could not be a right to know and that without that right, the citizen is left at the mercy of a society dominated by industry and advances in technology, which puts the liberty and safety of individual citizens at stake. I uttered some harsh words about those in the ruling establishment opposing open government.

In 1991, when I was successful in the ballot for the first time, it was not difficult for me to choose a subject. In

[Mr. Jeff Rooker]

December 1991 I introduced the Corporate Safety and Environmental Information Bill, which is effectively part VIII of the current Bill. In essence, it tries to bring some measure of openness to the private sector that the rest of the Bill seeks to bring to the public sector. It is essentially an amendment to the Companies Act.

We consulted widely about my Bill. I was 12th in the ballot, but finally secured seventh place. However, as only six days were allowed I did not secure a debate. Our consultations showed a good deal of support. The Health and Safety Commission was extremely supportive in a letter from Mr. Rimington. Companies such as Courtaulds wholly supported the Bill and many other companies did not put up a great barrier. There was also a good deal of support by a range of professional bodies, especially the Royal Institute of Chemistry. I thought that there was also support from within the Department of the Environment because the White Paper entitled "This Common Heritage" contained advice from the Government to companies to publish information about environmental and safety matters in their annual reports. However, I discovered a block from the Department of Trade and Industry.

The part of the present Bill dealing with that matter does not require a great deal of expenditure. It does not require companies to do anything more than they do now and does not require an environmental or safety audit. It would require companies to take environmental and safety issues seriously at top management and board level so that information is given to the shareholders and, through them and the annual report, to the wider public. We want details of the occasions on which a company has been served with enforcement notices by regulatory authorities. It is crucial to have such details at a central source rather than in tiny company subsidiaries where it is difficult to get at the information. We want details of convictions for environmental and safety offences. We should not have to trawl the press for such information. Such information should be produced up-front in annual reports, and companies should take that seriously. We should like information about accidents on premises and, crucially, details of compensation payments paid by companies as a result of injury or environmental damage.

One of the facts that we want to get over is that, at the moment, anyone who makes a claim and receives an out-of-court settlement from a company because of physical injury or as a result of a product may be required to sign a disclaimer to the effect that he cannot disclose what he has received. That prevents others in a similar situation from being able to mount a decent case. The Bill contains a caveat so that people will not be identified, but the other information that I have mentioned should be available.

I suspect that if the House does not move on this issue we shall be forced to act by the European Parliament. It is much better to have legislation that suit British requirements than to have to accept legislation from the Commission. At the end of the day, it is better to have legislation of some sort than to have none at all, but it would be better for the House to decide after mature consideration on legislation that suits our demands, our industry, our geography and the requirements of our citizens. That would be done within the context of Britain's being a member of the European Community.

The way in which the matter is tackled in the private sector is crucial because many companies operate in Europe anyway. I shall give three or four examples later in my speech. The Government and everyone else face a great dilemma in examining information issues. The Government face a dilemma in seeking to opt out of the social chapter. Some British companies seek to defend that Government aim, but they are happy to operate the social chapter provisions in their subsidiaries in France and Germany and other parts of Europe.

The issue will not go away and, inevitably, those of us who seek reform will win. We would rather win while we are around than when we have shuffled off from this place, which some of my hon. Friends will not do for a long time. We accept that the Bill is a blockbuster. That is because it is being presented on our annual opportunity in the ballot. The Bill has been amended and nurtured and has been subject to consultations for almost a decade, ever since Clement Freud's Bill entered Committee as a result of the Lib-Lab pact in 1978.

The Bill has not appeared from nowhere. There has been an enormous amount of consultation. The Minister cannot simply dismiss that in a few throwaway lines by saying that the Bill is complicated. No matter which Government legislate in this area, the framework of the legislation will be as set out in the Bill and those that have preceded it.

I shall give about half a dozen examples of companies that have been prosecuted and have not made reference to it in their annual reports. *[Interruption.]* I said earlier that I would give three or four examples. I am sorry that it has risen to half a dozen. British Coal makes no reference in its annual report in early 1990 to nine pollution convictions and fines of over £7,000, although the company makes nice noises in the annual report about its environmental concerns. Guinness makes no reference to health, safety or the environment in its 1990 annual report, or to the fact that one of its subsidiaries was fined £12,000 for safety offences. Water companies are the worst offenders in the litany of companies that are prosecuted for environmental damage but then do not mention that in their annual reports.

One test shows that there has been some impact. ICI's annual report for 1990 devotes four pages to the environment, setting out objectives with lots of nice words about placing

> "the highest priority on the safety and health of its employers, its customers and the general public."

There is no mention of the £100,000 fine imposed for inadequate supervision after two workers were killed by an explosion, or of another case that led to a £250,000 fine when an explosives van burst into flames, killing a fireman and injuring 100 people. The vehicle was carrying 8,000 fuse heads, 16 times the number that it should have held, in a rusty tin. In its subsequent annual report, ICI has started detailing some of its misdeeds, and that is much to its credit. I am informed that it has done so as a direct result of the publicity over a year ago, and the campaign centred on getting companies to disclose such information. That is a plus for ICI.

I could cite examples from both British Aerospace and British Airways, but I shall give just one from the latter. It was fined £3,000 in June 1990 after a mechanic was paralysed from the waist down after falling 20 ft to the floor of a hangar at Gatwick. No reference to that incident or to health, safety or the environment is made in its annual report.

Subsidiary companies of Hanson plc were convicted of water pollution offences six times during the financial year, the main offender being ARC Ltd. The 1991 annual report makes no reference to this and states that caring for the environment is

"fundamental to our philosophy and good management practice."

I could have listed three or four dozen blue chip companies that produce glossy annual reports and glossy reports for their shareholders but skate over the company's real environmental record.

Such practices do a disservice to a company. They show that at the top level it is not elevating safety, environment, the advances of technology and the way in which they can impinge on the people who live around the plant. We have to bring home to companies the seriousness of the situation. One way to do that is to have legislation that requires them to do no more than list what has happened in their annual report. That means no new safety audit and no extra cost, just a collating of information in a single source.

I have concentrated on that aspect of the Bill because I am a great believer in not repeating what has already been said, and I agree 100 per cent. with all that my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central said. I sincerely hope that there will be no attempt to refuse the Bill a Second Reading because, if ever a Bill justified scrutiny one Wednesday morning a week until the summer, it is this one.

11.22 am

Sir John Wheeler (Westminster, North): I am always glad to follow the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker). I enjoyed his contribution, while not agreeing altogether with every part of it. When he spoke of abandoning the House's ultimate sovereignty over the issue, I felt that he was going too far, but then I am something of a high Tory, albeit with liberal tendencies. I also enjoyed the introductory speech of the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) and the speech of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy. As predicted, my right hon. Friend was sweetness and reason, fluent and persuasive.

Although, like my right hon. Friend and other hon. Friends, I support the broad aims of the Bill, I am afraid that I cannot support the means by which it proposes to achieve them. No one doubts the key role that access to information plays in informing the lives of our citizens. Without information, no one can make constructive decisions or competent judgments, and no one can be confident in the choices that he makes. I, too, chide Labour Members, because it is curious that a Right to Know Bill should come from a party from which we hear constant criticism of the great leaps forward that the Government have made in dramatically increasing the amount of information available.

For example, there was an outcry from the Labour party when the Government announced, as part of the broader citizens charter measure, that parents were to have the right to know how well the schools their children attend were performing. What can be more important than our children's education? All parents should be free to choose the best schools for their children, but to do so, they need that vital information. How else can they judge one school against another? However, when the Government acted to make widely available information that has a direct practical effect on the future of everyone in every generation, all that we heard from those on the Labour Benches were indignant cries that the information should be kept secret. Perhaps they would have us believe that parents are not capable of interpreting and using that information. That is patronising. Do they have such little trust in the individual?

I can and will give further examples of practical and effective measures that have been taken in recent years to improve access to information of all sorts. These will demonstrate the extent to which the Government have already gone to create a more open and more informed society. First, I want to explain why I do not believe that the Bill is the correct way to go about providing greater access to information.

Every state, institution and organisation has information that must be kept confidential. No one can deny that. The question is, where do we draw the line between what is genuinely confidential and what is not? Currently, although much information is freely available, a sizeable block is classified as confidential. I think that we all share the wish that that block should be as small as possible while protecting the security of the state or any particular organisation—I welcome what my right hon. Friend said about that.

The point at which I part company with the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central is how we reach the right balance. I believe that we should reform what already exists, examine the areas of information already kept confidential and redefine more of them for the public domain.

The Bill takes totally the opposite stance. It would abolish what has developed over many years and start from scratch; have everything in the open and then select what is to be classified as secret. That is a radical, bold and dangerous proposal. The risks are very high. The Bill, in a stroke, wipes out all the accumulated experience and convention on public and private information that has developed over many many years. As the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central has made clear, the Bill would stand on its head the present system of access to information. All information will be available unless it is specifically exempt. That represents a giant leap into untried and untested waters, which are fraught with dangers and from which, once this course has been taken, there is no going back.

I firmly believe that, with such an important move, we should put our trust in the tried and tested, as opposed to the theoretical and unproved. Rolling change is a more certain recipe for a sustained progression than the tumult of speculative and revolutionary change. Conservatives —at least, Conservatives like me—have always believed in a society that is evolutionary—evolutionary, not static. Indeed, it was Edmund Burke who said

"a state without the means of some change is without the means of its own conservation".

Changed circumstances and changing priorities produce specific problems and certain pressures. That is one benefit of not having a written constitution—a privilege which the United Kingdom shares with the dominion of New Zealand and the state of Israel. The answer is not wholesale change but targeted reform.

[Sir John Wheeler]

Reforms are required that conserve and develop, not muddle and potentially destroy. The way forward is for specific items of legislation to allow a recognised problem in any one area to be dealt with quickly and effectively. A generalised and cumbersome measure such as the Bill offers no such prospect or guarantee.

I cite recent Government actions to illustrate my point. The hon. Gentleman said that Britain is criticised for having a closed government which is secret and impenetrable, but the result of Government measures in recent years is more open government now than ever before. There may be a case for going further, but it cannot be denied that we have gone further than ever before in increasing the amount of information to which access is provided for by law.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: The familiarity of my right hon. Friend's speech commends it. If one considers our historic arrangements, one sees that secrecy is a 20th-century tendency. Until the introduction of the first Official Secrets Act—the first was attempted in the latter part of the 19th century—the concept was essentially one of open government. Members of Parliament and Ministers expected all information available to the state to be available to themselves. Secrecy is a 20th-century phenomenon to the extent that my right hon. Friend is identifying it. It is not the custom of our history to exercise the secrecy that my right hon. Friend contends is the practice.

Sir John Wheeler: There is a danger of two historians battling together on this issue. I invite my hon. Friend to consider the extent to which, at the time of the peninsular war, the Government of the day kept secret much of their international dealing, and perhaps to revise his broad opinion.

Mr. Waldegrave: I was going to mention the treaty of Dover. Recently, a piece of paper arrived on my desk that has been secret since 1792, so these issues are not quite so modern as my right hon. Friend thinks.

Sir John Wheeler: My right hon. Friend makes a point that serves to illustrate my case. I look forward to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd).

I return to the theme of progressive openness. The Data Protection Act 1984 gives individuals rights of access to information on them that is held on computers. We debated some aspects of that—such as whether the manila envelopes and other means of recording information should be included. The Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985—a welcome development—gives rights of access to local authority meetings, documents and records. Regulations made under the Personal Files Act 1987, which came into effect on 1 April 1989, give individuals the right of access to manual records of information about themselves held by local authorities for the purpose of housing and society services.

The volume of material published regularly by Government Departments and the agencies and industries they sponsor vastly exceeds that published in the 1970s. It varies from the release of inspection reports by Her Majesty's inspector of schools to the annual publication of full and accurate records on the production of plutonium from all United Kingdom civil reactors.

Much of the information that people need and desire, and which the Bill is aimed at, is already publicly available. There is no doubt that the Government were more open and accessible at the beginning of the 1990s than they were at the beginning of the 1980s. Those moves in specific and targeted areas are far more effective than the Bill's blanket provisions.

The Bill would result in the repeal of the Official Secrets Act 1989.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: Hooray.

Sir John Wheeler: Indeed, but that Act demonstrates the strength of the Conservative approach. Section 2 of the earlier Act was much maligned—with some justification, I agree. No one said that the Act was perfect, but it had some proven strengths that benefited the country as a whole. The Bill would sweep away the whole Act and replace it with a completely new, untested concept.

The Government have built on the 1989 Act, retaining its good points and refining its bad. Despite the critical noises made at the time, the 1989 Act has not given rise to any prosecutions or to any accusations of muzzling. Obviously, a good balance has been struck.

It is not just new legislation that brings about change. Much depends on political culture. What is the point of such a Bill if the public do not want or are not encouraged to seek and use information? That culture cannot be imposed from above, but must be allowed to develop at its own speed, over time. A culture forced on people is a culture that has no firm foundations. The Government's action is far more important and effective than the Bill's proposals.

Over the past 13 years, the Government have encouraged the development of a society that seeks choice and whose members demand independence to make decisions about their own lives. As a result, more and more people are actively seeking information on issues that directly affect them. It is that pressure and demand for meaningful information as a tool for the individual to develop which is so important.

The positive change in our political culture cannot be achieved simply by legislation of this nature. The process is much deeper. It is necessary, as the Government have done, to encourage people to think hard about the information they really want and need, which will be of practical use. Much of that information may not be readily available in a helpful form, and we must make sure that it is. My right hon. Friend's citizens charters are a move in that direction. I reiterate my earlier comment about school examination results and the way in which that information has been compiled specifically to guide parental choice.

No one can argue against today's greater availability of information that this Government, more than any other, have brought about. For the first time, we have a Government who have set in motion a new political culture that demands the release of more and more information. Given the record of this Government, I am sure that that will happen.

We must remember, however, that, in every state and organisation, much information is highly confidential. No one denies that information is hidden that should not be hidden, but the way to deal with it is not to discard a basically sound system developed over time—the risks are too great. The correct way is to develop the culture we have, build on its strengths and reform its weaknesses. That is the way to meet the demands of the people while being responsible with the confidences of the state.

The Bill approaches the problem from the wrong end. It throws away years of practical experience and puts at risk necessary confidences. The Bill is extremely long, with no fewer than 83 clauses, and is far too complex. It poses a number of practical difficulties and would involve excessive legalism and bureaucracy, at great cost.

We have heard some figures—£20 million, for example; my right hon. Friend mentioned £50 million—and we have heard comparisons with other countries. The mistake is that the Commonwealth of Australia, the dominion of Canada and the United States of America are confederations. They have many legislatures at work and many administrations. The real costs are huge. I would want to know the full impact of those costs before going down that road.

It is far better that we support and foster the culture of more open government and build on the strengths established by experience. That is the way forward, and that is why the Bill should not be supported.

11.40 am

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): I am delighted to be called to speak in this important debate on a Bill which, I assure the House, has my full support.

Like many other hon. Members, I believe that freedom of information is at the heart of a modern democracy. I congratulate the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) on getting his Bill to this stage. I hope that it will not suffer the same fate as so many other Bills on this subject. Notwithstanding the charm of the Minister and the eloquence of his speech, I fear that there is little chance of the Bill's receiving his support.

I hope that I do not do the right hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) an injustice by suggesting that there is little chance of his supporting the Bill, even at this stage. I understood him to be saying that, if the Government, in their infinite and great wisdom, decide to give the people of this country more and more choice, then, and only then, will people need more and more information to help them make choices and that, therefore, in due course, the Government should make that information available to them. He said that the Bill approached the issue from the wrong end. I believe that he approached the Bill from the wrong end, and that his speech was contrary to the spirit of the Bill.

I am pleased to support the Bill, not only because I believe strongly in the importance of freedom of information as a right, but because I know that many of my constituents support the Bill. Many hon. Members will know that, as part of its nationwide campaign, Charter 88, with the welcome help of the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust, has encouraged thousands of people to send postcards and letters in support of the Bill to their Members of Parliament. I am delighted to tell the House that Charter 88 informs me that I received more cards and letters than any other Member of Parliament.

Hundreds of my constituents want the Bill to succeed, and so do I. I congratulate Charter 88 and the many other organisations involved in the Campaign for Freedom of Information on their work in helping to boost my postbag. I do not think that my secretary shares that opinion.

The Minister referred to the large number of letters and cards that he has received, and I am sure that he was delighted to receive that correspondence, because he will be aware that the Prime Minister wrote in the introduction to "Britain in Europe":

> "Debate needs information as Fuel".

The Prime Minister put his name to his party's election manifesto, which said:

> "Government has traditionally been far too reluctant to provide information".

If the Minister supports the Bill today and in Committee, he will be one of the Ministers who have got it right for the Prime Minister.

There are numerous reasons why the Minister and Conservative Members should support the Bill. The most important for them is that the Bill's proposals go with the grain of Conservative party policy and thinking. The Bill is entirely consistent with the Government's stated desire to create a culture that enables society to become at ease with itself. It is consistent with the citizens charter and the charters that have followed it, and with the Conservative party manifesto at the last election.

All political parties, including mine, must begin to address themselves to adapting our political institutions and arrangements for the future. We need to concern ourselves with the growing dislocation between politicains and the people. Reference has been made to the tarnished image of politicians. In this country and, sadly, in many others, people are beginning to lose faith in their politicians, and even beginning to mistrust them.

In the past few months, the way in which Britain has been run has come under considerable fire. Many people have questioned the public values that underpin governance in this country and serious questions have been asked about the institutions of government—about the judiciary and legal system, about the monarchy and its role and about the motives of Parliament and the accountability of the Executive to the House and the people. That dislocation is a real problem and a solution is urgently required.

The Bill could form part of a series of measures that would help to reunite Parliament and the people. Following its successful passage, I hope that we shall consider a Bill of Rights, a fair voting system, greater devolution of power and, above all, a written constitution. The Bill would provide a valuable starting point for the constitutional reforms that my colleagues and I would like.

Like the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), I congratulate the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central on the title of the Bill. The hon. Member for Perry Barr referred to the way in which the title of the Bill places emphasis on the rights of people. People from all walks of life and of all political sympathies believe that there should be a legal right to information, and that openness of government should be the norm and secrecy the exception. Sadly, that was not the point that the right hon. Member for Westminster, North was making.

People should have the right to give the Government permission to keep things secret when appropriate, rather than the Government allowing the people to know only what Government want them to know. That is not a novel view. The Minister said that he had looked back over

[Mr. Don Foster]

speeches in the House. The hon. Member for Perry Barr has looked back not only at speeches in the House but to the file of speeches that he has made on the subject.

Earlier debates sometimes reveal interesting nuggets of information. One that attracted my attention was the view expressed in 1945 by Herbert Morrison when he was Lord President of the Council:

> "It is the right and indeed the duty of the Government to inform the public of the facts necessary for the full understanding of its actions and its decisions . . . It is in the national interest that the citizen and taxpayer should be adequately informed by the Government on its administration and policy."

He concluded:

> "The people 'have a right to know'."

That quotation was used in an earlier debate by the former Member for Isle of Ely when he introduced his Official Information Bill on 19 January 1979. He pointed out that there was an irony in Mr. Morrison's remarks, because the quotation was to be found in a memorandum marked "Secret" with the warning: "This is the property of His Majesty's Government". Fifty years later, things have not changed very much.

In a debate such as this, it is very tempting to follow what, looking back through the speeches, has become the tradition of telling one's favourite stories.

Mr. Bowis: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He referred to Clement Freud's Bill, which, as has been said, was the result of the Lib-Lab pact. We know that, despite that pact, the then Home Secretary declined to support the Bill. As a gesture of openness and in support of freedom of information, is the hon. Gentleman able to release the papers on the discussions between his party and the Labour party?

Mr. Foster: I am not at all grateful for that intervention, but if the hon. Gentleman would like to have a private chat with me afterwards, perhaps we can discuss the matter further.

I was referring to the legislation proposed by Clement Freud. In his speech, as in many subsequent speeches, it has been the tradition to lace one's remarks with favourite stories and ridiculous examples of secrecy and failure to provide information. The hon. Member for Perry Barr related some illuminating stories. I shall avoid the temptation to list my favourites, but I wish to make two points.

The Minister mentioned many pieces of information that were currently secret but were gradually being made available. I pay tribute to the Government for their moves in that direction. I hope that one piece of information that may shortly be made available relates to the background of the nuclear tests that were carried out in the 1950s on Christmas Island. The Minister will be aware that, although some of that information was expected to become available at the end of the 30-year rule, some has not been made public, which makes it very difficult for victims of the tests to pursue compensation claims.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): Is my hon. Friend aware that, as long ago as 1954, the Grigg committee report recommended that there should be more openness with regard to files affecting test victims and veterans, and that the Public Records Act 1958 has regularly been used to stop the publication of such information? The nuclear test victims have therefore been denied the opportunity to go to court, which is a good example of why the Bill would be so helpful to such people.

Mr. Foster: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention. It is an important point and highlights another matter of interest, which is that Greece has freedom of information legislation under which such information becomes available.

It is tempting to reflect that many of the Government's difficulties in relation to Matrix Churchill, the miners' debacle or, more recently, the problems with the social chapter, might not have occurred had the Bill been in place. Sherlock Holmes might perhaps have called the latter example "The Curious Case of the Conflicting Legal Advice." I and my party believe that it is absolutely disgraceful that, following the U-turn at the beginning of the week on the social chapter and the Maastricht treaty, the Government will not publish the Law Officers' advice or that of the Foreign and Commonwealth legal advisers.

The House may be aware that, only today, my right hon. Friend the leader of the Liberal Democrats has published a further legal opinion on that issue from Anthony Lester QC. That opinion reaches a wholly different conclusion from that given by the Law Officers. The important point is that that opinion has been made public. I urge the Government to do likewise and to remove the present state of uncertainty about the implications of amendment No. 27 under Community and United Kingdom constitutional law.

Surely the time has come to remove what the chairman of the Bar Council, Lord Williams of Mostyn, has called

> "the curse of obsessive secrecy that riddles our country".

If one checks through the records of the House, one finds that, notwithstanding some notable successes in relation to, for example, local government information, medical reports and data protection, the major breakthrough has not yet been realised.

I have already referred to some of the efforts of the former Liberal Member of Parliament, Sir Clement Freud, which failed. My right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) had a go in 1984, and he also failed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) had some success, but his Freedom of Information Bill failed to get a Second Reading last year. At least he has the satisfaction of knowing that a major part of this Bill is based on his earlier work, but I am sure that he would be the first to acknowledge that the scope of the Bill is wider than that of his proposals, and rightly so. My right hon. and hon. Friends were not alone in proposing such legislation. Many other hon. Members had a go but failed.

The Bill must not and should not fail. It must be allowed to pass today's hurdle, but should not then be allowed to wither on the vine in Committee, as some of its predecessors have done, or to fail for minor technical drafting errors. The Bill's failure on any of those counts would merely serve to show once more the way in which our arcane and creaking institutions fail to meet not only the wishes of members of all parties but, more importantly, those of the people.

Two years ago, a MORI poll showed that 77 per cent. of people favoured freedom of information legislation. The postcards and letters to which I have referred show that the wish is as strong today as it was then. The nation wants the proposals enacted, and the reason is clear. The director of the Campaign for Freedom of Information, to whom I also pay tribute, recently wrote to the Minister:

> "The Government has said that it is committed to greater openness and we welcome this. Creating, through legislation, a general right of access to information would therefore be a logical step for the government. Without information, we cannot make judgments. If we cannot judge, we cannot make real choices. And if we cannot make informed choices, we cannot be effective citizens."

It is not good enough for the Government to suggest that, in due course, as the Minister said, they will introduce their own proposals to increase the information that they decide to make available to the House, to my constituents in Bath and to the country.

Mr. Fisher: Perhaps I could help Conservative Members to make an informed choice. The hon. Gentleman referred to the MORI poll. He will have noted that 74 per cent. of Conservative voters were in favour of legislating for freedom of information. Indeed, it is the Conservative Administrations in Canada, Australia and New Zealand who have introduced such legislation, so Conservative Members should not be shy or nervous about plunging rather than paddling in the water. Perhaps that information will help them to make an informed choice.

Mr. Foster: I also hope that Conservative Members will not paddle but will jump in to support the Bill.

The people of this country have a right to know, which is why I and many other hon. Members, at least among the Opposition parties, urge the House to give the Bill a Second Reading.

11.59 am

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): I also congratulate the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Mr. Fisher) on introducing the Bill. It has a familiar ring and there is a feeling that we are cantering round old courses. It is appropriate that we should do so. I accept the view that big principles should sometimes be tested. We have certainly had a lot of testing of this issue.

The impetus behind most of the passion on the issue is the 20th century habit of legislating to deny us rights of access to information. I return, therefore, to the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler). He sees the 18th and 19th centuries differently from the way in which I see them. I think of Pope who wrote:

> "How can we reason but from what we know?"

I think of our political philosophers, of the American revolution and of the struggles of Madison and Jefferson about the concept of popular democracy, and about how one involves and informs people.

I then think of the miserable argument adduced by what I am now told is the high Tory school. "High" in the sense of high Tory is not "high" in the sense of high Church or of high days and holidays. It is "high" in the sense of a bad smell. I shall come in a moment to what I call the low Tory view, which is representative of the party and of the country, if not of Whitehall or of those presently in the Government, I regret to say.

Mrs. Roche: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman mentioned James Madison, who wrote:

> "A popular government, without popular information or the means of acquiring it, is but a prologue to a farce or a tragedy or perhaps both."

I invite the hon. Gentleman to ally himself to those sentiments, which I am sure that he will happily do.

Mr. Shepherd: Like every British schoolboy, I have a library of quotations. The joy of our language and the romance of our history has been to knock down arguments such as those put by my right hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North, and those we heard, expressed far more eloquently and elegantly, from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I am sorry that he could not be here for this exchange.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster gave an elegant explanation to which we have not been treated in the 14 years in which I have been a Member of Parliament. I want to test my right hon. Friend's view because there is an automatic quality to these debates. What is the central issue? I hope that I misquote my right hon. Friend. He seemed to say that there were some things that should not be left to the House. That is the most remarkable assertion and must be predicated—I hope that I do not misunderstand—on prerogative power.

Even I believe that prerogative power can be brought to heel by legislation in the House. We shall come in the next few weeks to the matters touched on by the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster). Much of our freedom and liberty is no longer dispensed by the House; it is secured for us by the courts. Public immunity certificates were absolute fiats from Government until 22 years ago. It was the judges who said, "Enough of this nonsense." In the debate on legal advice on Maastricht, we may end up with a judicial review.

Sir John Wheeler: Prerogative power is real and actual in this country. Only the elected Government of the day, through the medium of the sovereign, can agree on and make treaties with other countries. It is for the House to challenge, to examine and to test Ministers' concepts.

Mr. Shepherd: I enjoy the batting back and forth about the reality of the position. I, too, am going to make an assertion. I assert that legislative power gainsays prerogative power. That is our history, our convention and the law. If the House decided to take away from Government the discretion to negotiate and to ratify treaties, it could do so. That is the constitutional position. I further make the assertion that Parliament, the representative of the people, determines the laws under which we live. That is a sacred trust and is essential to the argument.

The high Tory position, elegantly read, I concede, by my right hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North, is essentially that information is the gift of the high Tories. If they decide in certain circumstances that it is right to empower citizens to know, for example, about their medical records, they may make that concession. However, the high Tories say, "The discretion must be with us—with central Government." I thought that that was the most powerful bid made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North for the chairmanship of the Committee that is to review the Security Service when it is set up some time next year. I saw the positioning and I understood it.

The substance of the issue is who should hold the right to the release of information. I accept the Madisonian and Jeffersonian position. I believe that we have constructed a civil society—a political society—in which power resides

[Mr. Shepherd]

with the people. I invoke not Burke, but Churchill on the sovereignty of the people. Churchill said that the people were sovereign. If that is the case, why do we deny them access to equality of information?

I have come to see over the years that, by and large, the Government and Ministers do not fear opinion. I can rant on as long as I like; after all, I am only expressing an opinion. The real fear is about equality of argument. If we are given common access to common facts, my goodness, the argument might not go the way in which the high Tories believe that it should. As the high Tories believe that their view is right, the low Tory view must be cast aside. I believe that we must have that equality.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My hon. Friend has observed that the people are, or ought to be, sovereign. Is not part of the reality that we are addressing the fact that so much power lies with experts? That is a regime under which we do not invariably prosper. Does my hon. Friend agree that we are likely to have better decision making if the advice of experts is made accountable and tested by being exposed to the scrutiny of common sense and of alternative experts?

Mr. Shepherd: My hon. Friend must have heard me make my speech many times. That point was going to be part of the burden of my argument.

I give three principal reasons for freedom of information. First, there is the question of who we are. We are human beings, whether artists, individuals or people with passion—free citizens in a free society. Let us remember that this is a democracy. Who we are entitles us to freedom of information.

The second reason is accountable government. Unless we know what the Government are doing, how can we judge them and how can they be held accountable? If the Government conceal behind a screen of absolute protection and secrecy their intent or purpose, how can we as Parliament or as public society discuss intelligently and reasonably the objectives and purposes of public policy? We cannot.

My third reason is the affirmative point that my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) raised. If information is open and available, surely the quality of decisions will be better. Those are my three general arguments and, as is the way of politicians, I believe that they cannot be gainsaid.

What is the essential grit, nut or hardness in the Government's arguments? I have pursued that point over the years. I had intended to trouble the House with a recitation of the gallant intervention by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education into the Official Secrets Act 1911. It is so denigratory that, although out of the mouths of babes and sucklings sometimes comes truth, I realise there are some things of which even Secretaries of State for Education do not wish to be reminded.

Instead, I shall refer to a more contemporary document. I am trying to make a distinction about civil society—the nature of our political society. I accept the arguments advanced by the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central that the central interest to most of us as citizens is often at the level of information relating to pollution and to the things that matter to our lives. I am concentrating on the things that matter to our society, to our political establishment and to the nature of democracy.

I refer to a recent document signed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office. It was necessary for my right hon. Friend to make the assertion in respect of the Commissioners of Customs and Excise *v.* Henderson, Abraham and Allen. One of those individuals is a constituent of mine. In relation to the Minister of State's certificate, I will refer to one of the categories of document that do not touch on national security. My right hon. Friend said:

> "I have formed the opinion that . . . the production of such documents . . . would be injurious to the public interest and that it is necessary for the proper functioning of the public service that the documents should be withheld from production. All these documents fall into a class of documents which relate to the formulation of Government policy and the internal dealings of Government departments . . . Decisions made by Ministers are frequently preceded by detailed discussions within and between Government departments and by consideration of the various possibilities open to Ministers."

My right hon. Friend's next point is critical and revealing of the Government's attitude:

> "It would, in my view, be against the public interest"—

the invocation of the public interest is always a powerful argument here—

> "that documents or oral evidence revealing the process of providing for Ministers' honest and candid advice on matters of high level policy should be subject to disclosure or compulsion."

My right hon. Friend concludes:

> "I would respectfully pray in aid the reasoning of Lord Reid in Conway *v.* Rimmer."

Nothing gives authority better than for the Government to indicate a legal source. Of course, that is quite right. In a common law system we expect precedent and ruling. Therefore, we should refer to what Lord Reid had to say about that essential claim for the need for secrecy in matters that affect public policy and which determine the well-being of the state and possibly the lives or, with regard to that constituent of mine, the freedom of people.

In the magisterial way of that great judgment of 1968—and it is part of our argument today that attitudes change with time—Lord Reid stated:

> "I do not doubt that there are certain classes of documents which ought not to be disclosed whatever their content may be. Virtually everyone agrees that Cabinet minutes and the like ought not to be disclosed until such time as they are only of historical interest. But I do not think that many people would give as the reason that premature disclosure would prevent candour in Cabinet. To my mind the most important reason is that disclosure would create or fan ill-informed or captious public or political criticism."

In other words, it is outrageous that people should have contrary views and they are all ill-informed if they are contrary to mine. Lord Reid continued to state that the burden of the argument is that

> "The business of government is difficult enough as it is, and no government could contemplate with equanimity the inner workings of the government machine being exposed to the gaze of those ready to criticise without adequate knowledge of the background and perhaps with some axe to grind."

On that basis, we might as well close down Parliament. One of its endearing features is that most of us have axes to grind; but most of us have inadequate information with which to grind them on the basis of legislation and the new high Tory view. Lord Reid continued:

"And that must, in my view, also apply to all documents concerned with policy making within departments including, it may be, minutes and the like by quite junior officials and correspondence with outside bodies."

Events came forward on that basis and I do not intend to explain or take a view about where the Matrix Churchill case will end up, other than to note that my constituent, whose liberty was at risk, is not in that unhappy position at the moment.

If we consider this subject since the war, it is interesting to consider the influence of DORA—the Defence of the Realm Acts. I have lived through the era of TINA—there is no alternative. We must consider the attitude of a nation under pressure, engaged in a war and in a fight for survival. That nation required certain measures.

I may have caused people to snigger at the expense of Lord Reid—although I am not sure that I did that. However, that honourable gentleman was formed in the last world war. His attitudes and those of many who held key positions in public administration grew out of the need for national survival and from that came the absolute injunction to secrecy and to keep information controlled because it might be a matter of life or death. Such an attitude is understandable in that context. That is why I believe that the challenge of the 1990s will win, overcome and subsume the high Toryism of my right hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North.

In his statement to which I have referred, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office referred to

"revealing the process of providing for Ministers' honest and candid advice on matters of high policy should be subject to disclosure or compulsion."

There are grounds for that, in the sense that there is ministerial accountability. We are considering in Committee ministerial accountability in respect of the arrangements for the European Community. If decisions are made in a different forum, outside the call of this House, Ministers cannot be accountable for those decisions. Therefore, the doctrine must face some form of challenge. I put it no higher than that.

In respect of the case to which I have referred, I continue to refer to it only to the extent that the documents released by the courts have shown the lengths to which Whitehall wished to keep secret the shifts in defence-related trade and policy and to change the guidelines promulgated in Parliament on the ground, presumably, that that would affect the honesty and candour of advice from civil servants to Ministers. That is a very important aspect.

I want to consider why the Government are arguing for such secrecy. My right hon. Friend the Minister, who has now left the Chamber, will perhaps well recall the comment:

"There seems considerable merit in keeping as quiet as possible about this politically sensitive issue . . . and we do not wish to face the Foreign and Commonwealth Office with presentational difficulties."

In that kind of admission in departmental documents, we see the extinction of the argument for honesty and candour. The advice received by Ministers is certainly candid. However, it urged a lack of candour towards the public.

With respect to the internal workings of government, Ministers overlook the fact that the prospect of early disclosure of the information would make the advisers more candid. They would be more candid about the public debate on the issue. If the documents are released, we must be able to show that the issue is a matter for public debate and that we have weighed it up. The arguments should not be for secrecy. The instruction for candour would be reinforced by the knowledge that whatever one was arguing for would become available.

Advisers would be more inclined to accept the merit of being as open as possible about advice so that that can be decided and defended according to arguments sustained through the democratic process. I remind the House that this is the low Tory view. It is certainly not the high Tory view. We seem to be reaching an age in which no argument should be sustained by reason. It is a great inconvenience that our majority has been reduced from what it should be—which is absolute—to a more debatable level.

The real advantage of the Bill is that it would create a presumption in favour of democratic debate. The prospect that advice will become public sooner rather than later will mean that the advice will be candid. I did not hear one good argument from my right hon. Friend the Minister. I believe that the most central and convincing argument is personal privacy. We all recognise, in respect of protection of the state, that there are certain areas of information which, for the integrity of the democratic process, should be protected. However, that is very limited and should be closely distinguished. The presumption is that we, the people, conceive the institutions through which we rule ourselves. Therefore, we low Tories will argue that all the information of government, other than that immediately in the heart of the defence of the realm, the privacy of the citizens, its tax arrangements and so on, should be open to the public as of right with the protections and mechanisms that are identified in the Bill. Let us give a cheer for the Bill and see it into Committee.

12.20 pm

Mrs. Barbara Roche (Hornsey and Wood Green): I am absolutely delighted to speak in this debate which has been of such a high standard. First, I should say that it is a great privilege to speak after the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd). Before I was elected to the House I remember being asked in a public context a difficult question—to name a Conservative Member whom I admired. I am sorry to give the hon. Gentleman cause to blush, but, without hesitation, his name sprang to mind. Having heard his speech in this debate, I am pleased that I made that choice.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) on the way in which he presented his Bill and the way in which he has campaigned for it. I also congratulate the Campaign for Freedom of Information. Hon. Members on both sides know of the great strength of public feeling about the Bill. I am sure that all of us have had many letters and post cards on the matter. In my short time in the House, I do not think that I have had so much strength of public feeling in my constituency on any subject that has come before the House.

This debate has been going on for some time. The Royal Commission on the press which reported in 1977 referred to the right of access to information and the legitimate concerns of people, Parliament and the press if our information is too restricted. We speak for many people when we say that we have almost an obsession with

[Mrs. Barbara Roche]

secrecy in this country. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster was right to say that unless we change the culture of institutions, secrecy will continue.

I note what the Chancellor said about the open government initiative, but, like the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills, I am afraid that the Chancellor's words have a slightly hollow ring to them when we see the Government claiming immunity by signing public immunity certificates. Such certificates might threaten the liberty of individuals and also prevent discussion of the public's concerns.

Recently, we heard that the Department of Health told soft drink companies that there was no need to inform the public that a brand of apple juice contained more than eight times the safety level of a specific toxin. That matter rightly outraged public opinion in the United Kingdom. It seems as though Ministers agree with Sir Humphrey Appleby from "Yes Minister" that, "You can either be open, or you can have government". They believe one cannot have both.

The documents that might have entered the public domain under the Bill would have shown the lengths to which Whitehall advisers were prepared to go to keep secret the shifts in defence-related trade policy, and the changes in guidelines promulgated in Parliament, which took place in the years before the invasion of Kuwait. Such legislation would have provided a public interest defence for any whistle blower who tried rightly to expose what was going on. A democratic public debate about whether we should have armed Saddam Hussein would have been possible and appropriate. Geoffrey Robertson QC commented:

> "These pros and cons of defence-related trade with Iraq should have been argued out in Parliament, in editorials, in pubs and clubs and common rooms . . . a Government which refuses to share this dilemma with the public, and which is advised to solve it secretly or deviously, is not a Government which has respect for the informed public debate which is central to the democratic process."

Mr. Stephen: The hon. Lady mentioned Iraq. Does she not recognise that, at the time that foreign policy decisions were made in London with regard to Iraq, there was a delicate international situation involving both Iran and Iraq in the middle east and that the full openness for which she argues might have made the conduct of our foreign policy very difficult?

Mrs. Roche: It is always easy to say that full openness would have made things difficult. Our policy of secrecy certainly made things extremely difficult for the men and women of our armed forces when they had to take part in the Gulf war. The fact that there was that secrecy and what was clearly happening was an arms trade with Iraq meant that there was no public debate whatever on the issue and it led to the consequences that resulted.

If we follow the path of the hon. Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen), how far would he extend it? Where would Parliament's rights be? Might there not be subjects which the House should perhaps not discuss, primarily because it would make things difficult? One of the roles of not only the House but the public is sometimes to make things difficult, to shed light and perhaps to make things uncomfortable.

No one is suggesting that national security should be breached or that the lives of security services and armed forces personnel should be endangered. The Bill includes exemptions from providing information on seven counts ranging from causing significant damage to defence to breaching personal privacy, so the hon. Gentleman's worries would be well covered.

For far too long, Governments have hidden behind the defence of national security. The security services have rightly been mentioned. The Chancellor said that MI6 will be put on a statutory footing. The Secretary of State's assurances would perhaps have greater weight with Opposition and Conservative Members if he gave his support to the recent Home Affairs Select Committee report on parliamentary accountability for MI5. That would enable us to accept that the Government are keen to blow away the cobwebs and are prepared to provide parliamentary scrutiny of our security services.

Most people's thirst for the right to know rightly and understandably stems from daily matters. They want to know how safe their car is, whether the food that they buy is properly and hygienically produced, or what is the safety record of the ferry on which they cross the channel. The Government claim to be interested in offering people choice. If they want people to be able to make informed choices, I urge the Government to support the Bill to ensure that it has time to reach the statute book. People need to know the safety and environmental record of companies that they plan to patronise. If choice means anything, it means that one has the knowledge on which to make that choice. Choice does not mean anything if one makes a choice from ignorance.

Reference has already been made to the tragedies of the King's Cross disaster and the Bradford fire. Similarly, after the Marchioness river cruiser sank on the Thames in August 1989, it was revealed that the ship into which it had crashed, the Bowbelle, had been involved in three previous river accidents. The public did not know about those accidents and were not aware of the dangerous record of the Bowbelle because accident records are confidential. Again, if choice means anything, it means that the public have a right to know in such cases.

Of course, no one knows whether accidents could have been avoided by greater openness, but it is possible that if the public knew about the problems they would demand improvements that could prevent such tragedies from happening. It happens time and again. The same is true of the Bradford fire. If all the circumstances and the history of the stadium had been known, there would have been a public debate in Bradford. Questions would have been asked of several public bodies. It may well be that the tragedy could have been averted.

My postbag is evidence that many of my constituents are rightly concerned about the environment. Their concern influences the products that they buy. Under the Bill, a company that employs more than 50 people would be obliged to publish in its annual report how often enforcement action had been successfully taken against it for breaching laws on the environment. The Bill would also require companies to publish information on health and safety at work and the company's pension fund.

Other people come to my advice surgeries with accounts of discrimination at work. The Bill would give them access and the ability to correct records and references held by their current and former employers.

Perhaps one of the most moving cases with which I have dealt is of a constituent who has become badly disabled and is now partially wheelchair-bound following an exploratory operation 10 years ago. During the operation she was injected with a contrast medium or dye. After suffering crippling symptoms, she tried to find out what was in the dye. She met a wall of silence from doctors, the hospital and the health authority. Having been a hospital nurse before her disability forced her to give up her job, my constituent was shocked to find that the authority had no obligation to reveal what was in the dye with which she was injected.

When I have tried to gather further information on the subject, I have found that such cases are by no means unusual. My constituent's case is not an isolated one. Under the Bill, she would have the right to the information on written application within 30 days. That would enable her to pursue any remedies that are available.

I cannot see what argument there can be for denying my constituent the basic right to know the components of the dye that was injected into her. Such examples of personal experience of state power and secrecy are excellent reasons for supporting the Bill.

Another reason is our personal experiences as Members of Parliament. As a Back-Bench Member of Parliament, I certainly feel that the Bill would enable me to undertake my duties and responsibilities more efficiently and effectively. As Members of Parliament, we have no right to information. We can ask questions, but we cannot insist on answers. I gather from the Table Office that the advisory limit for refusing to answer written questions, on the ground of disproportionate cost, stands at £400.

Apparently, there is no limit on the amount of money that Ministers can spend on replies. An interesting illustration involved the former Prime Minister, who refused to say how many questions she had declined to answer during her premiership, saying that answering that question would involve, "disproportionate cost." Yet, in June 1989, she was asked, in one of those questions that are a waste of parliamentary time, to list the Government's achievements since 1979. The reply covered 34 columns of *Hansard*, and the cost was later disclosed to have been £4,600. If we are talking about checks and balances, that is perhaps a classic example of the way in which the balance lies in favour not of the legislature but of the Executive. The Bill would go some way to check that balance.

Other countries look in some disbelief at the way that we carry on. As Richard Norton-Taylor wrote in *The Guardian:*

> "Ostrich-like, determined to insulate Britain from the outside world, the government pulled up the blanket higher, tucked it in tighter, confirming the established view among Britain's puzzled and closest allies that the obsession with secrecy is now le vice Anglais."

If members of the Government feel that their Departments have no stupidity, ineptitude, inefficiency, bad decision-making, bureaucratic bungling, dishonesty or corruption to hide, they have nothing to fear by supporting the Bill.

12.33 pm

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): I congratulate the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) on promoting this measure and thereby giving us the opportunity to debate an important subject, on which there is much common ground. I suspect that the Bill may try to do too many things, which may make it difficult for it to proceed on to the statute book, but its intention is right. I am not sure whether it will achieve what hon. Members who have spoken think it will. I would describe it as a "yes, but" Bill and this has been a "yes, but" debate. During every speech I have said to myself, "Yes I agree, but".

I want to know the 1792 secret that is sitting on the Minister's desk. We do not even know the subject, and we should be told. There are interesting secrets to be revealed, and some things should not remain secret.

We may be able to achieve some of what we want without the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) referred to the fact that the Data Protection Acts only cover computer records rather than files. We could sensibly use that legislation to extend data protection, and from that point of view I am not sure whether the Bill is necessary.

As one listens to the debate, one tends to muse. I have been thinking about our own dear Whips Office—I am sure that Labour Members have thought of theirs—and the personal files and records that it might contain. If the measure is enacted, I wonder whether we shall be protected. I had thought that the Whips Office would be exempt, but I can find no such exemption. Clause 3 states:

> "In this Act 'public authority' means . . . any government department"—

I am not sure whether that covers it—

> "any other corporation or body"—

it is certainly a body—

> "in relation to any function which it exercises on behalf of the Crown"—

we are getting closer—

> "any other corporation or body . . . at least half of whose revenues derive directly from money provided by Parliament"—

we have got them. The Whips Office will be covered by the measure, and that is something to be said for it.

The Bill represents an attempt to move from a society run on a need-to-know basis to one run on a right-to-know basis. It is designed to shift the balance—which is what the Government have sought to do through recent actions. They have created a more open society, in which the disclosure of information is judged correct unless there is good cause to prevent it. They have moved society on from the days when things were kept secret because it was not good for children to know the truth.

The Bill would not provide a right to be told, however, but just the right to know. One would have to know what question to ask and of whom, unless one scattered lots of questions in the hope of obtaining the relevant answers. It does not place a requirement on any public authority to collect information. If the relevant authority does not have the requested information, it is required to say who might have it, if it knows that it is available from somewhere else, but it is not required to collect it. Such collection of information may be the answer to the problem of parliamentary questions to which the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central referred, which are often answered with the words, "We do not collect this information centrally." I suspect that that practice may still continue.

I support the principles behind the Bill. Almost two years ago to the day, I stood here promoting my own private Member's Bill, the Public Safety Information Bill. It proved too complex for the House to swallow and got no further than its Second Reading, but, nevertheless, we

[Mr. John Bowis]

had a useful debate. I recall quoting the words of Charles Churchill—I offer them again to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central:

> "In full fair tide let information flow:
> That evil is half cured whose cause we know"

That is the theme of the Bill in poetic form. The down-to-earth reasons for the Bill are in part revealed by some of the disasters to which the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) referred—those disasters were the rationale behind my Bill.

It is worth recalling that Desmond Fennell, who wrote the report on the King's Cross fire, said:

> "I view with dismay the suggestion that information gained by a statutory authority which has a bearing on the safety of the public using a system for mass transportation should not be made publicly available."

We should be moving towards such disclosure.

I am not certain that the Bill goes far enough. If one knows about something, one can make a reasoned judgment, but in some cases that information must be presented. In 1987, 31 people died at King's Cross. It was subsequently discovered that between 1945 and 1987, there had been 46 escalator fires. None of those, happily, led to the sort of disaster that resulted in loss of life, but had the public been informed of the danger posed by those fires, pressure for improvements would have been brought to bear. Pressure is not always exerted by individual members of the public, although it often is by the press or elected representatives.

If no action is taken when conditions demand it, lives can be lost. Often, no action is taken because no pressure is exerted, and often no pressure is exerted because there is no knowledge. When considering the Bill need to dwell on the need to seek such knowledge.

My Bill sought to require not just a right to know, but the right to be told. That is missing from this Bill, especially when one considers the protection of the public in places where they could be at risk.

In 1985, 50 people died at Bradford football ground, when a wooden stand caught fire because of the rubbish collected underneath it. Bradford council had been warned about the combustible materials in that rubbish. When we discussed my Bill two years ago, I quoted a letter sent to me by the former leader of Bradford council, Ronnie Farley:

> "This information never reached the public or the elected members as there was no legal requirement for it to do so. Had the Public Safety Information Bill been law, it would have been discussed in public at the next meeting of the committee, the public gallery would have been packed"—

as the press would have drawn attention to it.

> "I cannot conceive it possible that no remedial action would have been taken. The fire would not have happened and those people would be alive today."

There are many other disasters, such as that involving the Herald of Free Enterprise in 1987. Reports were known to have been received showing that there were no lights on the bridge to warn that the bow doors were open. The hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green referred to the Marchioness disaster in 1989. I well recall that disaster, as the Bowbelle sailed from my constituency. Some reports relating to the Bowbelle's sister ship were known to the authorities, but not the public. That is the key issue—the public could not be aware of the information, but it should have been possible for the information to be drawn to their attention.

My Bill would have made it a requirement that football grounds or transport that had received a warning would have to display a notice stating that fact, so that nobody could unknowingly take a risk. Having seen the warning, they could take the risk knowing that, on balance, they accepted it.

In 1988, the Clapham junction train crash occurred in my constituency, and 35 people were killed. The subsequent Hidden inquiry showed that there had been five similar incidents of faulty wiring which were known and reported. However, the lesson was not learned, the public did not know, a row was not caused and lives were lost.

Lives and health can be saved by information. The Health and Safety Commission has made that clear. One of its reports states:

> "Where their own immediate safety or health could be at risk, the public should be in possession of information enabling them to understand their position."

I hope that it is clear that I wholly support policies to ensure more freedom of information, but I believe that the Bill does not go far enough. Perhaps its powers could be extended, or the Government could listen to the discussions and take further action.

However, we must also be aware of the dangers of partial knowledge. The apple juice case has been mentioned several times today, but it is not a good example to use when discussing the Bill. The information that seeped out about apple juice related to a risk that did not exist. As the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green said, someone would have to drink 140 litres of the wretched stuff to suffer anything more than a mild stomach ache—quite apart from the other results of consuming such quantities.

Anyone who has picked up a slightly rotting windfall apple and munched into it will know that it tastes different from normal apples. The report involved the natural over-maturing of apples. That was causing the problem, not chemicals inserted by the food industry into cans or cartons of apple juice. Therefore, the public were unnecessarily worried. We must be careful about partial knowledge.

Ms. Glenda Jackson: Surely, what compounded the fault and genuinely frightened many of my constituents was that the newspaper reports referred to carcinogens and the possibility of infant defects. The Bill addresses exactly that problem. The Government had arrogantly presumed not to release information. There have been so many other examples of the Government arrogantly refusing to release information that the public automatically thought that they were not releasing the information because they had something to hide.

Mr. Bowis: I appreciate the hon. Lady's point. The other argument is that, if the information had been released, it would have caused unnecessary concern. However, after the information was leaked, it was right for a statement to be made and for the entire detail of the report to be made public. I merely say that we must maintain a balance between unnecessarily alarming the public and giving them the right to know, which I support.

Ms. Glenda Jackson: Part of the public disquiet arose from previous examples, in which it was the policy and the arrogance of the Government invariably to protect the producer rather than the consumer. That fuelled an entirely justifiable fear in the public mind that there was some risk. We subsequently discovered that there was none, unless one drank enormous quantities of apple juice. If the report had been released when the Government received it, with a covering note defining the amount of liquid that would be required to produce adverse effects, no one would have been caused any disquiet. However, genuine disquiet was caused.

Mr. Bowis: Leaving aside the hon. Lady's reference to arrogance, I would say that the Government in their wisdom reached certain conclusions and that, in this instance, they were probably right.

I do not think that the Bill would achieve what the hon. Lady thinks it would achieve, because the fact that a report has been received does not mean that the Government will make an announcement to that effect. The Bill merely says that if an authority is asked about a report, it will have a duty to explain it and make it available. Perhaps the hon. Lady is suggesting, as I suggested in the case of public safety, that the measure is not quite as good as we should like it to be. Perhaps there should be an authoritative body that can say that there is deemed to be a risk and that it should be made public, not just available to the public. Such a body could be the Health and Safety Commission. Perhaps the hon. Lady and I can find common cause on that.

I do not think that the Bill achieves all that its supporters claim. The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central is not in the Chamber, but perhaps someone else can enlighten me. I have received about a dozen of the postcards that have been mentioned, but I am not much convinced by that, any more than I am convinced by the fact that 68,000 of my constituents did not send me postcards.

However, I was influenced by the people who wrote to me explaining their genuine concerns and stating what they hoped the Bill would achieve. In a letter supporting the Bill, one of my constituents stated:

> "When you buy fresh fruit and vegetables, you do not know what chemicals have been sprayed on them or even whether peeling them would necessarily remove all of the chemicals."

That is not covered by the Bill.

> "This Bill would help in providing the public with clear information about the food they eat. For example in labelling foods. Some items have the sugar contents listed under each separate type of sugar, such as sucrose, glucose, dextrose. Many people do not know that they are all sugar".

I do not think that that is covered by the Bill, but people think that it will cover such matters. I do not say that such matters should not be covered, but the Bill does not cover them. Therefore, in our debate, we must be careful not to raise expectations that cannot be met.

It has been suggested that the private sector will be controlled to a greater extent than the Bill proposes. I understand that there are three methods of introducing such controls. One relates to the information held by a public authority about a company or business, and that seems reasonable. The second relates to clause 80, about directors' reports. The clause lists the Acts under which a warning has to be revealed in the annual report. I fully support that excellent measure.

The third relates to access to employment records. I am slightly wary of that, partly because of the old question of what is a record, particularly with job references. We know that there is data protection for computer records, and we have suggested that they might include filed records, but what about telephone calls? Most people who are employing somebody do not go by the written record, because they worry about what is missed out. Indeed, some people phrase references in such a way as to make it clear that there should be a telephone call to give the truth. I am not sure how far we can go in controlling society so that telelphone calls are included. We would almost have to require that they were recorded—a dangerous path for civil liberties.

That example shows the problems in obtaining what we seek—sensible access to records. We should not think that that is the end of the story and rely on it, because other information that may be passed about us through various means, even through my flippant example of the Whips Office, may not be covered.

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): Only the Tory Whips Office.

Mr. Bowis: I suspect that it is all Whips Offices, although perhaps it is particularly true of the Government Whips Office. I leave that for the hon. Gentleman's Back Benchers to decide.

The right to know that would be useful—my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) and others have referred to this—is that which would give us a greater knowledge about the bases on which decisions are made. With that greater knowledge, we could make better and more informed decisions, in this place and elsewhere. That would apply also to newspapers and the press. I wonder whether the person who drafted the Bill considered whether press records and personal files held by newspapers, television companies and research companies should be available for access. I say that only in parenthesis, so that hon. Members may consider it.

There is a worry that civil servants' advice to Ministers might be inhibited. I know that clause 21 is aimed at addressing that, because we do not want it to happen. Nor do we want Ministers, because advice is published, to put blame elsewhere; our tradition has always been that Ministers take responsibility rather than hiding behind a civil servant, and it is a good tradition. Furthermore, we do not want civil servants to be constrained when giving advice. We may be able to deal with that in Committee.

Clause 21(1) refers to information being

> "exempt if it consists of the advice, opinion or recommendation tendered by any person in the course of that person's official duties for the purpose of the formation of policy within a public authority."

Information that is not exempt is set out in subsection (2). That includes

> "the analysis, interpretation or evaluation of, or any projection based on, factual information".

Both those subsections set out close definitions, but I wonder whether the one exempts a category that the other then reinstates. That may worry Ministers and civil servants.

I am concerned also about clause 16, and other exemption clauses, because of the use of the word "significant". For example, clause 16 exempts information

> "if its disclosure would be likely to cause significant damage to the defence of the United Kingdom".

Information on security

> "is exempt if its disclosure would be likely to cause significant damage to the lawful activities of the security or intelligence services."

On international relations, clause 18 says:

> "Information is exempt if its disclosure would be likely to cause significant damage to the interests of the United Kingdom".

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On law enforcement, it says:

> "Information is exempt if its disclosure would be likely to . . . impede significantly the prevention or detection of offences".

In the briefings that we helpfully received from various organisations setting out the background to the Bill, that word is not used. The reference is only to "damage". "Significant" has either been added since the briefings or it was always there and the briefers did not understand the significance of the word "significant". Its use detracts from that exemption, and we need more detail of what is meant. If significant damage to a country's interest means, for example, paratroopers dropping behind the lines rather than a mass invasion, I would still be worried about paratroopers dropping behind the lines.

I am, in theory, in favour of more information in one regard, but, again, we must be wary of the impact. The contaminated land register was introduced by this Government to provide more information to the public about a particular risk. Because that innovation was not thought through, undue and untold worry and harm were caused to individuals whose properties, they discovered, were built on land that was formerly occupied by a shunting yard or refuse tip and which was still toxic despite treatment. The Government are considering how to revise that register, but that example reflects my concern about the kind of information that is released to the public.

The Government have a good record of achievements, and we do not have to exchange banter across the Floor on that issue. The Campaign for Freedom of Information acknowledges progress but wants more, understandably. Only today, more information was released about education tests. Those of us who were members of the Committee considering the Education Bill are delighted that the stage 3 tests are to go ahead, and equally delighted that the Government have taken the advice of right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the Committee and provided that first-year stage 3 results should not be published. That represents a sensible adaptation of the right to information, where the Government listened to the public and to experts and produced an amended proposal which will be welcomed by the whole House.

The Bill's theme is absolutely right, and I hope that it will be possible to pass measures not unlike those that the Bill proposes. That can be done by improving the Bill in Committee, by the Government taking the action that they have promised before the summer, or by a combination of the two. With 83 clauses, it is a lengthy private Member's Bill, but I wish it well. I hope that the Government will note today's debate and that the Bill's draftsmen will consider how it may be not only revised but supplemented. In that spirit, I wish the Bill and the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central all strength to their elbow.

1.2 pm

Ms. Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): After all that, I believe that the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) supports the Bill—and I am grateful for the opportunity to support my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) from the Opposition Front Bench. My hon. Friend is a member of our citizens charter team and if he were not promoting his Bill, it is likely that he would be standing at the Dispatch Box in my place.

I congratulate all right hon. and hon. Members who, over the years, have done much work in presenting private Members' Bills. Thanks are due to them for enabling my hon. Friend's Bill to be before us. I join in congratulating also the Campaign for Freedom of Information and other groups on their work in bringing this important issue to the attention of right hon. and hon. Members.

This is a timely and necessary debate on an issue which demands urgent attention. I agree with the many hon. Members who have said that the apparently peculiarly British disease of obsessive secrecy must be cured urgently. It is time that our citizens had free access to information that affects all aspects of their lives and that we recognised that information is power. The Government are anxious to talk about real empowerment, but they have done little to implement it and seem keen to withhold it from our citizens.

Hon. Members have given examples of seemingly trivial information that remains officially secret. An example that has not been mentioned, but which is so trivial that it is worth mentioning, is the absence of the British Telecom tower from Ordnance Survey maps. I hope that I am covered by parliamentary privilege when I reveal that the British Telecom tower does exist and that its address is 60 Cleveland street, London.

We have heard how much historical information has been withheld. I welcomed the invitation of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to historians to list papers that they would like to be declassified. I welcome any action to bring such papers into the public domain. The Minister told us that more papers will be brought into the public domain. Such a step is important to some people, but it seems almost a gimmick given the amount of information that is still withheld. Interesting though they are, those historical documents will not be read or used by many of my constituents. Nevertheless, it is progress and we should welcome that.

The Bill recognises that there is a case for withholding information in the interests of national security, but to have rules so rigid that information is held even where it can be shown that its ready availability would actively promote the public interest is bizarre. The public have a right to know information about the safety of public buildings and facilities. The hon. Member for Battersea spoke of his private Member's Bill, which would have helped to achieve that, but which the Government did not accept.

Many hon. Members have mentioned the tragedies at King's Cross and Bradford. As a result of the King's Cross fire, safety checks on London Underground's facilities are regularly published, but comparative details for British Rail stations remain under wraps. Desmond Fennell, who investigated the King's Cross tragedy, reported that he

> "viewed with dismay the suggestion that information gained by a statutory authority which has a bearing on the safety of the public using a system for mass transportation should not be publicly available."

We have heard about the Bradford football tragedy. The Health and Safety Executive expressed concerns about safety at that ground. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) said, if that information had been made routinely public or even passed to the fire brigade, a tragedy might have been prevented.

The Marchioness river boat sank in the River Thames in August 1989. It was revealed that the ship that crashed into it, the Bowbelle, had been involved in three previous river accidents. The public had not known about its dangerous record because accident reports are confidential. Labour Members believe that the public can legitimately expect that if information on safety is made public it is less likely to be overlooked.

The Minister made a very unconvincing case against the Bill. He mentioned expense—and, clearly, expense will be involved—but can we not learn from the experience of other countries, which have found that open government is less likely to lead to costly mistakes behind closed doors, away from public scrutiny? Far from being an expensive diversion, might not the Bill be a constructive measure in increasing value for money in the provision of quality services responsive to consumer demand and public need?

The Bill covers a fundamental issue: the public's right to make informed choices based on information that affects them as individuals and to have access to details of the performance of the Government and of public and private services. Bearing in mind the Government's almost fanatical desire to expand the power of the market across the board, I cannot understand why the Minister does not concede that a fundamental, textbook component of the free market is the universal availability of knowledge about that market.

How can the Government be serious about improving public services when, for example, the length of the queue at my local post office is an official secret? The Post Office regularly monitors how long customers have to wait to be served at each of its 1,400 directly managed Crown offices. Its target is to serve 95 per cent. of customers within five minutes, but it refuses to say which branches failed to meet that standard. After years of pressure from the consumer, the Post Office recently agreed to show its data to the Post Office Users National Council, the body representing consumers. However, the council has been told that it must keep the information secret. If it publishes it or gives the press access to it, the Post Office will withhold the information. That means that the Post Office has succeeded in protecting itself from the one thing that is most likely to lead to improvements in service—informed public criticism.

There is another issue that shows that the Government are not serious about improving public services. Only last week we discovered—it was in the newspapers—that national health service patients are being denied information even about how long they will have to stay on the waiting list. While other public services are to have their performance indicators monitored by the National Audit Office, the national health service is retaining that function within its own management executive. That will hardly enhance its public credibility. The health service has ordered hospitals not to tell patients how long they will have to wait for their operation.

The Bill attempts to strike the right balance between secrecy and openness. My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central is right to start with the assumption that official secrecy should be the exception rather than the rule.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): I agree with many of the elements at the beginning of the Bill, but I have severe misgivings about clause 62, which I invite the hon. Lady to consider. The three-line clause states:

> "It shall be a defence for a person charged with an offence under this Part to prove that before the time of the alleged offence the material had become publicly available, whether in the United Kingdom or elsewhere."

What would happen if part of an official document, whose provenance was unclear, were leaked and printed in a newspaper? The clause would appear to allow almost any public sector employee who handled classified documents to release such a document with impunity, thereby establishing the provenance of the document and putting details into the public domain. Does the hon. Lady not have severe misgivings about the clause, which destroys other marvellous elements of the Bill?

Ms. Hoey: I do not have severe misgivings about the Bill; I have made it clear that I support it. Obviously, hon. Members will wish to make some changes to the Bill. I am delighted that the hon. Member for Battersea wants to go further than the Bill does. If the Bill goes into Committee, I am sure that we shall be able to make some of the changes that hon. Members want.

We have heard about the experiences of other countries that have designed and implemented effective freedom of information legislation systems. They do not cost the earth and are not unnecessarily complex and difficult to administer. They have demonstrably enhanced the rights of citizens.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and his Parliamentary Secretary are honourable men. I believe that their commitment to extend the public's right to know is genuine, but I fear that they have been, and are likely to be, constrained by many of their Cabinet colleagues, either because of timidity or for other reasons about which we do not know. We know that many civil servants do not want the Bill to go through. I hope that the Minister and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster accept that there is widespread support for the Bill in the country.

Many hon. Members have mentioned the many right-to-know cards that they have received. Many of us have also had many letters from constituents explaining why, from their own experiences, they believe that there should be a right to know. I have had more letters from constituents on the Bill than I have had on any other. I have received even more letters than I did on the Pig Husbandry Bill, which was also a private Member's Bill. I am not sure what that says about the people of Vauxhall. The number of cards and letters shows that there is broad support for the Bill across the party political divide.

I recall that Margaret Thatcher once said of Lord Young that whereas other people brought her problems, he brought her solutions. The Minister had no fundamental argument against the Bill. I hope that, rather than relying on excuses for not supporting the necessary legislation, the Government will adopt a can-do mentality and that they will find a way around the concerns raised. The genuine practical difficulties can be dealt with in Committee with all the scrutiny that our system allows.

The people of this country, whether fairly or not, often view politicians and public servants with cynicism. Other hon. Members have made that point. We must face the fact that politicians on the whole are not believed. We are viewed by many people as being liars and cheats who are prepared to cover up all manner of things. When there is no right to know and no freedom of information, it is difficult to disprove that view. The Bill will go some way towards stripping away that image.

[Ms. Hoey]

With the Government in their 14th year in power, the institutions of the state are viewed as self-serving and self-perpetuating. The Bill will help to change the image of government, of politicians and of people in public life generally. We have heard a lot from the Prime Minister and from the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster about open government and about giving power to citizens. There has been a proliferation of citizens charters, yet the Government simultaneously deny the public the right to know and make decisions in secrecy.

The Chancellor of the Duchy said last week that the Government were preparing a White Paper on openness and he said today that the White Paper will be available in the summer. He has been talking about the White Paper for some time, and the Parliamentary Secretary has claimed that the Bill will be of particular interest. Only last week the Chancellor claimed that the Government were committed to greater openness and to removing areas of unnecessary secrecy. Such changes have been a long time coming and I hope that hon. Members will feel able to take the first step themselves today.

My party is committed to freedom of information. Before the general election, we promised that a freedom of information Bill would be top of our agenda. The commitment to informing the public stretches across hon. Members of all parties. I urge hon. Members to support the Bill. If it receives a Second Reading and reaches Committee, we will begin to deliver a citizen's basic right to freedom of information and a right to know. As one of his main reasons for opposing the Bill, the right hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) said that we already have a tried and tested system. Yes, we have such a system, but the right hon. Gentleman did not say that it is a failed system. That is why hon. Members must support the Bill. I hope that we will allow it a Second Reading.

1.19 pm

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute briefly to the debate. I join hon. Members on both sides of the House in congratulating the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) on initiating a debate on this important topic.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis), I strongly agree with many of the principles that have inspired the Bill. However, again like my hon. Friend, I believe that the Bill is a bit of a curate's egg. If it progresses beyond Second Reading, we shall need to consider in Committee or at a later stage issues such as an individual's right to privacy and the relationship between a right to know and commercial confidentiality.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central should also think again about the inclusion in the Bill of an outright overthrow and repeal of the Official Secrets Act 1989. My right hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) made a telling point when he said that the 1989 Act has been on the statute book for only two years. It is therefore premature, to say the least, to rush in and seek to overthrow it before we have seen it working for a period of time.

I am slightly surprised that the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central has taken that course. In my previous incarnation as special adviser to my right hon. Friend the then Home Secretary, who is now the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, I recall discussions about the reform of the official secrets legislation. I felt that restricting the scope of official secrets law to a number of defined areas of public policy would allow supporters of a freedom of information Act to introduce a Bill that would dovetail neatly with the reform of the official secrets legislation and bring within the scope of a statutory right to know the areas of public policy and Government documentation that were freed by the 1989 Act from the protection of the criminal law, but which were not subject to any statutory right of access by the public.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan), I have considerable reservations about the inclusion in the Bill of all-embracing defences of prior publication and of public interest. On the latter point, the specific harm tests within the 1989 Act allow a court—a judge and jury—to take account of the public interest.

An unquestioned defence on the ground of prior publication would allow someone who wished to leak an important classified document the freedom to do so perhaps by securing its publication in a very obscure journal in this country or overseas. He could then point that fact out to a newspaper with a wide circulation which would, like the individual responsible for the leak, be able to claim the defence that the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central offers in the Bill.

Mr. Fisher: The fact that we are proposing a prior publication defence does not mean that prior publication in itself would inevitably be found to be a satisfactory defence. It simply gives the opportunity for genuine prior publication to be a defence. It would be for the courts to decide whether it was a defence which held up.

Mr. Lidington: As a layman, my reading of clause 62 of the Bill means that an absolute defence of prior publication would exist. Clearly, that matter will be considered if the Bill proceeds further. If the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central and his supporters wish to have my support and, I suspect, the support of other Conservative Members, they would do well to reflect on whether they wish to press forward and overthrow the 1989 Act in the way in which the Bill does.

I shall refer to those aspects of the Bill on which I sympathise with the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central and other hon. Members on both sides of the House. It is true that the Government have moved a long way recently towards greater openness about their policies. Some of the Acts to which my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea referred, Judge Tumim shining his torch into the prison system and reports of Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary being published so that everyone can see how our police service is managed, are real advances in bringing information forward for inspection by the public and the media.

I agree that we can and should do more. I was impressed by the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea when he said that it was not enough simply to have a public right to know. For that right to be effective, a specific obligation needs to be imposed on the Government or other public bodies to make that information accessible and known to those who might be interested in it.

I am slightly sceptical about some of the hopes that are held out for the Bill if it is enacted. I somehow doubt whether there will be queues of our constituents knocking on the doors of Government Departments daily seeking to find out what has been going on. Nor, I fear, will all journalists be as excited by a Government document when it ceases to have "top secret" stamped on it and, instead, becomes much more readily available for wider dissemination.

I shall dwell on two points on which I think we need to go further in creating greater public access to the workings of government and which have not been touched on hitherto in the debate. The first was highlighted in a recent Hansard Society report about improving the quality of law making in the United Kingdom. The Hansard Society recommended that the Government should be much more open about their consultation exercises prior to publication of Green or White Papers or Bills.

Having had limited experience of two Whitehall Departments, I am clear in my mind that although civil servants make an effort to consult, they tend often to work from the same rather limited list of tried and trusted corporate bodies with which they are used to communicating. Legislation can come before the House, apparently after a long consultation period, and it is only then that interest groups wake up, very late in the day, and find that their legitimate interests are vitally affected because the consultation had not been wide enough and its results not widely disseminated.

That is one aspect of the workings of government where an initiative could be taken by my right hon. and hon. Friends to open up their intentions and policies to wider public scrutiny and to what my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) has called the "clash of expert opinion". The result would be better drafted Bills and better laws.

My second point is about the workings of the European Community. I have been struck by the oddity that papers submitted by our Government to the Council of Ministers are treated as Government documents—documents of the Executive which would not normally be released for discussion or debate by Parliament or the general public. I understand why, in the normal course of international relations, that degree of Government privacy is observed.

But in the European Community and Council of Ministers, we have a new hybrid beast—a body composed of representatives of the executive branches of government of the 12 member states who, when they act as the Council of Ministers, perform a legislative function for the EC as a whole. I welcome the initiative of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister last week to prise open the doors behind which the Council of Ministers usually operates. Again, I hope that my right hon. Friends will be much bolder in putting forward ideas to make the workings of the Council of Ministers and its process of decision making much less obscure.

The success of any policy designed to allow greater public access to Government information, whether it be embodied in statute or derived from Government initiative, depends on changing the Whitehall culture. In our system there is still a tendency to over-classify documents. I recall the Foreign Office stamping telegrams "Confidential". The reference note said that publication of documents would involve a serious risk to national interest. The contents of the telegrams were matters such as the record of an ambassador in some capital of his table talk with the junior Foreign Minister of the relevant country.

As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster made clear, we have moved on quickly in the past year or two. We have even acknowledged to ourselves that the security and intelligence services exist. When I first entered the Foreign Office I looked at my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's daily diary and asked, "What is this listed as 'Meeting with C'?" I was drawn aside by an official and told quietly in a corner, "David, C is M." We have moved on from those days a little, but we could go further.

We should not deny to ourselves that such a shift would also require a shift in the way in which we think about Britain's constitution. The key to civil servants' resistance to greater public access to Government information seems to be a concern to preserve the notion that a chain of accountability runs from officials to their responsible Ministers and only from the Ministers to Parliament and thereafter to the wider public.

If we go in the direction that the Bill suggests, we shall question that link. That might not be such a bad thing. It is absurd to expect Ministers to stand at the Dispatch Box and know the last detail of how many bed pans there are in each hospital in Barnsley and to decry them if they do not have that information instantly available.

The workings of government are so extensive that it is fair for the public to ask not only that Ministers accept responsibility for the policies and decisions of their Departments, but that officials realise that they have a responsibility and some accountability not only to their departmental boss, but to the British public who pay their salaries and whom they are appointed to serve.

I argue that the Government have, to some extent, acknowledged that by moving towards the next steps agencies, which remove most sections of government away from Whitehall and that neat system of accountability, and have established the agencies as semi-detached organs of government. That move is healthy and goes in the right direction, but that and the Bill force us to think carefully about the way in which we have traditionally regarded our constitution.

My message to my right hon. and hon. Friends the Parliamentary Secretary and the Chancellor of the Duchy is that there is certainly widespread support among Conservatives and Conservative Members of Parliament for many of the principles and objectives embodied in the Bill. I hope that when my right hon. and hon. Friends tussle with their departmental colleagues and with the institutional mind of Whitehall, they will bear in mind that they have the goodwill of people of all political affiliations and of none, and that they will go back to Whitehall from this debate feeling encouraged to commence that struggle with renewed vigour.

1.36 pm

Dr. Tony Wright (Cannock and Burntwood): It should not be necessary to argue that a modern democracy should have a commitment to openness as one of its basic ingredients. Perhaps it may not be quite the case, as Francis Bacon so famously put it, that

"knowledge itself is power",

[Dr. Tony Wright]

but there can be no doubt that they are intimately connected. Clearly that is the Government's view, since they have always regarded the control of information as one of their major preoccupations.

The central fact in the British case, now thoroughly stale in the telling, is that the British way of governing has been characterised by the most extraordinary secrecy, which is unrivalled among comparable western democracies. One testimony to that, which is all the more remarkable because it comes from a former permanent secretary, Sir Patrick Nairne, could stand for many. He said, the

"culture of secrecy is bred in the bone of British parliamentary democracy."

Lord Hailsham once provided a convenient public school translation:

"Thou shalt not blub, and thou shalt not sneak."

What that has meant for British democracy and society has been exhaustively recorded. It ranges far and wide, and high and low.

For most of the 20th century, the Official Secrets Act, which was nodded through in a day in 1911, has enveloped public life in a blanket of official secrecy. When its notorious catch-all section 2 was finally reformed after a mere 80 years, by the Official Secrets Act 1989, the new legislation not only continued to allow ample scope for continued prosecutions, above all through its exclusion of a public interest defence, but was emphatically not intended to form part of a widening of access to official information.

That is only the visible tip of a much larger iceberg, as a succession of causes célèbres in the 1980s showed that British Governments had equipped themselves with a formidable armoury of devices to employ against whistle-blowing civil servants, journalists and broadcasters. At their heart is the ability of Ministers of the Crown to sustain the claim that there is an identity of interest between their interests, those of the Government and those of the state, and the absence in public law of a recognised interest of state to which reference can be made and disclosure compelled and information revealed.

That position was admirably and appallingly stated by Judge Justice McCowan in the trial of the civil servant, Clive Ponting, in 1985—I ask hon. Members to listen carefully—when he said:

"We have General Elections in this country. The majority party in the House of Commons forms the Government. If it loses majority support it ceases to do so, but for the time being, it is the Government, and its policies are those of the State."

That claim of an identity of interests between the interests of the Government of the day and the interests of the state, and the refusal to make any distinction, is at the heart of many of our difficulties.

That high secrecy forms only one part of that routine web of secrecy which envelops the workings of government in Britain. Behind the particular practices, a whole culture exists. For example, the Cabinet committee structure was kept from view. The recent acknowledgment of its existence along with the ministerial rule book—and, goodness gracious me, the fact that we had a Secret Intelligence Service—shows that one cannot sustain fictions for ever.

Official statistics can be doctored. The annual opening of the 30-year Cabinet archive regularly reveals that Ministers have always devoted much of their effort to keeping information out of the public domain—even routine information collected by Government about the standard of products and services. Some such information can be obtained only from foreign Governments.

Hon. Members have given various examples of the difficulties encountered in obtaining information. It is particularly shocking and shameful that, for example, families whose sons suffer injury while serving with the British armed forces find it impossible to get even basic information about the cause of their sons' injuries from the Ministry of Defence. That problem will be addressed by the Bill.

The arrangement that I have described is a direct, perfect embodiment of the British constitutional tradition. It is not a distorting aberration, but a truthful mirror of an Executive-dominated constitution in which Ministers have inherited prerogative powers from the Crown. They are not used to sharing information with citizens or their representatives. To have done so would have been to govern in a different way; indeed, to have been a different kind of Government. Instead, constitutional doctrines have been advanced—as they were by the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington)—to explain why matters are conducted as they are and why, in constitutional terms, no significant change is permissible or desirable.

The central doctrine is that of ministerial responsibility, whereby Ministers alone are answerable to Parliament for what Departments do and civil servants are preserved in their virginal state of anonymous neutrality. That chain of accountability would be broken, we are told, if there were more windows on the policy process and a linchpin of responsible constitutional government would be thereby kicked away. The problem with that argument is that it amounts to saying that it is necessary to keep certain fictions intact if the traditional theory of the constitution is to be maintained.

The root fiction and deceit is the way in which the doctrine of ministerial responsibility is marshalled to defend the politics of secrecy despite the fact that effective responsibility, the promise of the doctrine, is thereby undercut. In other words, a doctrine is invoked in the service of its direct opposite. The truth is that Ministers, the monopolists of information, decide what to disclose and what to conceal so that the extent of secrecy becomes the greatest secret of all.

A further truth pointed out by the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) is that the ability of Parliament to compel the Executive to lay papers before the House was much greater in the previous century when the role of government was more restricted than in the party-dominated big government of this century.

A doctrine of responsibility that denies access to the sources of information required to make responsibility effective, stands matters on their head. It also sustains a series of further fictions about Ministers having responsibility and civil servants not being involved in the policy process.

The arguments that are today being used in some quarters to oppose the Right to Know Bill were exactly the sort of arguments about the threat to ministerial responsibility that were used when the ombudsman system was established in the 1960s. If one reads the debates of that time, one sees the same sort of arguments used. It was claimed that it would be a threat to ministerial responsibility and would undermine the constitution.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): How much thought has my hon. Friend given to the fact that we are dealing with a moving target—the relationship between what those who are being governed need to know and the way that the Government hog the information? We are not merely discussing the relationship between a Minister and a civil servant. We are talking about the use of quangos where the "civil servants" are not actually civil servants and do not sign the Official Secrets Act. Where the Government and the quango want to cover up a major scandal they use the gagging clause. They force someone to retire early, and pay him an extra year's salary in return for his signing the gagging clause—the non-disclosure agreement. Therefore, it costs the taxpayer more money to assist the Government to stop the taxpayer discovering the scandal that results in the sacking, because the Government want to avoid embarrassment. That happens in the health service, universities, museums and other publicly funded institutions, where people cannot find out what went wrong.

Dr. Wright: My hon. Friend raises an important issue, which I wish I had time to develop. We have seen the privatisation of government, arms-length government, next steps agencies—what some people have called the new magistracy of appointed people who run our public services. The resulting lack of accountability makes it more important to build in an information requirement so that we know what is going on.

The constitutional doctrine is increasingly implausible and threadbare, but it is used to maintain the veil of secrecy over the political process and the operation of government. The costs of that process, both in democratic terms and in terms of its effectiveness, are considerable. Policy advice and options are not open to official scrutiny. One such example may interest the Government. If they had revealed to public view the Rothschild report on the coal industry when they were limbering up to privatise it and first floated the idea of a massive contraction in the industry, the arguments could have been tested in Parliament and by the public. As a result, the Government might have saved themselves the debacle and humiliation of the past few months. There is abundant evidence of major policy decisions—the stuff of democratic choice—being taken by Governments without Parliament or the people knowing the facts.

There is a further choice to be made by those who are persuaded of the need for greater openness. Many hon. Members have said today that they have been so persuaded, including the Minister. That choice is between nudging Governments—or even Governments allowing themselves to be nudged—into letting a little more light in here and there or seeking to effect a more structural change in the architecture of the constitution. That is the main argument over the Bill.

The nudging approach has advantages to its credit. The Minister and the Government are right to emphasise the extension of information provisions during the past few years. The access provisions in the ombudsman and audit systems are all examples of that extension, but more can be achieved and more is promised—such as the powers available to Select Committees and the revision of the internal civil service code, of which the Minister spoke. Such pressure is likely to, and should, increase, if only to stave off demands such as those made in the Bill for more fundamental changes. Governments must continue to respond, although it is clear that the Minister is finding it more difficult to respond than he thought it would be. The problem with that approach is that Governments will continue to respond on their own terms. The Executive will still decide how much information and of what kind to give their citizens and Parliament. That is why it is necessary to reverse the relationship between Government and people on the matter of information. If the present relationship accurately reflects a constitution in which the Executive has always been dominant, an altered relationship should be seen as an essential element in a democratic remodelling of that constitution. The presumption should be in favour of openness. Governments should have to make a case for not disclosing certain information, rather than, as now, disclosing only what they choose. The shift in onus is crucial and lies at the heart of proposals for freedom of information.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that one little bit of information that could usefully be made public is when a public servant, such as a civil servant, a magistrate, a councillor or a Member of Parliament, is a member of a secret society? When my Secret Societies (Declaration) Bill is called, Pinky and Perky on the Conservative Benches will shout, "Object" and the Minister for open government will sit with a smile on his face. Does my hon. Friend agree that that area of darkness is long overdue for a little exposure and that, irrespective of whether the Bill addresses it, the issue should be examined in the near future?

Dr. Wright: That was an interesting and not entirely unexpected intervention, but I am delighted to agree with my hon. Friend.

The issues of onus and presumption are crucial. The resistance to legislation is not narrowly technical, although that is how it is sometimes presented. That was the thrust of what the Minister said. The issue is constitutional and cultural. The absence of freedom of information is rooted in a larger democratic deficit and the acquisition of provisions would herald a wider shift in the political system.

The Bill presents a moment of truth for the House and, more widely, for our democracy. It is not a choice between information and no information, but a matter of the terms on which access to information is to be had. Are we to continue with a system in which the Government will continue to decide the information that Parliament and the public should know, even if they do that in the generous, expansive and emollient way that the Government have now adopted? Conversely, is Britain to become the kind of democracy in which there is a presumption of openness and access, with Governments having to justify non-disclosure? That is the issue of principle which the House must decide and the Bill provides the opportunity for Parliament to choose. If we make the wrong choice, respect for this place, which, as we have heard, is not high, and the way in which we conduct politics will decline still further.

Some hon. Members spoke about making a brave choice, but I would call it a confident choice and it could provide the moment for the process of democratic and constitutional renewal to take a decisive step that will have benefits for every citizen.

1.53 pm

Mr. Michael Trend (Windsor and Maidenhead): We have heard some fairly extravagant claims about the supposed tyranical powers of government, and the efficacy of a right to know Bill, so I shall begin by setting the Bill in context. Although I do not feel that I can support the Bill of the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher), there is a great deal of value in it and I hope that many of its ends will be achieved soon—that is not just a ritual claim.

The right to know has a good ring about it. Who could gainsay it? I have a right to know, he has a right to know, she has a right to know, it has a right to know. Surely that is a self-evident truth? The answer is, up to a point. We have here one of those slogans that seem to enshrine a deeply felt public demand. Curiously, while many hon. Members have said that they have received hundreds of cards, I have not. I have had more about whales, lambs or calves. I have not seen the massed ranks of our citizenry marching up Whitehall screaming, "The right to know or death!" In short, I do not detect the groundswell of public opinion for freedom of information legislation that some of its proponents suggest.

The debate about freedom of information encourages extravagant claims and has a narrow base. Moreover, I suspect that some who take up the campaign just because they see in it an opportunity to bash the Government would not be so keen on the cause if they suddenly came to power and had to forgo the luxuries of opposition. It is easy to bash away at Government practice and procedure, but then to find that one has got nowhere. It is much more difficult to find a way to encourage Governments to reform their practices, but often that is more rewarding.

I have said that I do not detect a groundswell of public opinion in favour of change, but I agree that the time for a change in openness has arrived.

Mr. Rooker: It is not a good idea to repeat the canard that a groundswell has not been detected. I am constantly taken back to the day in 1978 when a Home Secretary, at the Dispatch Box, challenged the rest of the House, saying that he did not think that there were more than two or three people in any constituency who were interested in freedom of information. That brought the roof in on him. The myth is that there is no public demand for freedom of information, but people want it when it affects their safety or that of their families and communities. We should not repeat the myth simply because the evidence of demand is not on the front pages of the newspapers every day.

Mr. Trend: I accept the hon. Gentleman's last point, but the experience of other countries such as Canada and Australia, set out in excellent papers given at a conference earlier this month, shows that there was not a groundswell of opinion in favour of change there before their legislation was introduced. I am not saying that it is necessary to have that groundswell for there to be a Bill, but I am saying that there is not one. I am also saying that the change is desirable. The question that I ask of the Bill is a simple one: is it the best way forward at the moment?

While I share many of the central assumptions that lie behind the Bill, one being that it is ludicrous to restrict access to information simply for the sake of restricting it, I have difficulty in believing that the long and complex Bill is the best way forward. In particular, I regret that it would overthrow the Official Secrets Act 1989, which has only recently been added to the statute book—in this, I agree with my right hon. and hon. Friends—and has yet to be significantly tested.

My main contribution to the debate is to examine further how some other countries have fared with freedom of information legislation, in particular Australia and Canada. One of the main lessons that those involved in such legislation say that they have learnt is that their new laws have had much less effect than most people on both sides of the argument felt that they would have. There have been some dramatic uses of freedom of information legislation. Robert Hazell, in his article in *Public Administration* in 1989, pointed to the case of a Minister in the Mulroney Government who had to resign after the press discovered that she had

> "spent five days in Paris at public expense in order to attend a one-hour meeting."

That came to light through use of the freedom of information legislation. Such sensational cases aside, the most remarkable thing about the introduction of such legislation is that many fewer people have applied for information than was originally thought likely. I contend that a groundswell did not exist before and that a torrent of demand was not released afterwards.

The possible effects of such legislation can be easily exaggerated. Justice Michael Kirby, the distinguished president of the New South Wales Court of Appeal, said recently, "there have been disappointments." Why? I suspect that it is because expectations of freedom of information legislation far exceed what it can deliver. There are other, perhaps better, ways of achieving a more open society.

All the authorities whose views I have studied recently basically agree with the comments of Sir Douglas Wass in his Reith lectures:

> "More important, in my view, than any institutional changes is the need for a commitment on the part of all who work in the field of government positively to want an informed public. If this is lacking, little in the way of machinery will help."

John Grace, Canada's information commissioner, holds the view that a

> "right-to-know law can only be meaningful if it serves as a catalyst for the emergence of a real openness."

That comes from a man who is at the heart of the Canadian freedom of information system. He says that a right-to-know law will not necessarily of itself lead to real openness. To that extent, he agrees with Sir Douglas Wass.

Is there a better way of achieving many of the desirable aims that the Bill seeks, without supporting the means that it proposes? The best chance of change in the right direction comes when the Government themselves signal a culture change to openness. That has been seen in Britain in the past few years and that is a welcome and rare development among worldwide parliamentary democracies.

The present Government's record is better than that of any other, and continues a movement begun under the previous Administration.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: I suppose that the greatest signalling of a culture change or a change of intent was the Croham directive, but that did not seem to bring about the culture change for which it argued.

Mr. Trend: I am essentially saying that because the wind appears to have changed, there is an opportunity to get on to a better tack. Such opportunities may have occurred in the past, but the wind changed and the ship of state sailed in its familiar direction again. In my concluding remarks, I shall say that if I do not feel that there has been a sea change, I shall be more inclined—probably definitely inclined—to support legislation.

Of the number of relevant measures introduced in the past few years, the Data Protection Act 1984 was a landmark, as was the Access to Medical Records Act four years later. This Government have increased their determination to secure more open government since the last general election. I cite the recent publication of the membership of Cabinet Committees, which I greatly enjoyed reading. I suspect that in years to come they will be used to gauge who is up and who is down—in the way that the annual ballot for the parliamentary Labour party's shadow Cabinet does.

Mr. Corbett: The Cabinet are not elected.

Mr. Trend: Still, that ballot reveals who is up and who is down in a most delightful manner. The Cabinet Committee minutes might do the same.

I approve of recent initiatives to release more historical material, and they could be extended to other areas. Such developments are of a piece with the citizens charter. In an age when the most frequently heard response to all of life's problems seem to be, "The Government must do something"—meaning, they must continually jerk the knee on request—the greater subtlety that lies behind the citizens charter is easily guyed.

The House does not need to be reminded that the citizens charter movement is supported in principle by all the main political parties. Nevertheless, Opposition Members cannot resist making an easy jibe. Indeed, their position is even less logical, because by supporting the idea in principle but trying to ridicule it in practice, opposition voices decry the achievements that the citizens charter movement has chalked up, such as forcing schools, health authorities, local councils and other public bodies to publish details of their performance. That opposition is not a good start for those who profess to want freedom of information.

The citizens charter is proving a better way ahead for the people of this country. The charter, taken with other open government initiatives, represents a fundamental shift in the Government's attitude. Some may say that freedom of information legislation would push the movement towards open government ahead even faster. I tend not to agree with that view, because, although I would not want to exaggerate the effects that a right-to-know Act might have on how civil servants and politicians would seek to alter their procedures, I should like to think more carefully about this matter before proceeding to legislation.

Ours is a comparatively open system. Compared with what happens in many other countries, the doctrine of ministerial responsibility is a remarkably sophisticated idea. When Opposition parties and Back Benchers believe that they have not received a clear answer to a question, it is chiefly because they have not asked a clear question. We have only ourselves to blame if we cannot use our daily opportunities to best effect. In the end, the House can claim what information it wants. As a former Clerk of this House is quoted on saying on the first page of "Erskine May", "Who can stop it?"

Mr. Flynn: Government.

Mr. Trend: No, not at all. If the House is determined, in the end, who can stop it?

Mr. Waldegrave: May I help my hon. Friend with some first-hand experience? I have been on the receiving end of questions from the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) for 12 years. Being questioned by him is different from being questioned by other hon. Members. It can be done.

Mr. Trend: While we are dwelling on partisan matters, I might add that experience from other countries suggests that freedom of information legislation adds nothing to the political response that one might achieve by asking a direct question in the legislature. Most Members of Parliament in Canada and Australia are obtaining their information in that way, rather than using freedom of information legislation.

Mr. Flynn: My experience of the House of Commons cannot compare with the hon. Gentleman's, but perhaps he could refer to the evidence that was given to the Procedure Committee on the obstructions to receiving answers to parliamentary questions. I commend to him a letter from Dr. David Lowry that appears in *The Guardian* today. I asssure him that many diligent Back Benchers have found that, in seeking information in this place, they are up against a brick wall.

Mr. Trend: I have experienced that once in my brief career. By thinking carefully which information it would be impossible for the Minister not to give in reply, I thought my way round one flank, but I am afraid that the pincer movement did not quite work. I am saying that the power of hon. Members to ask a question is greater than any other power.

Mr. Jenkin: My experience in tabling questions led me into a conversation with a Clerk in the Table Office, who advised me that a change in the rules to which the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) referred is a matter for the Procedure Committee. The inability to extract information about legal opinions from the Government is purely a matter for hon. Members, and if hon. Members want the Government to lay legal opinions on the table they can compel them to do so.

Mr. Trend *rose—[Interruption.]* I should like to make a little progress. I know that the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms. Jackson) is keen to speak and I am keen to hear her.

I do not subscribe to another claim made by some freedom of information enthusiasts that only through such legislation can rights be ensured. The same effect will occur as the Government move ahead with their own programme. Each area to which the public gain access becomes an area where there can be no going back. It is inconceivable that once parents have got used to knowing the examination results of their local schools they will be help happy to see that information restricted once again to the so-called experts. In that way, I believe that the changes on which the Government have embarked will become entrenched in our public life, which is to the good.

I have outlined a number of reasons why we should not proceed with the Bill. I hope that I have pointed out some of the false hopes that such legislation could stir up and

[Mr. Trend]

have identified the remarkable culture shift which is under way in our own system of government, although it must go further.

My aim would be to find the best way to reconcile the Westminster principle of ministerial accountability to Parliament with greatly increased public rights of information. I look forward to a time when many of the Bill's apirations are fulfilled, but I should not necessarily wish to see them brought into existence in the way suggested by the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central. The hon. Gentleman prefers the straitjacket of statute, whereas I prefer the more subtle, organic approach. I should, however, incline more to his way of thinking if I did not believe that the Government really were committed to open government.

The piecemeal approach can be just as profound—perhaps more so—than the statutory route. There is much to be said for taking people with us, step by step, and for educating the public at large about what could be of use to them from official statistics and other sources of information, but the will to do so must come from the Government. That is what Sir Douglas Wass meant when he pointed to the necessity

"on the part of all who work in the field of Government positively to want an informed public".

Indeed, that is almost the classic definition of the scope and purpose of the citizens charter movement.

I am content to wait for the Government's White Paper before thinking again about this issue. I want to see what they suggest to take us further and faster along the path to open government. Although I do not feel able to support the Bill, I hope that one day some—perhaps many—of the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central's wishes will be realised. I am very much in favour of shifting the balance of power from the state to the citizen and I hope that significant steps will be taken in that direction in the not-too-distant future.

2.11 pm

Ms. Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I join other hon. Members in thanking my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) for introducing the Bill. I also join my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) in thanking the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) not only for the splendour of his speech but for allowing me to hear the phrase "we the people" uttered in the House—a phrase which, in its powerful simplicity, still causes the hairs to rise on the back of my neck, containing as it does the aspirations and hopes of all people who have ever believed in justice, equality and freedom and desired to make themselves free. It is a response which the words "citizens charter" do not produce.

I believe Britain to be a unique society in many ways but, for a nation that prides itself on being the mother of parliamentary democracy, it is uniquely secretive. Indeed, few democratic nations can have the same anachronistic attitude to what the public do or do not have the right to know. Most of our democratic neighbours and friends find it perfectly possible to protect their freedom and security without enveloping themselves and their political institutions in a cloak of impenetrable secrecy.

For example, in Sweden, a country which has enjoyed freedom of information for 200 years, citizens with only a few exceptions have a legal right to see all official documents and correspondence. Indeed, it is possible for anyone to enter the Prime Minister's residence and ask to see the correspondence received that day. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central is not suggesting that we all be given the right to traipse around to No. 10 and interrupt the Prime Minister's breakfast with demands that he show us his morning post, but the Swedish principle that Government information is information that belongs to the people is one which we should adopt. Even the United States, a nation which historically has been more paranoid than most about internal and external threats to its security, has freedom of information laws that are balanced towards openness rather than towards secrecy.

Few of us would argue that there is not some information that must be retained to protect our freedom and to protect those who risk their lives protecting us, but it is equally clear that the national security argument has been used all too often as a means of suppressing information that is of legitimate public interest.

Other hon. Members have cited examples of that excessive secrecy. My own favourite is taken from the Defence Select Committee meeting of 24 April 1991. The hon. Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates) asked Mr. David Gould, head of resources and programmes for the Royal Air Force, how many Phantom aircraft were based at RAF Wildenrath in Germany. He was told that the information could not be disclosed in public session. It was then explained to Mr. Gould that a recent treaty with the Russians had disclosed the number of aircraft to be 28. Mr. Gould replied that, although the information had been supplied to the Russians, he was not entitled to supply it to the British people. When information is being made available to potential adversaries, but is being withheld from the public, we are entering the realm of "Through the Looking-Glass".

Unfortunately, not all the implications of secrecy are as amusing. In 1957, a document entitled "Report On Track Pollution Problems" was commissioned as a result of public concern about the probable health hazards caused by undiluted sewage being flushed on to railway tracks throughout the country. Thirty six years later, that report has still not been published. It is a safe bet that the report has not been withheld because its findings were harmless.

The present rules governing secrecy would not be quite so bizarre if it were not for the fact that they are not adhered to even by those who so jealously guard them. Ministers who are prepared to vilify, to sack and, on occasions, to imprison civil servants who leak confidential information are the same Ministers who leak information daily to any Lobby journalist who is prepared to listen. If the secrecy laws were applied to Ministers as zealously as they are applied to the rest of the country, there is a distinct possibility that the entire Cabinet would now be languishing in the Tower of London. That may be regarded by some as a good argument for tightening the restrictions, but the manner in which information can be passed selectively if and when it suits those in positions of power is almost as dangerous as a complete ban on information itself.

The Prime Minister has often talked about his wish to create a classless society. That wish will never be anything more than an empty dream as long as our culture allows a minority of select individuals to obtain information and to withhold it from the rest of society. It is not enough for the Government to publish citizens charters and booklets revealing ministerial regulations and then to sit back claiming that openness has been achieved. It is no help to my constituents for them to know what gifts Ministers may accept from visiting dignitaries, when they are not allowed to know what is in their own medical records.

Only last month, the House debated another private Member's Bill which dealt with press responsibility. During the debate, the Government argued against stricter press controls which they regarded as a threat to democracy. The Prime Minister, in a leaked statement, said he was personally opposed to the Freedom and Responsibility of the Press Bill on those grounds. If the Government oppose controls on the press, they should also oppose controls on individual citizens. If nothing else, it is unacceptably arrogant for those who govern for the people to hide information from the people.

I began by quoting the phrase "we the people", which has come to us from across the Atlantic. I end with the words of Abraham Lincoln, who spoke of

> "Government of the people, by the people, and for the people."

My constituents have contacted me in greater numbers about their wish to see the Bill enacted than in respect of any subject other than their outrage at the Government's plans for pit closures. My constituents understand that it is the first duty of any citizen to be informed. They acknowledge the responsibilities that they need to exercise to enable the phrase with which I began my peroration to be something more than mere empty rhetoric. They equally acknowledge that they cannot be responsible citizens without accurate and wide-ranging information.

The Bill would provide my constituents, and every constituent in the country, with that information. For that reason alone, I will support the Bill. I hope all hon. Members will join me.

2.20 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms. Jackson), in whose constituency I was born. She made a capable and eloquent speech, and a valuable contribution to the debate. I must apologise for not being present for the entire debate. I unfortunately missed several of the speeches, but I was present for the opening speeches.

I am particularly sorry to have missed the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd). If the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate is correct and my hon. Friend's speech made her hair stand on end, I am sure that it is one——

Mr. Fisher: It even made my hair stand on end.

Mr. Jenkin: I note what the hon. Gentleman says, but I was sorry to miss the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills.

The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate made her position on the Bill very clear. She made it clear that its underlying principle is that the information possessed by public authorities belongs to the people. I shall discuss that point at greater length in a moment.

I am not concerned about the general sentiments of the Bill for greater openness and accountability. My concern is that it represents a blunderbuss approach to a process which is already being carried on in the Government to extend openness and reduce secrecy.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) referred to the accountability of public authorities such as British Coal. However, British Coal was nationalised and the legislation that nationalised it is defective to such an extent that even Ministers find it difficult to extract information from British Coal because of its commercial sensitivity.

The privatisation of British Coal and the introduction of competition will increase accountability of the coal industry to its customers, to shareholders and to the public.The unsatisfactory relationship between the British people and British Coal is created by the fact that British Coal is owned by the Government but operates independently. I hope that the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central will join me in looking forward to the privatisation of British Coal.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central raised an interesting and relevant point about the accountability of public bodies that are being moved to a more arm's-length relationship. We discussed that point at some length during the proceedings of the Civil Service (Management Functions) Act 1992.

Undoubtedly, direct accountability is reduced in arm's-length organisations like training and enterprise councils, which are limited companies that operate independently of the Government, although they are owned by the Government through the use of public money. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Minister for having acknowledged that that is an issue. I look forward to the publication of league tables of the TECs, which will lead to greater accountability in respect of what they are seeking to do.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central said that commercial confidentiality was likely to be the biggest area affected by the Bill. Commercial confidentiality was one of the prime boasts of anti-secrecy legislation in the other countries to which he alluded.

Mr. Fisher: The hon. Gentleman misunderstood me. I said that it was likely to be the most contentious area and the area most disputed and taken to appeal.

Mr. Jenkin: I think that the hon. Gentleman said that it was the area most likely to be tested. He alluded to Australia, where wide use is made of this provision. I contrast that point with the point made by the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate—that there was no right of public ownership to information which is owned by private persons and corporations.

Mr. Bennett: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that those are Committee points, and that it would be much better for him to sit down and let the Bill go to Committee, where they can be pursued?

Mr. Fisher *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The House divided: Ayes 168, Noes 2.

Division No. 159] **[2.25 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh

Bell, Stuart
Benton, Joe
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Boateng, Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Boyce, Jimmy
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Darling, Alistair
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Dover, Den
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Enright, Derek
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Peter
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Janner, Greville
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kirkwood, Archy
Knox, David
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
McAllion, John
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
Page, Richard
Pike, Peter L.
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Sims, Roger
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Tipping, Paddy
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Wolfson, Mark
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Sir Teddy Taylor and
Mr. Andrew Bennett.

NOES

Jenkin, Bernard
Paice, James

Tellers for the Noes:
Dr. Liam Fox and
Mr. Alan Duncan.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Question put accordingly and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

Mr. Cryer: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I raised a point of order earlier requesting a statement from the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food about the allegations that he spent £17,000 of taxpayers' money on his private property for his own benefit. I understand that the press have been briefed by No. 10 to confirm that that is indeed the case.

I think that you will share my criticism that no statement has been made in this House, but that No. 10 has seen fit to brief the press outside it, when the first responsibility in the expenditure of taxpayers' money is a statement to this House, particularly on a day when we have been debating the secrecy of government and the Chancellor of the Duchy has tried to pretend that the Government are open, when the reverse appears to be the case.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): The hon. Member is sufficiently experienced to know that it is not a matter for the Chair whether Ministers make statements to the House. I have no doubt that those on the Government Front Bench have heard what he has said, and doubtless that was the intention.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is a matter for the House and for the Chair that the Minister of Agriculture recently gave evidence to a Committee of the House about spending money on a pond at his home in his constituency. He sent a five-page letter, and it is significant that he did not explain the extra £17,000. It is time that he was brought before the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. There is a method for dealing with any complaints of that type, but it is not through the Chair, and it is not now.

Remaining Private Members' Bills

MERCHANT SHIPPING (REGISTRATION ETC.) BILL

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

BAIL (AMENDMENT) BILL

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

GENERAL ELECTION EXPENSES REFORM BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

NATIONAL SCHOOL HEALTH SERVICE BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 26 February.

SECRET SOCIETIES (DECLARATION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 26 March.

WIDOWED FATHER'S ALLOWANCE BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

MISUSE OF DRUGS (ANABOLIC STEROIDS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 19 March.

PROTECTION OF ANIMALS (SCOTLAND) BILL

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK (TOBACCO SMOKING) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

COMMONWEALTH OF BRITAIN BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

COMMONWEALTH OF EUROPE BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

EUROPEAN UNION (PUBLIC INFORMATION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

ROAD TRAFFIC (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Seconding Reading deferred till Friday 26 February.

JUSTICE BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Seconding Reading deferred till Friday 26 March.

Western Sahara

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Robert G. Hughes.]*

2.39 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): The subject of this debate is the British Government's policy towards Western Sahara. The subject is not a new one before the House, because I raised it in an Adjournment debate in 1991 and it was subsequently discussed during a Friday morning debate on the future of the United Nations in December 1992 when a number of hon. Members expressed their concern about events in Western Sahara.

It is important for the House to understand the long history behind this sorry tale. Western Sahara was one of the later acquisitions of the European colonial powers as part of the scramble for Africa in the 1880s. Spain took over what is now Western Sahara as a colony and administered it until Franco died in the mid-1970s when it withdrew from Morocco. At that time, the people of Western Sahara were denied the right to self-determination and any opportunity to take part in the rapid decolonisation of the former Spanish and Portuguese colonies. They were denied that right because their land, which is rich in phosphates and appears to have large oil deposits, was immediately occupied by Morocco and Mauritania—its neighbours.

The people of Western Sahara were not prepared to accept that state of affairs and the Polisario Front was rapidly formed on behalf of the Saharawi people. It fought a guerrilla struggle for some years against the Moroccan and Mauritanian occupation of their land. Mauritania renounced any claim to the territory in 1979 and withdrew its forces. The Moroccan occupation continues to this day.

Many interesting issues are involved in this subject, but it is important to put on record that what has happened in Western Sahara is part of an anti-colonial struggle, which has gone on in Africa for a long time. It is also important to note that it is the only example of a demand for independence being made within the borders of an existing country—Morocco lays claim to Western Sahara—which has the support of the Organisation of African Unity. It has recognised the Polisario Front as the sole legitimate representative of the people of that region.

The Polisario Front is also recognised by 74 other countries. The British Government have never recognised it, but they have made their views clear. On 12 December 1991 the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office said in a debate held at 4.25 in the morning—I confess that the House was not packed at the time—

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): It is not packed at 2.30 in the afternoon.

Mr. Corbyn: Indeed. The Minister said:

> "As a permanent member of the Security Council, we warmly endorse the plan drawn up by the United Nations Secretary-General and endorsed by the Security Council."

Following an intervention from me, he said:

> "We have been neutral throughout this dispute. We do not recognise the Polisario or the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic. Nor do we accept Moroccan claims to the territory. We have consistently reaffirmed our belief in the principle of self-determination, and that has governed our policies on this matter in the UN and elsewhere."

Later, the Minister said:

> "The Secretary-General has not said that the referendum will be delayed"—

the referendum should have been held in December 1991—

> "but if the date does slip, we shall press for it to be held as soon as possible, subject to the important qualification that the conditions for the referendum should be right.!"—[*Official Report*, 12 December 1991; Vol. 200, c. 1173-74.]

We are talking of the need to resolve the conflict, which has raged since 1974 when the Spanish withdrew from Western Sahara and which still continues. A conflict has to be resolved by resolution and the agreement of both sides. In the latter part of the 20th century, one hopes that, through the auspices of the United Nations, we can provide a peaceful resolution to an awful and bloody conflict in which many lives have been lost.

There have been consistent attempts to involve the United Nations. Those attempts culminated in the plan to hold a referendum in December 1991 under the auspices of the United Nations. The United Nations set up an organisation, MINURSCO, to undertake the preparations for the referendum. However, that organisation has a pitifully low complement of staff. I am not criticising the quality of the staff, but there are very few of them. The British contribution to the monitoring exercise amounts to the grand total of 15 people.

Throughout that period, there have been consistent violations of the ceasefire which had earlier been agreed. The report to the United Nations Security Council of 25 January 1993 on the MINURSO experience states:

> "Still I have noted with concern a reversal in the downward trend in the number of violations discerned during the period 29 May to 20 August 1992 when only six violations were reported by the MINURSO Force Commander a.i. By contrast, no less than 50 violations were reported in the period 20 August to 20 January 1993, with 46 of them attributed to Morocco and four to the Frente POLISARIO. Of the former violations, 22 related to overflights, 13 to improvements of defensive works and 11 to unauthorized troop movements. On the Frente POLISARIO side, all four violations involved troop movements without prior notification and permission. Additionally, the POLISARIO filed complaints alleging 24 overflights over and above the 22 which could be confirmed by MINURSO's own observations."

The violations of the ceasefire are regrettable, as is the failure to hold the referendum in December 1991. The referendum did not take place for the following reasons. There has been an agreement between Morocco and the Polisario on the method of drawing up the electoral roll by which the referendum should be taken. It was agreed that the roll should comprise the 74,000 people whose names appeared on the 1974 census and who were resident in the Western Sahara at that time.

The vast majority of Saharawi people have been forced into refugee camps in exile in southern Algeria, where they live to this day. They are living as best they can, but they are in camps and in exile—they are refugees who want to return home. It was obviously hoped that the agreement on the drawing up of the electoral roll would allow a referendum to be held and the people of that country to decide of their own free will whether they wanted to be a part of Morocco or an independent country.

Close to the date on which the referendum was to have been held, Morocco said that it wished to add 120,000 names to the roll. Many of the names appeared to be soldiers or people who had been settled in the Western Sahara by the Moroccan Government of King Hassan who, during the process, said that no foreign flag would ever fly over the Western Sahara. That calls into question his original support for the United Nations position. There were some serious problems. On 1 October 1992, the

United States Senate foreign relations Africa subcommittee held a special hearing on the situation in the Western Sahara. In a lengthy statement Senator Edward Kennedy said:

> "The ongoing crisis in the Western Sahara raises serioous questions regarding the Government of Morocco's willingness to honour its international commitment to a free and fair referendum in that territory. It also brings into question the credibility of the United Nations in administering the Western Saharan peace plan, and our own government's commitment to the principles of sovereignty and self-determination. Barring immediate and dramatic progress, the peace plan for the Western Sahara is destined to fail. If the peace plan is to succeed, the United States must do more to make clear—through deed as well as word—its commitment to a free and fair referendum for the indigenous Saharawi people."

The senator described it as one of the last vestiges of colonialism and supported the idea that there should be a rapid resolution of the conflict.

Resolutions of conflict require the understanding by both sides that they have to adhere to the original agreements. That is quite difficult in the light of an Amnesty International report published in October 1992 which lists a number of Saharawi people who have disappeared. It states:

> "Among several hundred Saharawis still 'disappeared' is Baidari ould Sidi Mohamed oul Barbouchi. Born in 1943 at Oued Seguia, he was a student at the time of his arrest on 29 February 1976 in Tan Tan. Another is Mgaili ment Yahdih ould Embarek who was born in 1951 in Laayoune and arrested there on 3 March 1985, shortly before a visit to the city by King Hassan II."

Some have been released, but apparently a large number of secret detention centres have not released anybody and there are concerns about other Saharawis who went missing during this time.

The other extremely serious aspect is that immediately before his retirement as Secretary-General of the United Nations, Pérez de Cuellar, who was Secretary-General throughout the time that United Nation resolutions on the future of the Western Sahara were carried, presented a new report. It was several times rejected by the Security Council and less than 24 hours before he ceased to be Secretary-General he persuaded the Security Council to carry a new resolution which did not accept his report but noted it. It was subsequently interpreted as a fundamental change in the United Nations attitude to the drawing up of the electoral roll and the way in which the referendum would be held.

Doubly disturbing is that some months later a large Moroccan holding company called ONA which is involved principally in mining, but also in other industries in Morocco, issued a press release to the effect that Pérez de Cuellar had become an associate of the company and would be paid a substantial salary. That was subsequently reported in *El Pais* on 1 February 1993 and in some British newspapers. Pérez de Cuellar subsequently denied any such appointment. However, it is strange that he put enormous energy into producing a report on the eve of his retirement. Also strange was his subsequent invitation to be a senior person in a mining company that stands to gain a great deal from the continued Moroccan occupation of the Western Sahara.

Mr. Mullin: Does my hon. Friend agree that if Mr. Pérez de Cuellar is listening, we would be interested to know whether he ever received any money from that company?

Mr. Corbyn: I am unable to answer my hon. Friend's question, but it and my quotes from press statements and other sources are on the record and it is up to Pérez de Cuellar to make clear his position.

We must move on from that, because what happens in future is of the greatest interest. One option for the future of Western Sahara is for the United Nations Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros Ghali, to establish further negotiations between Morocco and the Polisario in order to reach agreement on how the electoral roll should be drawn up in advance of a referendum.

The second option is to impose the referendum on the basis of the electoral roll that has been drawn up and objected to by Morocco, with the objection sustained, which would mean a much larger electoral roll. Given the way that Morocco objected to the original roll, one can predict what the outcome of such a referendum might be. The third option would be to do something new.

It is important that the British Government stick to their original position, which was that they were neutral in the conflict and that a referendum should be held only if there were agreement by the protagonist parties on the basis on which it should be held. If a United Nations referendum is sponsored and held when there is no agreement between the two parties on how it should take place, it will not have any validity and could not last anyway.

The United Nations has sponsored referendums held to decide the future of a country—for exampe, Namibia and Angola. In such cases, there has been a large United Nations monitoring presence to ensure a free and fair referendum, a UN-sponsored educative process to show people how they should register to vote, how they should vote and what they are voting about, and sufficient numbers of international observers to ensure that those taking part in the vote are doing so without any let or hindrance. Therefore, the referendums have been genuinely free and fair.

If a referendum is imposed, the result of it will not be accepted by the losing side or by any other country. I urge the British Government to support option A—to encourage the Secretary-General of the United Nations to undertake continuing negotiations and call for a fresh report from the United Nations delegation within Western Sahara about what is going on, and what chances there are for reaching an agreement.

The stakes are high. Why should the Saharawi people be forced to leave their country, because of the annexation of Western Sahara in 1974 by Morocco and Mauritania, although Mauritania subsequently withdrew, and to live in refugee camps in southern Algeria? They demand the right to self-determination and that has been established and agreed and is on the record in many places all over the world.

The alternative is the continuation of a vicious war with large-scale loss of life and a diminution of the authority of the United Nations in the eyes of the rest of the world. I hope that the British Government will understand that there is a strength of feeling about this and that many hon. Members on both sides of the House have concerns about the matter and want to meet the Minister to have a further and perhaps longer discussion about how the British Government can advance the cause of a referendum in Western Sahara.

2.57 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): The hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) is to be congratulated on raising an important subject. I know that it is one which he follows with close attention, in keeping with the other subjects about which few other hon. Members know, but on which he has made himself an expert.

A settlement of the dispute over Western Sahara is long overdue. It is extremely disappointing that progress since we last debated the issue at the instigation of the hon. Member has been so limited. As a permanent member of the Security Council, we have worked hard to seek a solution. We warmly welcomed the plan drawn up by the UN Secretary-General in April 1991 and endorsed by the Security Council in resolution 690. As the hon. Gentleman said, that set out a timetable for a referendum that would allow self-determination for the people of Western Sahara. It also provided for the establishment of MINURSO—the United Nations Mission for a Referendum in the Western Sahara—to achieve this. A ceasefire came into effect on 6 September 1991, when a small number of MINURSO personnel were deployed. There have been no military clashes since then.

The British Government have contributed financially to MINURSO and also provided 15 military observers. Both parties have expressed considerable praise for the contribution made by British military observers. I pay tribute to their exemplary and highly professional conduct. Under the United Nations settlement plan, the implementation of the ceasefire marked the beginning of a transitional period that should have ended with the proclamation of the results of the referendum some 20 weeks later—in other words, at the end of January last year. Unfortunately, the timetable did not prove possible and we greatly regret the delay in holding the referendum, although it is not altogether surprising that problems should have arisen over efforts to resolve such a long and difficult dispute.

The most serious problem is the identification and registration of those eligible to vote in the referendum. It is not useful to try to apportion blame for the failure to resolve those problems. Under the terms of the settlement plan, the Secretary-General is ultimately responsible for determining the voting criteria. It is clear that both sides will have to show flexibility if outstanding problems are to be resolved.

Since we last debated this subject, in December 1991, Dr. Boutros Ghali has appointed Mr. Yaqub Khan to be his special representative on Western Sahara. The hon. Gentleman will agree that Mr. Yaqub Khan is a man of the highest integrity.

Mr. Corbyn *indicated assent.*

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman agrees that that was a very suitable appointment to a very difficult task. Mr. Yaqub Khan is a former Foreign Secretary for Pakistan, in which capacity he was equivalent to our Permanent Under-Secretary. I happen to know him as a result of other Foreign Office responsibilities.

Throughout last year, Mr. Yaqub Khan worked assiduously to bring the two parties together. In particular, he tried to get agreement on the criteria for eligibility to vote in the referendum and to obtain guarantees from both parties on their conduct, were they to win the referendum. Although he made some progress, problems over the voting criteria and their interpretation remain.

The Security Council is considering the Secretary-General's latest report, which sets out several options. It would not be right to enter into detail about the New York discussions, but I will make one comment in a moment. I hope that those discussions will result in a resolution that strengthens the Secretary-General's hand in further talks with all the parties and will lead to an early date for the referendum.

The one comment I will make is that I concur that the terms under which the referendum is held must be agreed by all the parties, and the Government's position in that regard has not changed since it was first developed. We shall play our part in New York in trying to ensure that the settlement plan is given renewed impetus.

We remain convinced that the Secretary-General's efforts to find a solution to that long-standing dispute offer the best way forward. I hope that the current discussions in New York will help to break the deadlock. The Secretary-General has our full support. His task is not easy. Much depends on the parties themselves. We shall continue to urge them to co-operate with the Secretary-General and to show the courage and flexibility that are needed.

Mr. Corbyn: Are the British Government prepared to continue supporting MINURSO, perhaps by increasing the number of personnel and the finance, which would perhaps need to be enhanced if a totally free referendum is to be held?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I cannot, at the conclusion of my speech, enter into much detail on that point, but we keep our contribution to MINURSO under review. The current deployment runs until April this year. It would be wrong to anticipate a decision at the tail-end of my speech—or at all—today.

We will urge the parties to show flexibility, for that is essential if this unhappy dispute is to be brought to the peaceful conclusion for which we all hope.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at three minutes past Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 22 February 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

DEATH OF A MEMBER

Madam Speaker: I regret to have to inform the House of the death of Mrs. Sybil Judith Chaplin, OBE, Member for Newbury, and I desire, on behalf of the House, to express our sense of the loss we have sustained and our sympathy with the relatives of the hon. Member.

Oral Answers to Questions

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Drug Abuse (Sport)

1. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he will meet the chairman of the Sports Council to discuss the problem of drug abuse in sport.

The Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mr. Peter Brooke): I expect to have a number of meetings this year with the chairman of the Sports Council to discuss issues of mutual concern, including the abuse of drugs in sport.

Mr. Campbell: What does it take to shake the Government out of their complacency about the problem of drug abuse by sportsmen? It is increasingly clear that, although evidence in the past suggested that anabolic steroids, for example, were being used by track and field athletes, the use of such potentially life-threatening drugs is more widespread throughout a variety of sports. Is not it time that the Government did something much more concrete and definite to discourage sportsmen from abusing themselves in this way?

Mr. Brooke: I do not accept for a moment the opening sentence of the hon. and learned Gentleman's question. The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs has been asked to consider the possibility of bringing steroids under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 and the Home Secretary will consider its advice before reaching a decision.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: Does my right hon. Friend agree that Britain has some of the best drug detection techniques in the world? Do not other sports bodies in the world frequently come here for advice?

Mr. Brooke: I totally accept my hon. Friend's comment. Our reputation is widely praised and my hon. Friend is right about other countries seeking our advice.

Mr. Pendry: Does the Secretary of State recognise, none the less, that the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, the Sports Council, the British Olympic Association and others urge the need to regulate the use of anabolic steroids in particular not only in sport but in gymnasiums up and down the country? I recognise that the Government have a problem in finding a legislative peg on which to hang such controls, but will he join Opposition Members in urging that we have a full debate in order that this serious problem, which affects sport and society generally, is ironed out in the House, which may assist the Government in paving the way for such legislation as asked for by the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell).

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for joining the Opposition in concern about the issue. The problem was considered in our debate on sport shortly before Christmas. An Adjournment debate would offer us the opportunity to consider the full facts.

Government Art Collection

3. **Ms. Abbott:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement on the future plans for the Government art collection.

Mr. Brooke: I have no plans to change the status of the Government art collection. It is the Government's policy regularly to review their activities to see whether the management of those activities should be provided by the state, and, if so, how they should be managed. The Government art collection is not excluded from this policy.

Ms. Abbott: The Secretary of State may not have such plans, but he will be aware that it has been extensively reported in the press that the Treasury is trying to force a change on him. Does he agree that the fact that this ridiculous idea is even floated by the Treasury shows the bankruptcy of the Government's economic policies, which reduce them to such stratagems as selling off paintings and raiding British Rail's pension fund at a time when it is not clear whether they would raise the maximum amount of money? Will he assure the House that if the Treasury were formally to approach him with this absurd suggestion he would resist it strongly? Does he accept that this reflects the attitude of a Government who know the price of everything but the value of nothing?

Mr. Brooke: In a speech to the Centre for Policy Studies on 23 November, my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury said that it was sensible to review Government activities to decide whether they should continue to be provided by the state, and I repeated that in my answer to the hon. Lady a moment ago. The hon. Lady has worked up tremendous indignation about a hypothesis, but I hope that she will next turn her attention to the hard fact that the City of Manchester education committee is selling more than 100 works of art at Sotheby's next month—the decision has already been taken that the sale is to take place.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will my right hon. Friend admit that the Government art collection is not up to much anyway and that it would not be a very great loss if it were flogged?

Mr. Brooke: I would not agree with my hon. Friend. The Government art collection is approaching its centenary. It represents more than 15,000 works of art which have been chosen over the past century. They are a significant representation of the history of British art in our time.

National Lottery

4. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he expects funds to be available for distribution from the national lottery.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mr. Robert Key): We hope that the licence to run the national lottery will be awarded later this year, and the national lottery will be operational towards the end of 1994. Funds will be available for distribution shortly after the lottery starts up.

Mr. Knox: Will my hon. Friend give an assurance that the main objective of the national lottery, which is to improve the quality of life, will not be diluted?

Mr. Key: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for pointing out the importance of not diluting the main objective of the lottery. It is true that we seek to have the best national lottery in the world, but, of course, it is also true that concerns have been expressed by small and charitable lotteries, the charities themselves, the pools industry and others. All the concerned bodies are being listened to with great care in Committee, but we are dealing with the problem by ensuring that 20 per cent. of proceeds go to charities and by the enhancement of small lotteries. It will, indeed, be a very British lottery.

Mrs. Clwyd: When the National Lottery etc. Bill was first published, the Minister pledged that the revenue raised from the lottery would be truly additional and would not be a substitute for Government funding. Does the Minister agree that when hundreds of local arts and sports organisations are being savagely cut because of the revenue support grant, the lottery pledge of additionality rings very hollow and, along with many other Government promises, should be taken with a large pinch of salt?

Mr. Key: I do not think that the hon. Lady understands local government finance. Most of the local government equation—priorities within it must be for local authorities —is based on the principle of revenue funding. The whole point of the national lottery is that the vast proportion will be concerned with capital funding.

Mr. Tracey: Could my hon. Friend go a little further and say when he envisages the appointment of the director general of the Office of the National Lottery which will be an important part of the operation? Is he aware that a great deal of expertise is already available in the operation of lotteries, and it is estimated that the national lottery could be up and running successfully by the spring of next year?

Mr. Key: Nothing would please me more. I hope that we shall be able to proceed to the appointment of the director general of Oflot as soon as Royal Assent has been granted. In order to achieve that, we must make speedy progress in Committee.

UNESCO

5. **Mr. Dowd:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment he has made of the effect of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from UNESCO on the work of his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The United Kingdom's withdrawal from UNESCO in 1985 has not significantly affected the work of my Department. The question of rejoining UNESCO is primarily a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, who continues to follow closely developments in that organisation, but has not so far taken any decision on resumption of membership.

Mr. Dowd: The Secretary of State will be aware that the overwhelming majority of informed opinion in the arts and sciences and cultural circles believe that the simple submission to the former President of the United States in pulling out of UNESCO has done immeasurable damage to this country and to the organisation. Will he prevail on the Foreign Office to reconsider the issue before, by force majeure, the new Administration in the United States makes it compulsory for us to rejoin, and to do so at the earliest opportunity, thus avoiding the embarrassment which would follow such a train of events, and repairing some of the damage done to this country and its influence overseas by the earlier decision?

Mr. Key: I do not know where the hon. Gentleman was in 1985. At that time, I was the last British national commissioner for UNESCO. I was, therefore, very familiar with the arguments then. I assure the hon. Gentleman that there was not total and unswerving support for the objectives of the UNESCO administration. However, UNESCO has many important functions to which we still subscribe and in which we are actively involved—even this very week.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not come to a decision. Whether he comes to a decision before or after the United States has done so is entirely up to him. I reassure the hon. Gentleman that the whole question of membership of UNESCO is kept under consideration.

Mr. Maclennan: Is the Minister aware that the new President of the United States has spoken most warmly to Dr. Mayor, the director-general of UNESCO? Any benefit that may have been experienced by that universal organisation as a result of our withdrawal because of its bad administration will be dissipated by our remaining out of it. There is a great deal to be said in terms of this country's interests for our rejoining that universal organisation and for ensuring that our cultural achievements are shared and are carried through in its work abroad.

Mr. Key: I am aware of that point and I am also aware that many British nationals provide expertise for UNESCO, either because they are directly employed by that organisation or because they are employed on a consultancy basis. I have no doubt that some parts of UNESCO's work are valuable to this country, whereas other parts may be more beneficial to other countries than to Britain.

Press Complaints Commission

6. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what consultations he has held with the Press Complaints Commission on the recent changes made by the commission in its code of conduct.

Mr. Brooke: None.

Mr. Soley: Can the Secretary of State tell us what the Government's policy is? The Government have said that they do not like self-regulation because it is not working, but the Secretary of State has apparently had no talks with the commission to see whether self-regulation can be beefed up. In the past few weeks, we have seen headlines such as "You bitch" in the "Home Alone" case. Sir Allan Green's late wife was approached by the prostitute in the case and the photograph was paid for—if not directly by the press—indirectly either to the prostitute or to the pimp. We have not heard a dicky-bird from the Press Complaints Commission. What makes the Secretary of State think that self-regulation will work if he has not talked to the commission? All the evidence shows a continuing decline in press standards.

Mr. Brooke: The hon. Gentleman knows especially well that the Government have said that their final response to the recent Calcutt report will come after they have had the opportunity to listen to the debates in Committee on the Freedom and Responsibility of the Press Bill and after we have had the opportunity to hear the views of the Select Committee on National Heritage.

The Press Complaints Commission has not asked to see me. A meeting could, of course, take place if I asked to see it. I believe that self-regulation works when the inspiration for it comes from within the body that is doing the self-regulating rather than from outside it.

Mr. Alan Howarth: For those of us who believe in self-regulation the tragedy is that the press has always done too little too late. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the newspaper industry should not rest complacently on the latest changes to the code of conduct, welcome though they are? Does my right hon. Friend agree that the newspaper industry should reconsider carefully the code of conduct proposed in the first Calcutt report? It offers a tighter model of self-regulation than that offered by the relatively easy-going code that the newspaper industry has put together for itself.

Mr. Brooke: I am aware that my hon. Friend will contribute to the Select Committee report, to which we look forward. On the developments that have occurred since the second Calcutt report was published, I have welcomed the evidence that the press is interested in reform of its own procedures. There is still plenty of time before we have to come to a conclusion—after the Select Committee has reported—when we can see whether there are further developments.

Cross-media Ownership

7. **Mr. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations he has received on the question of cross-media ownership.

Mr. Brooke: This and other ownership issues are raised at meetings with broadcasters and in letters from hon. Members and the public. However, there is no agreement about what, if anything, needs to be changed.

Mr. Bennett: I am sure that the Minister would agree that free and well-dispersed media in this country are essential if we are to maintain freedom of speech. Can he therefore explain why the ownership of the electronic media—radio and television—is subject to control while no restraints are imposed on the accumulation of newspapers by certain owners? Can he tell me how much of both media is now owned by Rupert Murdoch?

Mr. Brooke: Of course I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the Government should pay attention to the matters he raises. He will be aware of the remarks of Sir David Calcutt regarding the regulation of the electronic media. The matters that the hon. Gentleman has raised were widely debated when the House considered the Broadcasting Act 1990. He will also be aware that the President of the Board of Trade has certain powers in relation to the ownership of newspapers. For the time being, we shall leave matters as they are and allow the Broadcasting Act to settle down.

Mr. Fabricant: Does my right hon. Friend accept that cross-media ownership of newspapers and the electronic media occurs in France and Italy? Does he accept that if Britain and the English-speaking world are to compete adequately with those conglomerates, we must have strength in our own media?

Mr. Brooke: My hon. Friend has done the House a service by referring to the international dimension of the issue. I repeat the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett).

Mrs. Clwyd: Surely, despite what the right hon. Gentleman has said, he would agree that pluralistic press media are at the heart of what is meant by a democratic society. Does he agree that when one man can own three weekday newspapers and two Sunday newspapers, as well as a 50 per cent. stake in BSkyB, that is a totally unacceptable concentration of media ownership? When will he face up to this issue and take some action, or is he simply afraid of Mr. Rupert Murdoch?

Mr. Brooke: The hon. Lady used the word "unacceptable" as the justification for her argument. As I have already said, we keep these matters under review and I do not believe that that adjective can be justified at this time.

Children's Play

8. **Mr. Brandreth:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement on his Department's policy for children's play.

Mr. Key: The Sports Council will take over the National Children's Play and Recreation Unit's responsibilities for information and playwork education and training from 1 April 1993. This represents a very positive way forward for children's play.

Mr. Brandreth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply. Does he recognise that widespread concern has been expressed because, since the demise of the National

Children's Play and Recreation Unit, £500,000, which was formerly dedicated to children's play, has now disappeared within the Sports Council? Does he further accept that there is a widespread feeling that there is a need for a national focus for children's play and that the Sports Council may not be the appropriate forum for that? Perhaps his Department would like to take that on board?

Mr. Key: First, let me reassure my hon. Friend that £500,000 certainly has not disappeared. It is up to the Sports Council to decide how to spend that money, which was, of course, considered within its budget. I know of my hon. Friend's highly regarded work on behalf of the National Playing Fields Association. I hope that he will join a number of hon. Members who are coming to see me shortly as part of a delegation to discuss the matter.

Mr. Barry Jones: What is the Government's policy on the sale of school playing fields? Is he aware that such sales are frequently the only way that schools can afford to get themselves modernised? Those sales cause a great deal of anguish in the communities. Is not it time that we were told what the Government's future policy on this important matter is? Will the Minister also bear in mind the difficulties faced by Connah's Quay primary school in my constituency?

Mr. Key: I am not familiar with the case in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, but if he takes up the matter with the Minister with responsibility in Wales, I shall seek to liaise with him. The general principle and the policy are clear. Successive Ministers with responsibility for sport have said that local authorities, when deciding whether to dispose of playing fields, should consider how much they benefit the local community. First, we must establish how many playing fields there are, where they are and how big they are. The establishment of those facts is now being undertaken by the Sports Council, which I hope will be able to report on the matter by mid-summer.

Small Theatres

9. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will review the regulations affecting small theatres.

Mr. Brooke: Although the regulations affecting small theatres are not the responsibility of my Department, I have, like my hon. Friend, an interest in their work.

Mr. Bowis: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, beneath the great success of British theatre is the heartbeat of the small theatre which provides the first opportunity for many writers, producers and actors? However, the small theatre is a tender flower which needs to be protected. It has suffered various problems in the past, including those relating to the 48-hour rule. The small theatre is now moving into the licensing world—which, although not covered by my right hon. Friend's Department, is legislated for in the House—and there is a risk that the cost and bureaucracy of licensing may once again put the small theatre at risk. Will my right hon. Friend keep a close watch on that issue?

Mr. Brooke: As I said in my main answer, I share my hon. Friend's interest and I have been delighted to be able to attend performances in small theatres since I took on my present job. As my hon. Friend is aware, a review of the licensing laws in pub theatres was carried out a few years ago. The then Home Secretary concluded that the public performance of plays should continue to be licensed under the Theatres Act 1968. In making that decision, he was particularly mindful of the fire and safety implications. I am not persuaded that there is any reason to reopen the issue.

Mr. Dafis: The Secretary of State may be aware of the problems that have been created by the local management of schools, particularly grant-maintained status, for small theatre and education companies. Will the right hon. Gentleman study the way in which partnership funding currently works? Will he also consider ways in which the problems can be remedied, specifically by strengthening the funding and the contribution from the Arts Council of Great Britain in order to compensate for the current loss of funding from local education authorities?

Mr. Brooke: The question posed by the hon. Gentleman is more a matter for education Ministers than for me, but I recognise the read-across that he has established. One of the facts that have been brought home to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary and myself during the past year is the extent of the overlap between our responsibilities and those elsewhere. I shall glady look at the issue raised by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Hawkins: Will my right hon. Friend accept that many small and medium-sized theatres such as the Grand theatre in my constituency of Blackpool have benefited from Government support in recent years? Does my right hon. Friend accept that such Government support is much appreciated?

Mr. Brooke: In 1993-94 the Arts Council of Great Britain will allocate more than £40 million to drama and mime companies. In addition, drama companies benefit from the council's touring fund and the regional arts boards. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me the opportunity of mentioning that.

Unlisted Buildings (London)

10. **Mr. Austin-Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations he has received arising from consultations on English Heritage's plans to reduce its services on unlisted buildings in London.

Mr. Key: I have received approximately 80 representations on English Heritage's London proposals as a whole, few of them relating specifically to unlisted buildings.

Mr. Austin-Walker: Will the Minister acknowledge that the majority of representations that he has received are opposed to the proposals? Does he recognise that there are many fine buildings in London that do not have listed status? Does he further acknowledge that, outside London, county councils have the overriding responsibility for, and provide much of the special advice to, the district councils? If the proposals are adopted there will be a mishmash—an unco-ordinated approach in the absence of an organisation with overall responsibility for London. Does not such a policy constitute short-sightedness and short-termism of the worst sort? Will not he and his colleagues be condemned by future generations for the destruction of our architectural heritage and London's character?

Mr. Key: That is rather strange, considering the massive growth in the number of listed buildings in the past decade or so. Of course, English Heritage has listened carefully to the representations that it has received. In making the revised proposals, it has taken full account of the responses to its consultation paper. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will endorse English Heritage's final proposals only if he is satisfied that they make proper provision for the safeguarding of London's heritage.

Mr. Jessel: Will my hon. Friend encourage English Heritage in its basic task, which it does well, of preserving and protecting the marvellous heritage of important historic buildings and monuments? That is what future generations will care about.

Mr. Key: Yes. I am grateful to my hon. Friend. One of the most magnificent—Hampton Court—is in his constituency and I know that he takes a great interest in it. English Heritage has performed remarkably well in the decade since it was founded and I have no doubt of its intention to continue to do so.

Public Libraries

11. **Mr. Orme:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment he has made of the effect of this year's local government finance settlement on public library provision.

Mr. Key: I shall collect information from library authorities about their expenditure plans for the coming financial year. That will enable me to make an accurate overall assessment.

Mr. Orme: Is the Minister aware that in the city of Salford tremendous cuts in local government expenditure are bound to overflow into the library service? Does the Minister agree that at a time when we are talking about young people and crime, the last thing we want is to see libraries closing?

Mr. Key: I am, indeed, aware of the position in Salford. I follow the affairs of Salford with great interest and I do not forget that Salford is the home of the first free municipal library service in the world. Of course, public libraries must deliver a comprehensive and efficient service. No decisions have yet been taken by many local authorities in respect of their general or library budgets, but I am watching the matter closely.

Independent Television Commission (Chairman)

12. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he expects to appoint the next chairman of the Independent Television Commission; and what procedure he will follow.

Mr. Brooke: Sir George Russell's current term of appointment as chairman of the Independent Television Commission runs out on 31 December 1994. Sir George is proving an excellent chairman of the ITC. It is much too early to consider succession issues.

Mr. Mullin: May I put it to the Secretary of State that Sir George is proving a not very adequate chairman of the ITC—*[Interruption.]* I put that as generously as I can. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that there is widespread anxiety, both in commercial television and at the ITC, about the failure of that organisation to monitor the disastrous impact of the Broadcasting Act 1990 on commercial television and about the wide gap between promise and performance in the franchise applications?

Mr. Brooke: The second half of the hon. Gentleman's supplementary question did not reinforce, sustain or provide a rationale for the first half. He was making a subjective judgment. As he well knows, these are early days. I have every confidence in the ITC.

Mr. Stephen: Will my right hon. Friend make it clear to the chairman of the ITC that our constituents expect him to take firm action to stop the constant flow of pornography, violence and degradation into their homes through the television screen?

Mr. Brooke: I realise why my hon. Friend raises that matter. In certain considerations, it obviously falls to the ITC to take action. In others, it is the responsibility of the ITC to offer advice and for other action to be taken.

Calcutt Report

13. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will introduce Government proposals for legislation arising from the Calcutt report.

Mr. Brooke: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the statement that I made to the House on 14 January on publication of the review of press self-regulation.

Mr. Mitchell: Why does the Secretary of State not call off the protracted farce and admit that he does not have an idea in his head as to what to do, that he is not allowed a policy by the puppet-masters in the Tory press and that it is impossible to do anything without infringing the freedom of the press? His strategy is to wait until the storm passes and attempt to kill off the Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith in the process.

Mr. Brooke: The hon. Gentleman, who knows how fond I am of him, dramatically oversimplifies the issue. He knows that his hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith would agree that his Bill is directed to a limited part of the issue, whereas we are looking at a wider one.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the best way to deal with most of the occasional excesses of the press is by public criticism and that one of the last things to do is to tie the press up in legislative knots, which would mean that it would lose the power to do good at the expense of trying to stop it doing things that are wrong?

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that suggestion, which has much merit and wisdom. He will be aware of the evidence given by our noble Friend the Lord Chancellor to the Select Committee on National Heritage last week. The Lord Chancellor expressed the concern that a legal route would be made overcomplicated by lawyers.

Television Subtitling

14. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what arrangements he has made to monitor the operation of subtitling provisions by ITV companies since 1 January; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The Independent Television Commission is responsible for monitoring the requirements on subtitling both in the ITV licences and in the Broadcasting Act 1990.

Mr. Barnes: The deaf and hard of hearing depend on subtitling for television programmes. The change on 1 January from Oracle to the ITV companies was a disaster because for some days there was no decent subtitling. We must ensure that that does not occur again. Does the Minister agree that the Government have a responsibility in this matter, as well as the ITV companies?

Mr. Key: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. I am aware of the technical problems to which he refers with the subtitling services on ITV. Those have now been resolved and the new subtitling system should offer much greater benefits in future. I am sympathetic to the needs of those with disabilities and I shall keep in touch with developments which may be of benefit.

Mr. Simon Coombs: As a member of the Standing Committee on the Broadcasting Bill, may I tell my hon. Friend that we were anxious to see the maximum amount of subtitling for the deaf and the hard of hearing? It is fair to say that, so far, they have been disappointed and we should all be grateful for the help that my hon. Friend has agreed to give to ensure that the maximum subtitling is available in future.

Mr. Key: I compliment my hon. Friend on the attention given to the Bill by that Committee. Section 35 of the Broadcasting Act 1990 requires that channel 3 and channel 5 licensees must provide 10 per cent. more subtitling in their first year of operation than was achieved by ITV companies in the previous year. Thereafter, the ITC would set reasonable targets to increase subtitling. There is a requirement that in 1998, 50 per cent. of the average number of programme hours will offer subtitling.

Tourism

15. **Mr. Robert Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the number of visitors to the United Kingdom through organised tours during 1992.

Mr. Key: Latest figures from the international passenger survey show that there were 1,202,000 visits to the United Kingdom by holidaymakers on marketed package holidays in the first half of 1992—54 per cent. more than in the first half of 1991. They represented 36 per cent. of overseas holiday visits and 15 per cent. of all overseas visitors.

Mr. Banks: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply. Bearing in mind that millions of people from this country take package holidays and tours overseas, will he take steps to ensure that there is proper co-ordination in this country between hoteliers and those responsible for resorts and facilities so that we may attract visitors on package holidays? To that end, will he ensure that the British Tourist Authority has the marketing funds available, adjusted for the devaluation of the pound, so that the number of visitors to this country is maintained?

Mr. Key: Just as important as the British Tourist Authority doing its work abroad—which it does magnificently, whatever the vagaries of the pound—is the necessity to ensure that this country has the facilities to receive package holiday visitors. The organisations concerned are making rapid progress on co-ordination, and individual resorts and destinations, including my hon. Friend's constituency of Harrogate, are blazing a trail in that respect by their approach to joint marketing strategies.

Private Funding

16. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what progress he is making in raising private funds for support of heritage and the arts.

Mr. Brooke: There has been a remarkable increase in private sector support for the arts, from less than £600,000 in 1976 to more than £65 million last year. Our business sponsorship incentive scheme has itself attracted almost £40 million since its inception in 1984. English Heritage is also making good progress in promoting private sector funding.

Mr. Banks: Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that the effect of the recession is such that many companies now find themselves unable to put into arts and heritage the money that they previously put in, and will he look into this? As he was clearly not over-enthusiastic about my idea of raising money through sponsorship of the royal family, will he look carefully at the recent suggestion by one of the timeshare experts that up to £100 million could be raised by using one of the royal palaces for timeshare? If he is looking for extra money, Trusthouse Forte and Holiday Inns would probably be interested in buying one of the palaces, which are clearly not all necessary.

Mr. Brooke: The first half of the hon. Gentleman's question was obviously serious. As a result of the spread of sponsors and the fact that smaller companies are now sponsoring arts and heritage, the amount of sponsorship continues to rise even though, as he rightly says, some larger companies have had to drop out because of the recession. As to the second half of his question, he does not seem discouraged by my reaction to his previous suggestion. As I said then, I am delighted to see that he is continuing to do research.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

National Audit Office

30. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission by how much the National Audit Office has increased in real terms the resources devoted to measuring the outcomes achieved by Government services.

Sir Peter Hordern (Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission): In the five years to 31 March 1993, the National Audit Office will have increased the number of value-for-money studies produced by some 50 per cent., from 33 to 50. Over the same period, the resources devoted to that work have risen in real terms by 45 per cent.

Mr. Bayley: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that reply. However, I am talking not just about value for money or efficiency but about effectiveness. As Government policy is moving towards an audit of policy in terms of quality and not just quantity of service provided, should we not be looking at the effectiveness of surgeons' operations in the national health service—that is, whether they make people better—rather than just the number of operations? Does the National Audit Office have sufficient resources to carry out such outcome studies on effectiveness as well as efficiency?

Sir Peter Hordern: The Comptroller and Auditor General has frequently reported on the health service and, as the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) will bear out, the reports are concerned with the quality of service. The reports on the NHS from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health frequently produce tests of quality—the number of patients dealt with, and so on—so the reports from the National Audit Office are pretty good.

31. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission what plans there are to increase the resources of the National Audit Office.

Sir Peter Hordern: The National Audit Office corporate plan for 1993-94 to 1997-98, which was approved by the Commission in July 1992, shows an increase in gross cash resources from £44·6 million to £47·4 million over the next five years. The office also plans to increase its output over the period, mainly as a result of auditing a further 60 accounts following the creation of new next steps agencies.

Mr. Bruce: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer, but could he give the House some sign as to whether the Commission has looked into the latent studies that the National Audit Office could be making? In particular, could he look at the studies being done into defence spending, as I believe that a large number of capital projects approved in the past have not been good value for money?

Sir Peter Hordern: I am tempted to go down that road, but, as the House knows, the Public Accounts Commission is the paymaster of the National Audit Office and matters of content are for the Public Accounts Committee. However, as the Chairman of that Committee will bear out, the National Audit Office has frequently done good research and reports on defence studies, including those into capital projects by the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Skinner: I wonder whether the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee are also looking into Ministers' perks. Will they be examining, for instance, the Minister of Agriculture's pond, which cost the taxpayer about 4,700 quid? Then things moved on to the security fence. It seems to me that he is building up a farm. Are there any cattle involved, or is a horse-racing stud being built? I should like to know—and I should like to think that the Minister will be paying the bill.

Sir Peter Hordern: I am sure that the attention of the Comptroller and Auditor General will be drawn to what the hon. Gentleman has said. As to whether the Public Accounts Commission will be examining this matter among the many that it has to study already, I do not really know.

32. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission what proportion of the NAO's current budget is allocated to value-for-money audits.

Sir Peter Hordern: The National Audit Office allocated 56 per cent. of its budget for audit work for value-for-money activities in 1992-93.

Mr. Mitchell: Will consideration be given to more financing for the National Audit Office for value-for-money audits so that we can examine the Government's estimates of the cost of their legislation, such as the Sea Fish (Conservation) Bill? The estimated costs of that measure have more than doubled since it was introduced to the House.

Sir Peter Hordern: That may well be a matter for the Public Accounts Committee to investigate. I understand that the Comptroller and Auditor General is studying the hon. Gentleman's letter and that the hon. Gentleman will be receiving a reply quite shortly.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Financial Management

33. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Chairman of the Finance and Services Committee if he will make a statement on initiatives to improve the financial management of the services of the House.

Mr. Paul Channon (Chairman of the Finance and Services Committee): Initiatives include the start of a new bill-paying and financial information system and revision of the estimates to allocate costs and receipts to House Departments as a firm basis for financial targets and planning. The Finance and Services Committee will monitor and encourage this process, both when preparing annual estimates and in assessing particular services in consultation with the Director of Finance and Administration.

Mr. Banks: May I be the first to congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his new job, which is the latest in a long and glittering parliamentary career? As he may well be feeling a little nervous, I remind him that I have given him notice of my supplementary question—*[Interruption.]* I want to be kind. Has the right hon. Gentleman made any estimate of the cost to the House, in terms of financial effectiveness, of the delay in the construction of the Jubilee line extension? Until we know precisely what is going on, the construction of new offices over Westminster station is being delayed.

Mr. Channon: I am deeply grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his many kindnesses and courtesy to me and for giving me notice of his supplementary question. I can assure him that my Committee is working with the Director of Works, the architect and the staff to get all the approvals in place so that arrangements with London Underground can be concluded when a decision is taken.

There has been substantial delay, but I hope that the matter will be resolved shortly. If the project is postponed indefinitely, there will be serious implications for the House. That is something which I should think that the House would wish to consider.

Mr. Tracey: What powers does my right hon. Friend have over the House of Commons car park, where I see many cars which seem never to move from their position from day to day or from week to week? It would seem that some people are using the car park when they are not entitled to do so and that they are doing so without making any payment, thus depriving the City of Westminster of much valuable revenue.

Mr. Channon: I am glad to tell my hon. Friend that, so far as I know, I have no responsibility for that. Perhaps he will address his remarks to the Administration Committee, which I know is considering the matter. I suggest that he has a word with the Chairman, the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin).

Mrs. Dunwoody: Will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that he does not allow a vast amount of money to be spent on studies of the Refreshment Department which will meet with no one's approval and cost the taxpayer a considerable amount of cash?

Mr. Channon: I believe that the Refreshment Department is undertaking a study, with consultants, of a range of measures. I note the hon. Lady's views. No doubt the House will want to take a view about these matters in due course. I am sure that they are designed to save money rather than to spend more. We shall see what happens.

Buildings and Facilities

34. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, what financial provision is being made to extend the office facilities of hon. Members and their staff.

36. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, if he will make a statement on the long-term plans to improve the House's buildings and facilities.

Mr. A. J. Beith *(on behalf of the House of Commons Commission):* Following completion of the phase 1 building, preparation for the second phase, to provide offices for 210 Members and their staff, is well under way. Some £3 million has been allocated for design work in the next financial year. The tentative occupation date is 1998, but this is dependent on a decision being taken to proceed with the new underground station as part of the Jubilee line extension, to which reference has already been made. Meanwhile, as an interim measure, the House has leased additional space at 7 Millbank to provide offices for 100 Members and their staff, and £7·9 million is earmarked in 1993-94 for fitting-out work.

Mr. Bruce: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his reply. Does the Commission have a plan which might indicate to the House when, eventually, every Member of Parliament will have, next to the office, used by his or her staff, an office without a bar—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry—a bath. In the late 20th century, it is about time we caught up with office conditions such as were available in the late 19th century.

Mr. Beith: It is intended that completion of the new parliamentary building, which should occur by the end of this century, will enable every hon. Member who wants an individual office to have one.

Mr. Greenway: On the important point raised unintentionally by my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce), may I ask whether there will be cleansing facilities, such as baths and showers, connected with the new offices? Will the right hon. Gentleman also see whether proper cleansing provision can be made for members of the public who come to this House? *[Interruption.]* Showers, too, perhaps, though I am sure that members of the public, like Members, hardly need showers. Refreshment facilities might well be provided in Westminster Hall—why not?

Mr. Beith: Detailed arrangements for the rooms in the new parliamentary building are still being considered by the appropriate Committee. However the catering authorities of the House, in the course of the inquiries referred to a moment ago by the right hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon), are also considering facilities for members of the public.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: How many Members of this House have the use of more than one office?

Mr. Beith: I have no information to hand on that point, but if I can find any which might be helpful to the hon. Gentleman I will supply him with it.

Mr. Dowd: In assessing office space for Members, is the right hon. Gentleman taking into account the disposition of office space in this building? Various offices in the Palace have less need to be in this building than does the accommodation of hon. Members. Is any attempt being made to examine precisely which administrative offices could be moved to outlying buildings so that more hon. Members might be accommodated here?

Mr. Beith: Yes, and significant progress has been made in that respect with the opening of 1 Parliament street. Further progress will be made by way of the new parliamentary building, to which a number of offices now in this building are expected to be transferred, thereby enabling more Members to be accommodated here.

Mr. Steen: Can the right hon. Gentleman explain why hair-driers are being installed in the public lavatories in the Palace and other parliamentary buildings? Is that a proper use of public money and is there a demand for such a facility?

Mr. Beith: I was unaware of that development, but I will inquire into it.

Facilities for Children

35. **Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, if he will make a further statement on progress in seeking to provide children's facilities in the Palace of Westminster.

Mr. Beith: The Accommodation and Works Committee has now confirmed its earlier decision that no space for a child care facility can be found in the parliamentary estate before the completion of the phase 2 building. Negotiations are now proceeding to establish whether, and at what cost, the House could participate in a joint venture child care scheme being considered by a number of Whitehall Departments. I expect firm proposals to be put before the relevant authorities and the Commission shortly.

Mrs. Jackson: On our first day back, I suggested that the House should make a new year resolution to make this place more children-friendly. The answer that we have just heard—that there will be no place for children's facilities until the phase 2 building has been completed—is a great shame. Will the right hon. Gentleman please take steps, at the earliest opportunity, to meet the women Opposition Members who have been campaigning for such facilities, as well as other interested Members? While he is thinking about this, he should also look into the appalling situation that occurred last week, in which the half-term holiday fell, when my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) tried desperately simply to obtain facilities at a reduced rate to accommodate hon. Members' children who were visiting Westminster. It was not possible to obtain any reduced rate accommodation. I shall be grateful if the hon. Gentleman will look into that.

Mr. Beith: The half-term holidays for more northern counties are taking place this week, when my children will be visiting the House.

The hon. Lady's earlier question related in large part to the much more difficult issue of how the House could provide a crèche or nursery facilities. I was disappointed that the Accommodation and Works Committee was unable to identify suitable accommodation for that purpose in our present building. If the hon. Lady cares to discuss the matter with members of that Committee, she will be made aware of the pressure of other matters that they are having to consider. At least their decision will concentrate attention on the possibility of providing crèche facilities through a joint venture with Government Departments.

Sittings of the House

37. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make a statement on the implementation of the proposals of the Select Committee on Sittings of the House.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): As I reaffirmed at Business Question Time last Thursday, the prospect of progress with the Jopling proposals depends on our discussions through the usual channels.

Mr. Coombs: I recognise that progress has been made on the Jopling report, especially in the early notice given to hon. Members of recess dates, but is my right hon. Friend aware that there is considerable restlessness throughout the House at the general lack of action? Would it be asking too much for him to direct his best endeavours towards ensuring that, even though we may not have a debate on the subject during this Session because of other pressures, there is a statement of intent from the Government on what they propose to do?

Mr. Newton: I understand my hon. Friend's point. Even if I did not, I would have registered the not unexpected murmurs—or more than murmurs—of support for my hon. Friend from both sides of the House. I have no doubt that that support has also been registered by the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett).

We have made rather more informal progress towards the Jopling recommendations than my hon. Friend suggested. Of course, I want to make more formal progress, but it must be against the background of the long and, I believe, proper tradition in the House of seeking to make procedural changes with a degree of agreement among all parties. That remains an important ingredient, as I think that the right hon. Lady would agree.

Mrs. Beckett: I agree with the Lord President's remarks, but does he accept that whatever views may be held about the sitting hours of the House, a large number of Back Benchers on both sides have reservations about the Government's wish, and the proposal in the report, to have automatic timetabling of all Government legislation? Will the right hon. Gentleman make it known, especially to his colleagues, that it does nothing to ease those fears when the Government use our present guillotine procedures to curtail legislative scrutiny on the basis of a timetable which they then discard, as has happened both with the paving motion for the Maastricht legislation and with the Education Bill last week?

Mr. Newton: The right hon. Lady made a similar point about the Education Bill at Business Question Time last week. I do not want to elaborate further on what I said then. The fact is that a reasonable amount of time was allowed for that Bill. We have to plan its progress in relation to other measures and she can expect its remaining stages to come before the House fairly shortly.

On the right hon. Lady's other comments, as I said in the debate on the Jopling report last July, whatever phrase is used to describe it—whether automatic timetabling or programming—there is no doubt that the report was essentially a balanced package between, on the one hand, changes to improve and in many ways reduce the working hours of the House, against on the other hand a degree of greater certainty on the progress of Bills. It is difficult to understand how the one can proceed without the other.

Mr. Jopling: Will my right hon. Friend recognise two points? First, the Select Committee did not recommend the automatic timetabling of all Government Bills; it excluded constitutional Bills taken on the Floor of the House. Secondly, it produced a unanimous report almost exactly a year ago, which was endorsed by 85 per cent. of hon. Members in the debate in July, so the Committee has demonstrated admirable restraint and patience. There is now a growing impatience in the House for something to be done to implement its opinions, which I believe are broadly held to be balanced and in need of urgent attention.

Mr. Newton: I hope that I have already shown that I well understand the point that my right hon. Friend made in the latter part of his remarks. As to the first part, that important point needs to be understood. To put it in shorthand terms, nothing in the Jopling report would have applied to the European Communities (Amendment) Bill.

Statutory Instruments, &c

Madam Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to statutory instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

RATING AND VALUATION

That the draft Water Undertakings (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Scottish Power plc (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Scottish Nuclear Limited (Rateable Values) (Scotland)Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Scottish Hydro-Electric plc (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Oil Related and Petrochemical Plants (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Mines and Quarries (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Mercury Communications Ltd. (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Lochaber Power Company (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Industrial and Freight Transport (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Glasgow Underground (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Electricity Generators (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft British Telecommunications plc (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft British Railways Board (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft British Gas plc (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Water Undertakers (Rateable Values) (Amendment) Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

European Communities (Amendment) Bill

Considered in Committee [Progress, 4 February]

[MR. MICHAEL MORRIS *in the Chair*]

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Morris): Before we begin the debates on the Bill, I have a statement to make. Right hon. and hon. Members will see that the amendments and new clauses that appear for the first time on today's provisional selection list are identified by an asterisk. I hope that right hon. and hon. Members will find that innovation helpful. That procedure will continue in force until the end of this Committee stage, and will then be reviewed by the Chairmen's Panel.

3.31 pm

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): On a point of order, Mr. Morris. I refer to the statement made to the House last Monday by the Foreign Secretary, relating to the legal position on amendment No. 27, which was included in the group of amendments led by amendment No. 7, on the social fund.

Clearly, major issues are involved that need to detain the Committee. I put it to you, Mr. Morris, that they must be debated, and that there must be urgent consideration of the Foreign Secretary's remarks last week—which directly contradicted the comments made by the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, in Committee on 20January.

The legal implications also must be considered, and perhaps we ought to hear from the Law Officers—who were, after all, the architects of the Foreign Secretary's remarks last week.

The Committee faces a dilemma. Debate on the group of amendments that included amendment No. 27 has come and gone. We are therefore not in a position to consider either the legal points advanced by the Law Officers to the Foreign Secretary of the policy implications of the changed legal judgment in relation to the social chapter and social protocol.

My right hon. and hon. Friends and I believe that the Committee must be given an opportunity to debate those matters on two, almost separate, grounds. First, we must hear from the Law Officers—and they must be answerable to Parliament and not just to Ministers of the Crown for their observations—as to why the views that they expressed were so different from the comments of the Minister of State. Secondly, we need a debate in which to consider the policy implications of the new legal interpretation.

On Friday last week, the Prime Minister wrote to my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition, following a request for sight of the legal advice given to the Cabinet by the Law Officers. In his letter, the Prime Minister said:

> "With their agreement, Douglas Hurd set out in his statement in the House on 15 February the advice of the Law Officers. If the House of Commons wishes to have further advice on the meaning and effect of the Bill, Law Officers will be present when the Committee Stage of the Bill resumes."

I know that this pre-empts your authority to some extent, Mr. Morris, in as much as the Prime Minister appears to be offering the House the services of Law Officers so that they can answer questions that—as you know—we wish to put to them. On the other hand, the Prime Minister's offer was made in the context of a legal view of an amendment that has already been debated. That is one of the dilemmas that now face the House.

Serious questions of substance have arisen, concerning not merely amendment No. 27 but the treaty itself. On 20 January, the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, said:

> "The hon. Gentleman"—

he was addressing the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston)—

> "knows that the social protocol is an integral part of the treaty of Rome. We shall be party to that protocol even if the arrangements of the 11 which are attached to it do not apply to the United Kingdom."—[*Official Report*, 20 January 1993; Vol. 217, c. 445.]

That statement has now been reversed by what the Foreign Secretary told us last week, but it relates to the protocols, not just to one protocol. It seems to be a general policy statement relating to protocols as a whole—and that must have implications not just for the social protocol, but for other protocols attached to the Maastricht treaty.

In his statement last week, the Foreign Secretary said:

> "I must make it clear that there can be no question of the United Kingdom ratifying the treaty except through the normal parliamentary procedures."—[*Official Report*, 15 February 1993; Vol. 219, c. 28.]

We have here a contrast between a Minister who tells us that the protocols are part of the treaty, and a Law Officer who is apparently telling us that they are not. The Foreign Secretary, meanwhile, tells us that the principle to which he will adhere is the ratification of the treaty by Parliament. A massively important issue of principle regarding the legalities needs to be resolved, and I suggest to you, Mr. Morris, that that cannot possibly be done other than in a debate involving the Law Officers and enabling them to answer our questions.

I wish to raise some other issues, perhaps less significant than the one that I have just cited. First, there is the impact of the Law Officers' revision of opinion on other parts of the treaty that may have already been dealt with. Can the House feel confident that the legal views expressed by the Minister of State in our earlier debates are sound, or will a revision now take place across the board? I direct your attention specifically, Mr. Morris, to the debate on title I that took place at the beginning of the Committee stage. We relied on Foreign Office legal advice, which I understand came from Treasury solicitors.

I should also like to know whether there is a prospect of new amendments being tabled to that part of the treaty, or to the protocols relating to the social protocol, now that a debate on the issue—as distinct from a debate on the legalities—has come and gone. Many hon. Members are trying to find ways of tabling further amendments that would allow the House to make a specific judgment on certain aspects of the social protocol.

It would be outrageous if the House were bypassed in some way by a nitpicking legalistic exercise, simply to get around the political difficulties that face the Government when they are likely to be defeated on amendment No. 27. We require nothing short of a debate on the Law Officers' present views, which they refuse to put in the Library of the House and to give the House.

Therefore, I ask whether you will accept a motion, That the Chairman do report progress and ask leave to sit again.

The Attorney-General (Sir Nicholas Lyell): Further to that point of order, Mr. Morris.

The Chairman: There cannot be anything further to that point of order, because at this stage I have to consider the motion put before me, and before I rule on that I must comment on the policy implications mentioned by the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson).

I am grateful to the hon. Member who leads for the Opposition on the Committee. I listened to the Foreign Secretary's statement, and subsequently read it, with the greatest care. We are some way off a vote on amendment No. 27, and other developments may occur at any time, but at this juncture I am minded to take seriously the need for a further debate before the Committee votes on that amendment.

I have also listened to the hon. Member for Hamilton and to the feelings of the House. He has sought to move a motion that I report progress and ask leave to sit again. In weighing up my decision, may I remind the Committee that Standing Order No. 33 lays down that the debate shall be confined to the matter of the dilatory motion—in this case, the effect on ratification of the treaty of carrying amendment No 27, as set out in the Foreign Secretary's statement.

I therefore accept the motion that I report progress and ask leave to sit again, and I call Mr. George Robertson.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Chairman do report progress and ask leave to sit again.

Several Hon. Members: Further to that point of order, Mr. Morris.

The Chairman: Order. There cannot be anything further to that, in that this is a very important matter. I call Mr. George Robertson. [HON. MEMBERS: "Further to that point of order, Mr. Morris."] Order. As I accept that what I said may have come as a surprise to certain hon. Members, I shall repeat what is laid down by Standing Order No. 33, so that there will be no misunderstanding. We shall keep the debate firmly within the confines of the Standing Order—that is, to the matter of the dilatory motion, which in this case means the effect on ratification of the treaty of carrying amendment No. 27, as set out in the Foreign Secretary's statement.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): In the Foreign Secretary's speech, in column 30, he said that the amendment on the Committee of the Regions was similarly affected. That is the amendment that we were discussing before the Committee stopped. While I accept that it is vital that we consider the statement on amendment No. 27, the Committee was considering an amendment relating to the Committee of the Regions, and the Foreign Secretary said:

"Another amendment that can be cited in this respect is the one about membership of the Committee of the Regions."—[*Official Report*, 15 February 1993; Vol. 219, c. 30.]

Surely, as the Foreign Secretary mentioned that, and as the Committee is considering that amendment, the issue of its relevance to the Committee of the Regions could also be relevant. Is that not fair?

The Chairman: Order. When we return to the debate on cohesion and amendment No. 13, it will be in order to discuss that matter.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

The Chairman: Sir Russell Johnston.

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): On a point of order, Mr. Morris. What duration will the debate on the motion be entitled to?

The Chairman: That is not a matter for me at this point.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): On a point of order, Mr. Morris. One of the issues that we did not cover in earlier discussions about the legal consequences of amendment No. 27 was the way in which the doctrine of judicial review might be applied to a situation in which a majority of the House were in favour of ratification of a treaty, which could not legally be ratified by that method. I hope that you will allow discussion of that issue and even suggest to the Attorney-General that he might explain his wider position because, as you well know, there is a conspiracy in this House among the three Front Benches to get the treaty ratified by hook or by crook. It is quite possible that that could be done unlawfully. We might be heading for a confrontation between a sovereign Parliament and the judiciary. It would be interesting—even vital, I suggest—to hear my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General explain his position, as a Law Officer, in that dilemma.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

The Chairman: Does the hon. Gentleman want a reply?

Mr. Budgen: Yes.

The Chairman: I am most grateful for the hon. Gentleman's attention. Any speech that the hon. Gentleman makes should be related to the Foreign Secretary's statement.

3.45 pm

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Mon): A number of hon. Members wished to speak in the debate on Monday 4 February on the Committee of the Regions. Will you, Mr. Morris, make it perfectly clear to the House that whatever time is allocated to the debate on the motion will not be deducted from that allocated when the subject returns for debate?

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): On a point of order, Mr. Morris. May I first thank you for your announcement about asterisked amendments, contingent on a point of order that I raised some time ago? May I draw your attention to another matter that may considerably assist the Committee and those outside—the possibility of showing on future selection sheets the votes that are permissible immediately after the end of each group of amendments? We shall encounter complications later, and that would simplify things.

In his statement last week, the Foreign Secretary said that he wished

"to make a statement on the process of ratification of the Maastricht treaty."—[*Official Report*, 15 February 1993; Vol 219, c.27.]

Can we assume that his supplementary answers are also covered by the definition that you have just given?

The Chairman: On the hon. Gentleman's first point, I cannot anticipate votes or make a statement without consulting my colleagues on the Chairmen's Panel. On the second point, the Law Officers will have heard the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) asked how long we can debate the dilatory motion under Standing Order No. 33. I draw your attention, Mr. Morris, to the fact that, normally, reporting progress at the end of the day can be contested and debated, and the Government have to get a closure if necessary. Many such debates have taken two or three hours.

It is important to make it clear that this is not just a dilatory motion to debate progress on a Bill but is more important, as it is about what the Government had to say last week and the arguments that have taken place since. It is pretty clear that the Government are in a complete mess on the Maastricht Bill; the wheels have come off.

I argue that, like a motion for the Adjournment of the House, the motion should be debated for a full day. This matter affects everyone. The closure should not be accepted after two or three hours, because many hon. Members will want to speak.

The Government have thrown their Bill into turmoil. It has all the seeds of decadence of the years between 1977 and 1979, when devolution Bills were presented. You can smell it in the air. Almost every constitutional measure in recent years has finished up down a big black hole. We should debate the motion throughout the day, and the Government Whips should not contemplate closing it down after a short time.

The Chairman: I thank the hon. and experienced Member for his advice.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): On a point of order, Mr. Morris. As this debate is on amendment No. 27, could you clarify the fact that the amendment relates to clause 1(1) but not to clause 1(2), which deals with the European Parliamentary Elections Act 1978? It is vital to seek your guidance, because there might be an attempt to turn an important dilatory motion into a dilatory procedure with an effect on the passing of the whole Bill, on which many hon. Members want to make progress for exactly the reasons—this country's interests—outlined by the Foreign Secretary at the weekend.

The Chairman: I respectfully suggest that the hon. Gentleman reads amendment No. 27 again, as it will clarify the issue.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): On a point of order, Mr. Morris. While most hon. Members will welcome the opportunity to debate the dilatory motion, can you say whether a copy of the legal ruling on which the motion is based has been made available in the Vote Office? It would be especially helpful to us, together with guidance from the Law Officers of Scotland, where there might even be a different interpretation.

The Chairman: Not to my knowledge.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): This is a very important issue, Mr. Morris, and I am sure that the House is grateful for your ruling. However, as you said yourself, it has come as a surprise to many of us, who were not expecting it. You will know that, even on the most charitable interpretation, the Government's legal advice has been a little erratic recently. Has the Attorney-General also been taken by surprise by the ruling? It is important that he has had sufficient time to prepare his remarks in response to the debate.

The Chairman: No one knew of my ruling.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Hasty legal advice is bad legal advice. It is clear that the Attorney-General has not had time properly to prepare his speech. It is also clear that your ruling, Mr. Morris, is of considerable significance to the House and to the progress of the Bill as a whole, which is what many of us want.

In a Standing Committee, if something is important technically and practically, it is possible for the Committee to bring together a series of experts. In this case, we are dealing with an important point of legal interpretation, on which lawyers in this country and on the continent will have views which would be relevant to the Committee if the Committee is to make an informed decision. Is there any procedure whereby a Committee of the whole House could, like a Standing Committee, bring together relevant experts to ensure that, this time, we get it right?

The Chairman: There is no such procedure, but the Chair expects all hon. Members to be following the Bill —it has been a week since the Foreign Secretary made his statement.

Sir Russell Johnston *rose*——

The Chairman: Again?

Sir Russell Johnston: I am sorry if I did not explain myself clearly enough last time, Mr. Morris. All I want to know is whether the debate can continue until a closure is moved and you accept it, or, if a closure motion is not moved, until 10 pm or, perhaps, until tomorrow? Perhaps you could also explain why the motion is called a "dilatory" motion, because it so admirably describes the Government's position?

The Chairman: The answer is that the absolute time limit is 10 pm.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): On a point of order, Mr. Morris. The debate revolves around what, for many of us, are difficult legal points. The debate has been announced without preparation for those difficult legal points—*[Interruption.]* I am only trying to be fair. It seems that these matters will be determined in the end by the courts. There will be one opinion against another.

It is difficult to determine where the balance of the argument lies. A number of legal opinions have been available. Sir Anthony Lester, QC has given one opinion and Opposition Front-Bench Members have another. None of us has had the opportunity to see those legal judgments. You have accepted the dilatory motion, Mr. Morris, but could it not be debated later, when we have had time to prepare for it?

The Chairman: Mr. Robertson.

Mr. George Robertson: I am grateful to you, Mr. Morris, for your decision. It is right for the Committee and right for parliamentary democracy that we have this opportunity to consider the remarkable situation. The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has unprecedently repudiated, almost completely, all that

[Mr. George Robertson]

his right hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), the Minister of State, told the Committee on a previous occasion.

I know that I was not alone in being stunned a week ago to hear the Foreign Secretary tell the House that all that had gone before was wrong. He apologised to the House, it must be said, for that, but he entirely repudiated not only his own colleague in the Department, but the legal advice to which the Foreign and Commonwealth Office had held firm for the previous 10 months.

The Committee and the outside world must keep in mind the fact that amendment No. 27 was tabled on 20 May 1992—10 months ago. Amendment No. 27 was no ordinary amendment. It was not likely to be seen inside the portals of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as simply one of the 450 amendments that were tabled immediately after Second Reading.

The social protocol—the opt-out from the social chapter—was the jewel in the Prime Minister's crown when he came back from Maastricht, with the Tory tabloid newspapers crying, "Game, set and match." The social protocol was at the heart of the Government's strategy, at the heart of the treaty and at the heart of the Bill which was given a Second Reading in the House last year.

Amendment No. 27, which sought to exclude the whole social protocol from the Bill, must have commanded attention deep within the recesses of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, stretching from the solicitors who advised, through the clever officials who have given the Minister of State his speeches and advice, right up to the Foreign Secretary. The amendment must have transfixed them because of the impact that it might eventually have on the ratification of the treaty.

Last year, on the day following the date scheduled for the Danish referendum, the Committee was ready to deal with the Bill. The Committee was scheduled to have its first sitting last June. The Minister of State would have had his notes ready and available, and would have had his preparations made, as was true of many Opposition Members. It was believed then that progress on ratification of the Maastricht treaty might be quite swift.

There was no way in which the Minister of State, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and even the Foreign Secretary could have held the view that the issue could be postponed, put off, shovelled under the carpet and simply left to be worried about another day. They knew about amendment No. 27. They had worked things out. They must have pondered closely the implications of the amendment.

The Minister of State, who had by that stage tendered his resignation and entered one of the longest periods of notice ever given by a Minister, intervened repeatedly in the debate on the group of amendments led by amendment No. 7. The right hon. Gentleman was not speaking off the top of his head. His remarks cannot be dismissed as one of "Tristan's flights of fancy", as some would have had us believe over the past weekend.

The right hon. Gentleman, who is a Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, is a far cleverer man than that. As he sits on the Treasury Bench today, he gives the impression of a man of casual habit, relaxed and laid back—almost to the extreme, now that he has handed in his resignation—as he tries to pilot the Bill through the House. But there is nothing relaxed about him, as Baroness Thatcher found out to her cost.

When the right hon. Gentleman came to the House on 20 January, he knew what he was about. His speech had been worked out and planned in advance.

4 pm

Mr. Anderson: My hon. Friend has made a valuable point about the Minister's speech, which had been worked out in advance. Is it not clear that, if the legal advisers in the Foreign Office had had any doubt about the accuracy of the opinion they were giving, they would have consulted the Attorney-General's office in any event? Apart from the importance and implications of the subject, if there had been a mere scintilla of doubt within the minds of those advisers, they would certainly have sought a second opinion from the Attorney-General.

Mr. Robertson: My hon. Friend has two areas of expertise that allow him to make that cogent point. First, he is a lawyer, and no one knows lawyers like other lawyers, even if they always disagree with each other. Secondly, not only did my hon. Friend serve with me for a long time as a member of the Opposition Front-Bench foreign affairs team, but he worked in the Foreign Office as a diplomat. Therefore, he knows only too well how cautious officials are inside the Foreign Office.

My hon. Friend has rightly put his finger on the matter. If there had been the slightest doubt in the minds of advisers about the advice they were to give to the Minister of State, and had they felt any caution about the strength of their opinion, the first thing they would have done was go to the Attorney-General, so that his Department could clear up the matter.

When the Minister of State came to the House on 20 January, his remarks were based on authority, and all the backing that comes from the heavyweight authorities of the Foreign Office who service him and the country. In reply to my right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), the right hon. Gentleman said:

> "The hon. Gentleman knows that the social protocol is an integral part of the treaty of Rome. We shall be party to that protocol even if the arrangements of the 11, which are attached to it, do not apply to the United Kingdom."—[*Official Report*, 20 January 1993; Vol. 217, c. 445.]

The right hon. Gentleman repeated those remarks in the House and outside it. He even took to writing them in a letter to the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston), in the faint hope that, somehow, the Liberal Democrats might be dislodged from their consistent support for the social protocol and the social chapter. There was no mistake about the meaning of the Minister's remarks.

I do not know when the right hon. Gentleman was taken aside by his boss—I do not know whether that was a private meeting or a public humiliation. One can only guess at the theatre that now takes place inside the Conservative Government. One can only imagine what it was like for the right hon. Gentleman, who is so laid back that he does not even have a desk in his office at the Foreign Office. He just sits in an armchair and greets the assembled dignitaries who come before him.

One can only imagine how stunned the right hon. Gentleman must have been when, at some point in the week before last, he heard from the Foreign Secretary that everything he had said was wrong, that he had misled the

House with the advice he had offered, and that the Foreign Secretary, no less, was going to have to come to the House on 15 February to apologise on his behalf, because everything he had said before was wrong. I think that that is material for a book—a novel, one might say—and there is no better man to write it, with all those characters, unbelievable though they may be, than the Foreign Secretary himself.

Mr. Marlow: Is not the reality that, when my right hon. Friend the Minister of State made his statement, he was in political mode? He was trying to put the frighteners on the Opposition parties. He knows that they want to get the Bill through, as he does. He was trying to say that what they were doing was against the interests of the Bill. At the same time, the Government were trying to put the frighteners on their Members by totally misrepresenting the social protocol and saying that, if hon. Members voted for the amendment, they would have the social charter thrust down their throats. However, that did not work, and they had to do something else to get themselves off the hook, so they approached the Attorney-General for new legal advice.

Mr. Robertson: I was about to come to the real modus behind the operation but, as usual, the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) has arrived at the conclusion faster than others. That is why, I believe, he is destined to keep his position below the Gangway, probably for the rest of his political career.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Does not the hon. Gentleman think that there might have been a simpler motive? Might not the Government, perhaps along with some of the other parties, have been trying to give Parliament the impression that it was deciding the great business? That was all right as long as Parliament behaved itself, but the moment that it seemed that the clever, saintly Members of Parliament who were carrying out such important work were going to vote against the Government, they pulled the rug away. The Government said, "We are terribly sorry, but your opinions do not count." Is that not a far more simple and objective possibility than all the complex legal suggestions?

Mr. Robertson: One only had to read the heavyweight newspapers last week—even the tabloids broke through the fog of the Government's propaganda—to see precisely what the Government were about: faced with defeat, they produced yet another legal opinion. We know that.

Sometimes, when I consider the Conservative Government, an old Glaswegian phrase comes into my mind: one sandwich short of a picnic. The Government seem so clueless, incompetent and capable of mismanagement that they have taken that policy to an art form. Anyone intervening at any time in the debate is likely to produce a more reasonable explanation of what happened than the one that we heard from the Foreign Secretary last Monday.

Mr. Budgen: Will the hon. Gentleman tell the House how many lawyers—in-house, as it were—the Foreign Office have? When they have to interpret a treaty, do they normally go to the Attorney-General for advice? It seems that the Foreign Office already has a substantial legal staff, headed by the gentleman who is a knight, and therefore presumably a most distinguished lawyer.

It seems odd that the distinguished legal advice, which must have been given carefully—and, I dare say, been checked with other lawyers—should suddenly be swept aside as though the man offering it were an ignorant country attorney. The great, grand Attorney-General told him, "My good man, you have hardly been able to read either the treaty or the amendment properly—allow an educated person to give a better interpretation." It seems that the Government are either playing around with the House or being grossly insulting to the dignified and honourable lawyers of a great Department.

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman poses one of the most difficult questions when he asks me how many lawyers there are in the Foreign Office. The answer is, either too many or too few—I am not entirely certain. Last year, I was asked why I thought that the progress in Russia had not been as catastrophic as people had predicted. I suggested that it was perhaps because there were not enough economists there. At present, there seem to be too few or too many lawyers here.

I am impressed by the naivety of the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen), who seems to suggest that the fact that the head of the legal department of the Foreign Office has a knighthood gives him an automatic qualification. One has only to look at the dazzling row of medals among Conservative Members to see the naivety of his opinion. If the hon. Gentleman had voted differently in the paving debate, he might have had at least two knighthoods by now. He might even join Lord Tebbit in the other Chamber eventually.

I return to the issue, because, humorous as the chaos and confusion in the Government is, it is serious and devastating for the nature of parliamentary democracy. We are not talking about some simple issue. We are not dealing with a hair-splitting argument about some subsection of some clause of some ordinary Bill. We are talking about the constitution and future constitution of the United Kingdom, as will be enshrined in United Kingdom law.

That is where the joke ceases to be a joke, and descriptions such as that which Mr. Peter Riddell so prosaically wrote in *The Times* last week—of the Government appearing like a spiv business man with a sharp lawyer—encapsulate the nature of a Government who are sadly the Government with whom the people of the United Kingdom and all our constituents have to live and of whom they have to bear the consequences.

Mr. Skinner: Does my hon. Friend agree that probably the simple reason for the Government's decision and the statement made by the junior Foreign Office Minister, the right hon. Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), on 20 January was part and parcel of what many of us have experienced in the past 14 years? Our experience is of a Government imbued with arrogance and contempt not only for the British people but for Parliament and the House of Commons. Many times during the past 14 years, Ministers have trotted out smart answers such as were trotted out on 20 January. They always thought that they could obtain the requisite votes in the appropriate Lobby at the end of the day.

The past few months have been characterised by the Government not realising what is taking place. They did not realise that the Labour Opposition would vote solidly against them. They probably did not realise that perhaps

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the tin-pot Liberals would deliver this time. They probably thought that the Tory rebels did not have the guts to go into the Lobby on the social chapter.

I am absolutely convinced that the statement that was made that day was born of the arrogance of the Tory party and the Ministers who sit on the Front Bench. They thought that they could get away with it. Now they know that, on this occasion at least, they cannot.

Mr. Robertson: I do not often agree with everything that my hon. Friend says. That is one of the sad accidents of the broad churches that our political parties represent. However, I agree with him wholeheartedly that we have on display an example of the arrogance that has come from too many years in power and too many assumptions that a Minister can simply be walked into the Chamber one day to say one thing to Parliament and walked out the next day and replaced by yet another Minister saying precisely the opposite, as if we were all expected to believe that both statements commanded authority and truth.

Mr. Spearing: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government might have been saved a great deal of trouble? Everyone in the Committee will remember that we asked time and time again for the attendance of the Attorney-General when the Minister of State was in trouble over arguments of justiciability. Would it not have been better if the Attorney-General, who is after all a learned and knighted member of the Committee, had been in attendance on both 20 and 27 January, when he could have pulled the coat tails of his right hon. Friend? Does that not show that his opinion must have been asked only after those dates?

Mr. Robertson: I agree with my hon. Friend about our request for the Law Officers to be present in a previous debate. Perhaps a subject for later discussion will be whether that issue will be the subject of some other legal review, given the strength and vigour with which the statement was made. However, I have to say that I took the trouble to check on its legality, and was reasonably satisfied with what was said.

But I believe that my hon. Friend is wrong in assuming that, if the Attorney-General had been here for that previous debate, he would have pulled the coat tails of the right hon. Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), who has occasionally trailed his coat before.

The reality is that the right hon. Member for Watford spoke the truth at that time. The Attorney-General's view became apparent only later, when defeat on amendment No. 27 was staring the Government in the face. Not only have the Government the arrogance to push Ministers in to tell the Committee whatever it wants to hear, but Law Officers seem to be wheeled into the arena to offer contrary legal advice as and when it suits Ministers' political convenience. That is much more sinister.

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): Does my hon. Friend think that the Law Officers were consulted by the Foreign Office, and that they agreed with what the Foreign Office said on that day?

4.15 pm

Mr. Robertson: I cannot answer that. No doubt the Attorney-General will answer it. It is one of the questions that I pose to him in endorsing what my hon. Friend says. It is inconceivable that, had the Foreign Office lawyers and the Treasury solicitors who may have been advising them been in any doubt whatever, the Attorney-General's office would not have been called upon to offer advice. The Committee demands answers from the Attorney-General in this short debate as to whether any such advice was sought and whether advice on any issue relating to the treaty was offered to the Foreign Office.

Mr. Radice: If not, why not?

Mr. Robertson: I agree with my hon. Friend.

I have a series of questions for the Attorney-General, who the Prime Minister said would help the House, but before asking them, I should like to put a central point.

All along, the Prime Minister and Ministers have made it clear that it was for Parliament to ratify the Maastricht treaty. They put down hon. Members who called for a referendum. They argued against a referendum, and may do so again in Committee, on the basis that it was proper and right for Parliament to decide. They said that it was for Parliament to consider the great, complicated, detailed and serious matters of the treaty.

I agree that it is right to consider such matters in Parliament, because the treaty is not a fitting subject for a simple yes or no in a referendum. However, I disagree with the Government, in that I believe that Parliament should have the power to ratify the treaty and be allowed to make decisions. I agree with the parliamentary Labour party and the Labour conference that we should not use amendments to wreck the treaty, but on some areas of the treaty, Parliament can make decisions.

Last week, Parliament, people throughout the country and those on all sides of the political spectrum were stunned when the Government said that, although Parliament would decide and ratify the treaty, those areas of the treaty amended by Parliament would not damage or destroy the treaty's integrity, and the Government would simply use the royal prerogative to avoid any voice, vote or decision by Parliament.

We were told at the beginning of the whole process that only some parts of the treaty needed to be ratified and put into domestic law. Titles 2, 3 and 4 of the treaty require an amendment to European Community legislation. Title I is excluded, and is therefore ratified by the royal prerogative, and, as we heard in the debate on that title, it was justiciable in the international court. Title 5, on home affairs and justice, and title 6, on common, foreign and security policy, and the final provisions of the treaty are not before the Committee. They are justiciable in international law and do not require amendments to the European Communities Act 1972, as amended by the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1986.

The Attorney-General: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not wish to mislead the Committee. Therefore, let me remind him what my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said last week about ratification:

> "I must make it clear that there can be no question of the United Kingdom ratifying the treaty except through the normal parliamentary procedures. The House will have the opportunity on Third Reading, after detailed consideration of all aspects of the Bill, to decide whether the Bill should pass

> into law. The United Kingdom will not ratify the treaty unless the Bill is approved by Parliament."—[*Official Report*, 15 February 1993; Vol. 219, c. 28.]

I should like the hon. Gentleman to acknowledge that nothing could be clearer.

Mr. Robertson: Let me say——

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): On a point of order, Mr. Morris. We are here dealing with a Bill the long title of which says:

> "make provision consequential on the Treaty on European Union signed at Maastricht on 7th February 1992."

In the Bill, it is clear that the matters that are to be inserted —that is, to be dealt with in respect of the treaty of Rome and the Single European Act and the consolidated European treaties—include the protocols adopted at Maastricht on that date.

It must follow that, as the words "other than the social chapter" did not appear, we were intending to legislate not merely by prerogative but by legislation in respect of all those protocols. Therefore, I submit that the matters that we are dealing with now are matters that relate to the long title and, if we do not continue to deal with them under that long title, the Bill will have to be disbanded.

The Chairman: That is a matter for debate, not a matter for me.

Mr. Robertson: I agree with the Attorney-General in one respect. I do not intend to mislead the Committee. I wish that it were possible that Ministers, who have now varied their position 100 per cent., were in a position to say that all the time. The Attorney-General has read out part of a statement made by the Foreign Secretary last week. I shall read it again, so that the Committee is certain of the quote:

> "I must make it clear that there can be no question of the United Kingdom ratifying the treaty except through the normal parliamentary procedures."—[*Official Report*, 15 February 1993; Vol. 219, c. 28.]

He referred to "the treaty". Something happened between the day when the right hon. Member for Watford came along with one legal view, and the taking of the view that is being expressed today—that the word "treaty" does not include the protocol on social policies. That is the difference and the distinction, and that is why the Attorney-General will have to explain, in some painful detail, why the change took place and what were the reasons for it. It is not clear to the majority of hon. Members that the change need have taken place, because it was not there at the beginning of the process.

When the right hon. Member for Watford said:

> "the social protocol is an integral part of the treaty of Rome." —[*Official Report*, 20 January 1993; Vol. 217, c. 445.],

he was stating a fact, based on a legal opinion that he had secured. The Attorney-General is now telling us another fact, but it is completely the opposite.

The titles that I mentioned do not have to be ratified by means of legislation, and the House will never again touch titles 1, 5, 6 and 7 of the Maastricht treaty in the ratification and implementation process, because that will be done by royal prerogative. The social chapter was not included in that category at the beginning of the process, but, magically, with defeat facing the Government, it is now included. What the Attorney-General said is right, because he is a fine lawyer making a fine point, but there is a bigger issue at stake, and that is what he will have to answer. That is one of the crucial questions in the context of this debate.

Mr. Marlow: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): I would ask the hon. Gentleman to give way.

Mr. Robertson: I want to make progress, because I know that many other right hon. and hon. Members wish to catch your eye, Mr. Morris. However, I shall give way to the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan).

Mr. Maclennan: The Foreign Secretary said that there was

> "no question of the United Kingdom ratifying the treaty except through the normal parliamentary processes."—[*Official Report*, 15 February 1993; Vol. 219, c. 28.]

Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the right hon. Gentleman was merely stating the obvious and begging the question whether normal parliamentary processes under section 6(2) of the European Assembly Elections Act 1978 required the protocol to be enacted?

Mr. Robertson: Begging the question is one of the polite or legal ways that can be used to describe what is going on. Fine legal distinctions will not blind the House of Commons or the country to the way in which the Government are dealing with this exercise.

Mr. Marlow: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robertson: No. I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman. I know that his intervention would be valuable and helpful, as ever, but I shall resist the temptation to allow him to intervene.

I have a series of questions for the Attorney-General. I believe that they are required to be asked before the Committee can move on to further consideration of the Bill. My first question drives to the heart of this debate: why is the House of Commons not getting a copy of the Attorney-General's legal opinion? It has been made available to Ministers, and it is being made available inside Government. It must have been offered as an olive branch to the head of the legal department of the Foreign Office. It was the basis of a volte-face by the Foreign Secretary last Monday.

The Attorney-General is, of course, a Minister in the Government. He advises the Government, but he is a Minister of the Crown. He must, by virtue of his office, advise the House of Commons as well. As we are dealing with matters that concern the authority of the House of Commons, why are we to be denied the formal advice that was offered by the Attorney-General?

Is the protocol part of the treaty? We do not want semantics, and we do not want questions begged. We merely want to know whether the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Watford, was right when he spoke on 20 January. Is the protocol concerned with the social policy part of the treaty? Are all the other 20-odd protocols to the Maastricht treaty part of the treaty, or are they not? If they are not, why are they not? They certainly were part of it when we began our consideration of the Bill in Committee.

I ask the Attorney-General to tell us when it was that the view of the Minister of State was formally decided. When did the doubts creep in, and why? Who was involved

[Mr. Robertson]

in making the decision that led to the abandonment of the Garel-Jones legal opinion and left the Minister of State hanging out to dry?

If titles I, V, VI, and VII were not needed and were specifically exempted from the necessity to be in domestic law for the United Kingdom, why is it that we have discovered only now that the social protocol is not on the list? Is it the Government's position that the protocol can be ratified? I use "ratified" in the context of the treaty of the European Communities. If the protocol can be ratified by royal prerogative, can our vote on amendment No. 27 be bypassed by a royal or executive push of the pen?

Will the Attorney-General tell us about the significance of the European Assembly Elections Act 1978, in which there is a specific instruction to government that no treaty can be ratified other than through Parliament if any extension of the powers of the European Parliament is involved.

There is no doubt whatsoever in anybody's mind that the powers of the European Parliament have been extended as a consequence of the Maastricht treaty—not just by the introduction of the novel negative assent procedures in respect of the Parliament's co-decision powers with the Council of Ministers, but also by way of its power to establish committees of inquiry, its right to be petitioned by citizens of the union, the right to appoint an independent ombudsman to intervene in matters relating to Parliament, and the power to request the Commission to make legislative proposals. These are the extended powers for the European Parliament laid down in the Maastricht treaty.

4.30 pm

Where is the legality of this treaty, and its ratification, in circumstances in which the extension of these powers impacts clearly upon the agreement attached to the social protocol? In the social protocol, the Twelve agree that the 11 may go ahead and make laws, involving the European Parliament, that will apply only to the 11 countries.

If amendment No. 27 is passed and social protocol is not included in United Kingdom legislation, and if, as the Foreign Secretary has stated, that does not create a problem, where precisely will it be justiciable? It will be part of a treaty. Either it will be part of the Maastricht treaty, or it is an independent, free-standing treaty. Would the Attorney-General care to tell us where it will be justiciable?

Can the Attorney-General tell the Committee what will happen if a member of the public, in this country or elsewhere in the European Communities, decides to take the United Kingdom to the European Court of Justice for being in breach of the overall laws that apply to the European Communities? Has anybody inside the Government sought the opinion of the European Court of Justice or any of its justices, with regard to the rather novel and surprising view that the Government have taken?

I should like now to put to the Attorney-General a question that he may be least qualified to answer but in respect of which he might care to tug on the coat tails of his right hon. Friend the Member for Watford, the Minister of State. What will happen to the elaborately stitched-together political package represented by the Maastricht treaty now that we are presented with this amazing new legal revelation?

We cannot ignore the politics of the Maastricht treaty. If the United Kingdom alone is to say that it does not have to ratify the social protocol, as its purpose can be achieved by some sleight of hand, where precisely is the package itself placed? After all, the Minister of State, during the debate on 20 January, made much of that very point.

I should like to ask the Attorney-General what the implications are for title I of the treaty and for the legal advice—the advice that title I need not be included in the United Kingdom legislation, because it is redundant and, indeed, dangerous—that we received from the Foreign Office at that time. Can Members of Parliament, can the country, rely on any legal opinion that has been produced up to now? Is the Attorney-General satisfied that it stands four-square?

The answers to the questions that I have just put to the Attorney-General might have been self-evident had the Committee been paid the courtesy of being allowed to see the document that the Attorney-General presented to the Cabinet—if it was ever presented to the Cabinet at all. These are questions to which answers are demanded, inside and outside the House. They need to be answered before the House of Commons can proceed with the Committee stage of the Bill.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Mr. Morris. Would it be helpful if the Attorney-General were to respond now to the remarks and very pointed questions of my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson): is it not true that, as we are in Committee, the Attorney-General is able to speak again? Speaking now will not prevent him from replying later to further points raised in the debate.

I want to seek your advice, Mr. Morris. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton said, we are at a great disadvantage because we have not seen the legal advice given to the Minister of State, or the legal advice on which the Foreign Secretary based his opinions——

The Chairman: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that I take only one point of order at a time. His first question was whether it would be in order for the Attorney-General to speak next. It is for hon. Members to rise in their places if they wish to speak. I look around and I try to keep a balance. It is a matter for individual Members.

Mr. Marlow: Further to that point of order, Mr. Morris. It may be that, when the Attorney-General speaks, everything that he says will be clear and non-controversial. On the other hand, he may leave some questions unanswered. If so, hon. Members may wish to participate further in the debate. I presume that the Government's business managers, in seeking the closure, will take into account the fact that, if the Attorney-General does not speak now, a significant number of right hon. and hon. Members may want to contribute later.

The Chairman: I cannot speak for the Government's business managers.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I want to put a few important and significant questions to the Attorney-General. There is no doubt that we owe you, Mr. Morris, a great debt for enabling us to debate an issue that is extremely important for democracy and for the way we handle these matters.

What the Foreign Secretary said in his statement did not come as a surprise to many of us who have been following the proceedings with great care. He made two specific points. First, he said that, even if we voted in favour of amendment No. 27, that would not require the United Kingdom to apply the social chapter. That was not news to us. We had made that point time and again while Cabinet and other Ministers said quite the opposite on television and in newspapers.

As this is an important issue, no doubt the Attorney-General is aware that I appeared on two television programmes and offered £2,000 to anyone in Britain who could substantiate the views of Cabinet Ministers. One of the most worrying factors of this business is that Ministers, who we expect to maintain the integrity and standards of life in Britain, have time and again deliberately spoken a pack of nonsense on television and in the newspapers, in the full knowledge that it was nonsense. We knew, simply by reading the amendment, that what they said could not happen.

The second point raised by the Foreign Secetary was the complicated question of whether or not we could ratify the treaty. The basic issue of whether the social chapter would apply to Britain is obvious to any person who could pass the 11-plus. I hope that the Attorney-General will tell us that, as a result of such unfortunate occurrences, Ministers will make a special endeavour to tell the truth. I do not say that lightly; I have been a Member of Parliament for 28 years.

Many of the problems relating to European affairs, and much of the misunderstanding and party division, could be overcome if on basic issues we had the standard of integrity to which we are entitled. Of course, I am not referring to issues of judgment, which obviously divide hon. Members.

Mr. Winnick: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman agrees that it is unfortunate that the Attorney-General has chosen not to respond immediately. Was not the initial advice given by the Minister of State just a try-on because the Government were terrified that they would lose the vote on amendment No. 27? They were prepared to use any pressure, especially on Liberal Democrat Members —it would not have worked on Labour Members—to avoid that.

Does the hon. Gentleman recall that the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) said, after listening to the Minister, that he would reflect carefully on the possibility that accepting amendment No. 27 would mean that the treaty could not be ratified? It is clear that the advice given to the House was misleading, with the intention of putting pressure on the Liberal Democrats.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I do not want to comment. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman has thought about that aspect very carefully, because he has attended these debates with amazing regularity—and I respect him for that. It is possible that his observations are true. On the complex issue of ratification, I can only tell my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General that, when I was leaving this Chamber after the speech by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, a senior and respected Member on these Benches who has held high office in the Conservative party—and whom all of us know and greatly respect—replied, when I asked for his view, "It's a load of codswallop." And that was from someone who is enthusiastic about the Community.

We must try to establish why the opinion in question was given in the way it was. There is an urgent need for further clarification of the statement. I want answers to three specific questions. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made a clear and helpful statement to the House indicating that, on further reflection, the Government now consider—in the light of the Law Officers' comment—that amendment No. 27 would not have the result either of obliging the United Kingdom to implement the social chapter or of preventing the Government from ratifying the treaty. As the protocol did not oblige the United Kingdom to do anything, it seemed that the inclusion or exclusion of the protocol had no great relevance.

However, it has now emerged in a letter that I received from my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary only a few minutes before this debate that, astonishingly, even if the Committee votes for amendment No. 27 and takes the protocol out of British law, the protocol will nevertheless be in the treaty that the Government sign. Is my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General aware of any precedent or occasion in the history of the Houses of Parliament when the Government signed a treaty when Parliament had specifically voted that one part of it should be taken out? In my 28 years in the House I have never known an occasion when the Government have said, "We are going to sign a treaty with that part in it," when that part was something that Parliament had decided to exclude.

Mr. Marlow: The Government will probably say that is precisely what they intend to do. They might be entitled to do that, but politically and constitutionally such action would be a massive abuse of the House.

Sir Teddy Taylor: It is the abuse of the House that upsets me. All right hon. and hon. Members—including the few here who are greatly in favour of the EEC—know the score. They know that what we do does not matter at all. What offends me most is that the Government were going along with the pretence. We were not to have a referendum and the people were not to decide—instead, all the clever, talented, able, thoughtful and compassionate Members of Parliament were to decide for them. We were supposed to do that with great distinction—by attending debates and thinking carefully about every line of every amendment and every clause.

The Government, along with others, tried to give the impression that that was the score—that Members of Parliament would decide—but the first time right hon. and hon. Members decided to chuck out part of the treaty, they suddenly found that was not to be the case. Senior Members of Parliament have openly stated that our views on the protocol are utterly irrelevant. It is unfortunate that the Government should try to give the impression that our views counted.

Mr. Maclennan: Will the hon. Gentleman at least exclude from his criticisms and from the suggestion that we do not care about the procedures on the social protocol my right hon. and hon. Friends who have supported ratification? It goes to the heart of our criticism of the Government's position that they have in effect deprived not only the Committee but the European Community of effective ratification by seeking to withdraw this matter from our attention.

4.45 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor: I have read legal opinions which make that view clear. I am not competent to make a judgment, but I am sure that the hon. Gentleman has studied that issue carefully and expresses that view after proper consideration. I hope that it will receive the attention that it merits. Even if the legal opinion obtained is correct, and even if the Government are legally off their heads and doing something hopelessly illegal, I hope that it will be remembered that the Liberal party's real strength lies in the times when it fought for people's rights—when it said that people counted.

The same can be said of the Labour party. I used to see Labour supporters in Glasgow marching down the streets, fighting for the rights of people and saying, "We will not allow people's rights to be taken away." Now, we are part of a gigantic conspiracy in which we are taking away people's rights and trying to fool them by saying that clever Members of Parliament will decide.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding) *indicated dissent.*

Sir Teddy Taylor: My hon. Friend smiles and shakes his head, but he knows that that is the case. He heard my right hon. Friend the Minister say that. He knows that it was a load of codswallop, aimed at trying to give the impression that clever people were doing something that they had no power to do.

When has that happened before? If the protocol is in the treaty but not in European law, will the Government be empowered to make contributions in respect of the one twelfth share of administrative expenses required by the protocol? In answering questions after his statement, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary stated clearly that that would be done from the Consolidated Fund under the powers of the treaty of Rome. My understanding is that the treaty of Rome gives authority for payments to be made only if they are Community obligations.

As the agreement to which the protocol relates is one of 11 member states only, there is no way in which payments can be regarded as a Community obligation. That is why the section of the protocol stating that Britain will pay a one-twelfth share was required. If I am not right, why on earth is it in the protocol that Britain will pay a one twelfth share of administrative costs?

No doubt one of my right hon. or hon. Friends who is a Euro-enthusiast will say, "There's not much money in it at all. The EC spends £250 million on dumping or destroying food, so what does it matter? It is only a small point." In fact, it is a terribly important legal point, and financially it might turn out to be substantial. A large section of Commission officers will no doubt be concerned with the social chapter. There will obviously be many conferences and seminars to which friends and EC enthusiasts will be invited. They will have a great time and stay in expensive hotels. That will all cost money. They will want to initiate studies and inquiries which will also cost a good deal of money. They will want to employ some of the most expensive people to undertake those inquiries.

Many of the organisations in the United Kingdom which speak enthusiastically about every aspect of the EC are making a fortune out of undertaking inquiries and studies for the EC. It would help our democracy if as well as declaring political contributions every trade association —including the big ones in high buildings—had to declare in their annual reports how much money they receive from the EC for undertaking studies, inquiries and commissions. Whether it is a small or large amount, the key question is why it was included in the protocol that Britain would pay a one-twelfth share of the social chapter. There must have been a reason. If we are to chuck that out of United Kingdom law, on what basis can we make those payments?

Mr. Skinner: This has just crossed my mind—perhaps the hon. Gentleman will give me his view on it. As it seems that we are not to be involved—although we are not sure yet—in one twelfth of the issue, what will happen to British MEPs? Should they be paid the same as the other MEPs, in view of the fact that they will not be involved in as much work as those of other countries? I throw that out as a possibility. I know that they could make the money up by fact-finding tours, gravy trains and junkets or whatever, but someone might argue that they cannot get as much.

Sir Teddy Taylor: The hon. Gentleman, whom I much respect, is introducing some of the EEC arguments that I am sure would be relevant to this debate. I appreciate his point. If I had the power, I would feel the same way. I find it strange that British MEPs are supporting and voting for a social chapter that the Government say is terrible. I read the other day that the Conservative party is to allow some of the cushy parts of Conservative Central Office to be used by MEPs who are deliberately undermining Government policy by supporting the social chapter and its application in Britain. That, however, is a separate issue.

Mr. Marlow: As my hon. Friend has rightly said, there is the question of paying towards the administrative costs, but the protocol also says that the institutions of the Community can be used. When we are talking about administrative costs, are they part of the administrative costs of those institutions, or is it intended that those institutions should be used without being costed? If it is not intended that they should be used without being costed, how can one be taken from the other?

If the House votes for amendment No. 27, will it not be saying in effect that the institutions of the Community should not be used for the purpose of the social protocol? Would it not benefit the United Kingdom if that were the case?

Sir Teddy Taylor: We shall know in time whether the amount will simply be added to the EC budget, or whether there will be a separate fund, with any expenses being met from moneys relating to other EC decisions. However, whether the amount for the administrative costs can be quantified, or whether we shall simply have to pay a lump sum within the budget, we need a straight answer to one crucial question. On what authority will we pay that amount if it is not a Community obligation, which it is not —it is an agreement between the 11—and if Britain has not passed the protocol requiring us to pay our share of one twelfth?

Perhaps the Attorney-General is going to produce a smart answer. Perhaps he is going to say, "Don't worry; the obligation to pay is still there." Why, then, was it put in the protocol? If it is not needed—if it is just one of those petty cash slips which have to be signed—what was the point of including it? That is an important question.

Mr. Skinner: It has just crossed my mind that British Members of Parliament are allowed to go to Brussels once a year, paid for by the taxpayer. [HON. MEMBERS: "Strasbourg."] Strasbourg, is it? I have never been, but I know one or two hon. Members have already taken up the option. Would it be in order for Members of Parliament to go trotting off to Strasbourg to discuss the social chapter that Britain has not accepted? Or would that be ultra vires? Would they have to pay the money back? I foresee complications.

Sir Teddy Taylor: The hon. Gentleman is entitled to go to Strasbourg—or, indeed, Brussels—at the taxpayer's expense. He can travel first class if he wants, and stay at a top-class hotel, for any purpose. It is almost like the Taylor plan for agriculture, under which farmers would be given a cheque and told that they could do whatever they liked. It would save us a great deal of money if we offered every farmer a cheque for £127,000 on 1 January, to be presented at village halls. For the avoidance of doubt, let me tell the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) that he can travel to Brussels or Strasbourg at any time, summer or winter. He can travel first class and he need not do anything at all.

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): And the longer he stays, the better.

Sir Teddy Taylor: That is unfair. This is a serious issue: we are talking about people's money. My hon. Friend should be ashamed of himself if he thinks that this is funny. He should consider the tragedy of poor people today, of all the things that Britain needs and of the £250 million that is spent every week on dumping, destroying and storing foodstuffs. I feel terrible when I encounter the problems of the homeless.

The Chairman: Order. I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would address the Chair.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I am sorry, Mr. Morris. I am afraid that my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) put me off. It is not right to treat these issues as laughing matters; they are deadly serious, and important to the people of Britain.

Finally, I should like specific advice about the issue of urgency. Like every other hon. Member, Mr. Morris, I appreciate your decision to allow us to discuss the matter today, rather than later. It was made clear—or appeared to be made clear—that what the Foreign Secretary said did not relate only to amendment No. 27; in his answers to questions, he plainly stated that it also related to the Committee of the Regions. Will the Attorney-General specify the areas of decision making, apart from amendment No. 27, to which we must pay the same attention?

That is important, because we shall shortly have to vote on the amendment relating to the Committee of the Regions. The Foreign Secretary has told us to treat the Committee of the Regions in the same way as amendment No. 27. We want to know why we should treat it in the same way; we also want to know which areas of decision making should lead us to say, "There is no need to bother about this amendment, because it will have no effect on ratification."

I may be wrong, but I have a horrible feeling that what was said about amendment No. 27 might apply to everything, and that the Government could say, "We are going to ratify the treaty, come what may." I have a horrible feeling—perhaps some of the lawyers will confirm it—that that applies not just to amendment No. 27 and the Committee of the Regions, the two matters on which the Government appear likely to be defeated, but that wider considerations may be involved. It would be unthinkable for the Committee to proceed to a vote without clarification of the issue. I accept that the Foreign Secretary's remarks appear to be correct in relation to the principal amendment that we may have to consider, but we must think carefully about what the issues really are.

I am glad to have been called early to ask my three specific questions. Let me tell the Attorney-General in all sincerity that he is a man whom we respect: he is one of the decent, straight guys. I do not think that I have ever heard him make one of those clever political remarks which attempt to distort figures or turn the facts on their heads. He must be well aware that something very nasty has happened on this occasion.

We know that the Attorney-General's views will not be published. I am sorry about that, as I am sure that they would be interesting and clearly expressed. We also know that the alleged legal opinions given to the Minister of State will not be published. That is unfortunate, but I think that the Minister will be aware that something nasty has happened in Parliament—something that is not consistent with the standards of integrity that many of us, irrespective of our views, expect of a Conservative Government.

The right way for the Minister to proceed—I am sure that he will do so because he is a straight guy—is not to try to make any "bashing" points, saying that Labour is silly or that the Liberals are worse, but to answer specific questions fairly and precisely, so that we know the facts. That is the way to make progress in the European debate —by telling people the truth, rather than trying to distort the issues. The powers of the House of Commons, which some people consider important, should be clarified and not confused by what appear to be political purposes.

Mr. Maclennan: The House is indebted to you for your decision, Mr. Morris. It has enabled the debate to take place.

I say at the outset that it is a matter for regret that the Attorney-General has not tabled the advice on which the Government base their construction of amendment No.27. Is it desirable for the opinions of legal advisers to the Foreign Office—on which the right hon. Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, based his earlier and entirely contradictory advice—not to be made public? Admittedly, it is not common practice to publish the advice of legal advisers to Departments of state—although, interestingly, they are a source of public international law. After the passage of time, they are cited in courts as indicative of the legal position of the time. The Committee would be assisted by the publication of earlier advice as well as that of the Attorney-General.

Mr. Spearing: Does the hon. Gentleman think it not only suspicious but undesirable, and to some extent unparliamentary, for the Attorney-General not to seek to follow the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), and tell us directly what that advice was and whether it was parallel with the advice that he gave the Prime Minister?

[Mr. Spearing]

His failure to do so and the difficulties in which that places hon. Members on both sides of the Committee is unparliamentary and wrong. We hope that the Chair will take notice of that when a closure is moved, so that some of us may speak again if we have spoken before the Attorney-General.

Mr. Maclennan: I regret that the Attorney-General did not publish his advice and that he did not place it in the Library before the beginning of today's debate. It is unsatisfactory that the debate should proceed on the basis of the Foreign Secretary's interpretation of that advice and that many hon. Members may speak before the Attorney-General chooses to intervene to explain his position, which presumably is that on which the Government rest their case. As he has not chosen to do so, it is best if I repeat the questions that my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) asked the Prime Minister—[HON. MEMBERS: "We want answers."] I want specific answers to specific questions, and that is why I am speaking.

5 pm

My right hon. Friend questioned the Prime Minister on the basis of advice that he sought and was given by Mr. Anthony Lester QC, a distinguished authority on international public law and European law, who has taken the view that, if the social protocol is to be given international effect—as a treaty to which this country has subscribed as a high contracting party—it must be ratified by the proper procedures of our constitution. That is explicit in article R of the Maastricht treaty and is a necessary implication of the language in section 6(2) of the European Assembly Elections Act 1978, which introduced a provision to limit the powers of the Executive in this country—the Crown—to ratify any treaty, including

> "any international agreement and any protocol or annexe to a treaty."

Section 6(1) provides that any increase in the powers of the European Assembly, such as a treaty, cannot be ratified unless it has been approved by an Act of Parliament. The Foreign Secretary did not deal with that issue when he made his famous statement.

Mr. Marlow: I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's argument, and I read about Mr. Lester's advice in the newspapers. How does the hon. Gentleman react to clause 1(2) of the Bill, which states:

> "For the purposes of section 6 of the European Parliamentary Elections Act 1978 (approval of treaties increasing Parliament's powers) the Treaty on European union signed at Maastricht on 7th February 1992 is approved"?

Mr. Maclennan: I shall deal with that, but it is best if I do so in a logical order.

From reading section 6(1) and (2) of the European Assembly Elections Act 1978, it is clear that the protocol requires explicit enactment or approval of the House, since the protocol and the annex to it enlarge the power of the European Parliament. It follows that we cannot accept, as an adequate expression of the law, the Foreign Secretary's statement that it would be desirable, but not strictly necessary, to ratify the social protocol by the approval of the House.

The Foreign Secretary seemed to focus on the incorporation of the protocol into our domestic law, but has the protocol been properly ratified as a treaty to which we have signed our names? That question affects not only our domestic law, but whether the social protocol will come into effect. Likewise, that treaty is required to be approved by the procedures of section 6(1) and (2) of the 1978 Act. If it has not been so approved by the House, the country will have failed to ratify the treaty and the protocol will lack effectiveness. The treaty will fail for lack of ratification.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I have followed the hon. Gentleman as well as I am able; I am non-legally minded. May I ask him one simple question? Since to ordinary men and women the situation is obtuse and seems to show that all sorts of decisions are being taken without any elected Member being fully aware of the implications, would it not be much simpler if the Attorney-General told us now exactly what he has advised the Government, so that we can proceed with a much more informed debate?

Mr. Maclennan: I realise that the hon. Lady would prefer to hear the Attorney-General rather than listen to me.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Never.

Mr. Maclennan: I have already made plain my view that it would have been preferable for the Attorney-General to speak, but he has not done so and I must therefore continue with my questions to him. I hope that the hon. Lady shares an interest in the questions and the answers that we shall get.

Mrs. Dunwoody: I should like to hear the answers.

Mr. Maclennan: The hon. Lady must possess herself in patience, as I am trying to do.

The Attorney-General must say how he seeks to distinguish between the necessary requirements of ratification for the Maastricht treaty and for the social protocol. Why is he prepared to tell the House and the Government that it is necessary for the House to approve specified parts of the treaty in clause 1(1) and (2) of the Bill, but that it is not necessary—although it would be desirable for reasons of incorporation—to enact the social protocol?

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): I am listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman. I wish that he was right, but I do not think that he has a good case. I believe that the provisions of clause 1(2) are conclusive. Does he accept that, if he is to prove his argument, he will have to extend it not merely to the social protocol but to titles I, V, VI and VII and to every other part of the treaty that is not incorporated into domestic law by virtue of the Bill?

Mr. Maclennan: I hope that I shall deal with that aspect to the hon. Member's satisfaction before I conclude. It also relates to the remarks made by the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow).

I suggest to the Government that it is important to ensure that we enact the social protocol properly, to enable it to come into effect, even if it is merely to achieve the Government's objective of keeping Britain out of the operation of that protocol—although that may seem paradoxical. If the agreement is to have effect, we must enact it according to our procedures.

A non-legal argument is that United Kingdom electors have a substantial interest in the manner in which the European Parliament exercises the increased powers provided by the social protocol. On those grounds, we are entitled to some say in the matter—and not only on grounds of legal necessity.

As I understand it, the hon. Member for Northampton, North was saying that clause 1(2) would approve the entire treaty for the purposes of the 1978 Act, including the social protocol, that, since amendment No. 27 relates to clause 1(1) the House will be enacting the social protocol as required and that, in effect, those who drafted amendment No. 27—the official Opposition—failed to recognise that it might have been better to amend clause 1(2) to achieve the total deletion of the social protocol. There is a clear answer to the point. Clause 1(2) refers only to the treaty and not to the protocol. The social protocol, unlike other protocols to the treaty, expressly states:

"this Protocol and the said Agreement are without prejudice to the provision of the Treaty.

That emphasises its independent character as an international agreement for the purposes of section 6 of the 1978 Act. It must therefore be separately and explicitly approved by the House.

Clause 1(1), in defining the Community treaties in section 1(2) of the European Communities Act 1972, refers to

"Titles II, III, and IV of the Treaty on European Union . . . together with the other provisions of the Treaty so far as they relate to those Titles, and the Protocols adopted at Maastricht . . . and annexed to the Treaty establishing the European Community."

The use of the word "and" is important to emphasise, because it shows that, for the purposes of clause 1(1), the protocols are required as additional to the treaty rather than being an integral part of it.

The reference in clause 1(2) to the treaty of European union must be construed in the light of the provisions of the Bill as a whole, including clause 1(1). Even without amendment No. 27, there is an obvious difference between the reference to the treaty and the protocol in clause 1(1) and the reference to the treaty alone in clause 1(2). As Mr. Anthony Lester put it in his advice to us, clause 1(1) refers to bacon and eggs; clause 1(2) refers to bacon.

If amendment No. 27 is passed, the fact that clause 1(1) will deliberately exclude the social protocol will make it even more difficult to argue that the reference to the treaty in clause 1(2) is to be construed to include the social protocol.

As I understand the Government's approach, it involves inserting in clause 1(2) after the reference to the treaty the words

"and the Protocols adopted at Maastricht on that date and annexed to the Treaty establishing the European Community."

It is our legal view that unless those words are added by amendment, it will leave great uncertainty about whether Britain has validly ratified the social protocol, and hence whether the protocol can lawfully take effect.

I put it to the Attorney-General that that view is a weighty one and if it remains unanswered—it has not been answered so far in the exchanges between my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil and the Prime Minister—it will be open to others to seek judicial review and clarification in the European Court of Justice. It is beholden upon the Government to avoid that uncertainty by ensuring that there is no doubt that Britain has properly ratified the social protocol if it wishes to avoid the inevitable political uncertainties that will flow from pursuance of that legal action in our courts or the courts of Brussels.

5.15 pm

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): As a non-lawyer, I have followed with care today's debate and the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

It has always been clear to me that the Bill is designed not to ratify the Maastricht treaty but to bring into force in United Kingdom domestic law those aspects of the treaty agreed at Maastricht that require such legal implementation. The treaty has therefore always embodied two categories of measure—those that traditionally it has been the right of the Executive, using the prerogative powers of the Crown, to decide on behalf of the nation, and those that have required legislative embodiment in the corpus of our domestic law.

Our debates have covered both categories of measure. The Government have rightly decided that the Committee should be given an opportunity to debate matters that essentially have been of an intergovernmental nature, such as co-operation on foreign policy, even though, strictly speaking, it was not necessary to debate or vote on them before the Government could ratify the treaty.

Mr. Geoffrey Hoon (Ashfield): Is the hon. Gentleman saying, therefore, that it would not be appropriate for the Committee to debate and subsequently vote on the question whether the United Kingdom should be bound by the social chapter?

Mr. Lidington: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's intervention. I made no such assertion. The Committee has every right to express a view to the Government on matters that require amendment to our domestic law and on matters for which the Government are using prerogative powers. I would oppose the Committee declaring itself in favour of the social chapter by some amendment other than amendment No. 27, but if it did so, the Government would have to take account of that view.

Having listened to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary last week and having read the *Official Report* and subsequent accounts published outside the Committee, I asked myself three questions. The first was whether amendment No. 27 would embody the social chapter in British law and bind Britain by the obligations that the other 11 voluntarily undertook. I am clear in my own mind—I believe that this view is generally accepted—that amendment No. 27, if passed, would not have that effect.

Mr. Cash: My hon. Friend is traversing a matter of some legal interest, and is asserting that he understands it. No doubt I am not alone in thinking that the confusion that has been generated would only be compounded by his remarks. The social chapter says that the "High Contracting Parties . . . herein" agree. The 12 member states, including the United Kingdom, are parties to the inclusion of the social chapter in the treaty. It must therefore follow that it is part of the treaty. Any attempt

[Mr. Cash]

to exclude it would automatically go outside the treaty, and what my hon. Friend has said would conflict with the provisions of clause 1, which says:

"the protocols adopted at Maastricht on that date"—

7 February 1992—

"and annexed to the Treaty establishing the European Community"

shall be regarded as part of British domestic law. I have much difficulty in understanding how my hon. Friend can argue that the amendment could exclude Britain from the social chapter.

Mr. Lidington: As always, I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) for his remarks. He has identified the next question with which I was about to deal, but I pray in aid the Library's research paper, which was compiled and published a month before my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary's statement last week. The paper makes clear the Library's view that

"if an amendment made provision in the European Communities Act 1972 for the UK to take full part in the Protocol on social policy at a later date, then the Government would still have the legislative underpinning necessary for the ratification of the Treaty in its present form."

I do not accept—and I do not believe that those on the Opposition Front Bench accept—that passing amendment No. 27 would compel the United Kingdom to accept the social chapter.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford touched on the second question that I ask myself, which is whether the refusal of the British Parliament to pass the Bill as drafted, and our acceptance of amendment No. 27, would prevent the other 11 countries from going ahead with the social protocol, and would therefore bring down the entire edifice. That is certainly an outcome that my hon. Friends the Members for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) and for Stafford and others wish devoutly to secure.

I await with interest the comments of my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General but it seems implausible to me, as a non-lawyer, for us to argue that paragraph 1 of the protocol on social policy would cease to have any effect if the British Parliament tried to exclude it from our domestic law.

Paragraph 1 is the agreement that the Community authorises the 11 member states who wish to use the social protocol to do so. If we were to assert that the acceptance of amendment No. 27 would make it impossible for the other 11 to proceed, the same principle would presumably have to apply to each of the other protocols which refer to groups of countries of individual countries but not the United Kingdom, to the protocol that safeguards the provision in the Irish constitution which covers the abortion law and to that which gives the Danes the right to stop Germans buying second homes in their territory.

I stress that I speak as a non-lawyer, but it seems that amendment No. 27, in as far as it deletes paragraph 1 of the protocol on social policy, would not prevent the Government from ratifying the treaty and, through their prerogative powers, enabling such ratification to authorise the other countries to proceed within the bounds of the treaty as negotiated.

Another question that I ask myself is whether, therefore, the amendment means anything. If the amendment does not compel Britain to accept the social chapter and does not prevent the other 11 from proceeding, what is the point of the Government continuing to object to it?

Mr. Marlow: My hon. Friend is comparing the amendment with the Danish protocol, which stops the Germans buying second homes. Is not one of the main *differences the fact* that it allows the use of Community resources and institutions? If the House says no, through amendment No. 27, would it be proper for the Government to proceed and to allow Community resources and institutions to be used among the other 11 countries?

Mr. Lidington: The issue of Community resources is the one aspect about which I remain troubled, and I look forward to hearing what my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General has to say. The expenditure involved and alluded to in paragraph 2 of the protocol on social policy concerns the administrative expenses of the institutions themselves, for whose costs there is already a subvention in our membership of the Community in any case.

Before my hon. Friend's intervention, I was wondering whether there is any reason why Conservative Members should continue to oppose amendment No. 27. I believe that there is, and it was mentioned by the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon) in a question to my right hon. Friend the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary last week: how might the courts—the British courts or the European Court of Justice—seek to interpret the legislation if amendment No. 27 were passed? The wording of the protocol, especially paragraph 2, explicitly excludes the United Kingdom from the remit of the social chapter.

In the light of a recent judgment, the House of Lords is willing to examine Parliament's intentions, and the European Court of Justice has traditionally tried to discern the intentions of legislators before it reaches a decision. In view of those facts, it is only common sense for my colleagues who believe that the social chapter would gravely damage this country's prosperity to ensure that the British exclusion from the social chapter is made clear in any legislation.

For that reason, I shall certainly oppose amendment No. 27, and I hope that members of my party who share my view of the social chapter will also act accordingly.

Mr. Spearing: On a point of order, Mr. Lofthouse. May I consult you on an issue relating to the conduct of the Committee and, in particular, the circumstances of its conclusion on a motion to report progress? I understand that it is entirely within the Attorney-General's discretion to decide when to speak. However, some of us have difficulty in deciding whether to speak before him. Clearly, we have come prepared to comment on the opinion that he has given to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, but we are not able to do so until he endorses it.

The debate is due to finish at 10 pm, whether or not there is a closure motion. If the Attorney-General speaks towards the end of the debate and the Government move a closure motion near 10 pm, there will be little opportunity for further comment after the Attorney-General has spoken. Therefore, I submit that there will be no proper debate, as there should be in the tradition and working of the parliamentary democracy of this place.

Will you please confirm, Mr. Lofthouse, that what I have said is certainly a possibility? If so, the Attorney-General is condemned by his own silence.

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): The hon. Gentleman will know that if the Attorney-General attempts to catch my eye, I shall consider calling him. It is not up to the Chair to decide when the Attorney-General or any other hon. Members rise to be called.

Mr. Winnick: Further to that point of order, Mr. Lofthouse. We are grateful for your advice. There are, of course, times when a Minister is not especially welcome. However, you may not be aware that then Mr. Morris was in the Chair, my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) asked the Attorney-General a number of pointed questions. We are at a tremendous disadvantage. I accept what you said about an hon. Member trying to catch your eye, but the Attorney-General knows that we are at a disadvantage because of the conflicting advice. He has been asked some important questions. It is extremely discourteous of the Attorney-General, who is not normally discourteous—I am not sure whether he wants praise from an Opposition Member——

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. I have listened to the monitor earlier and I heard the Chairman of Ways and Means deal with the question, with which I shall deal again. If the Attorney-General wishes to catch my eye, he will no doubt attempt to do so. It is not for the Chair to decide when the Attorney-General wishes to speak.

Mr. Marlow: Further to that point of order, Mr. Lofthouse. You are a decent chap and a distinguished servant of the House. You know how important this debate is, so you agree, I am sure, that it will be a rum old do, as the debate is largely about what the Attorney-General is going to say, if the debate is not allowed to continue for some considerable period after he has spoken.

The First Deputy Chairman: Whom the hon. Gentleman agrees with is not a matter for me.

5.30 pm

Mr. Spearing: Further to that point of order, Mr. Lofthouse. If there was any asperity in my submission a few moments ago, it was not in respect of the Chair, but in respect of the behaviour of the Government, who are accountable here. You said correctly—we all know this—that when the Attorney-General wishes to rise to catch your eye is within his initiative. However, will you cofirm—this is a point of absolute order—that if the Attorney-General chose to rise between 7 pm and 8 pm, or even a little later, the time available for subsequent speakers—this would probably rule out those who had already spoken—would be limited by the fact that the debate would continue either until 10 pm, when it would conclude automatically, or until there was a closure motion just before 10 pm? The opportunity for any hon. Member, including my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris), to wind up the debate would therefore be limited. All I ask is that you confirm that that is the potential procedural position.

The First Deputy Chairman: The hon. Gentleman's points are all speculative. I shall repeat what I have said, after which I shall take no further points of order on the subject. Whether or not the Attorney-General wishes to catch my eye is a matter for him.

Mr. Donald Anderson: I quote:

> "Confusion now hath made his masterpiece!"

The hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) made a number of interesting points. He said that amendment No. 27 either means something or means nothing; either it would have an effect or it would not have an effect; even if it were to mean something and to have an effect, no one knows what that meaning would be. In any event, the hon. Gentleman will support the Government. That gives some idea of the fog of obfuscation hanging over our debate.

With the best will in the world, the Committee is not at its best when it tries to come to a conclusions on what may be a narrow technical and legal point. There is a whole host of witnesses—"a cloud of witnesses", as the old book would say, and the word "cloud" may be relevant in the context. Sir Anthony Lester has said one thing and the gentleman who writes research notes for the Library has said another. Mr. Alan Watkins, the lawyer manqué of the *Observer*, has written a third thing. Everyone gives us the benefit of his views. What is the correct view?

It is important to get the matter right because there could be profound consequences if the Government proceeded incorrectly. It could take a long time to determine matters if they were put before the courts, either our own courts by way of judicial review, or before the European Court of Justice. We know from the Sunday trading legislation saga, for example, how long the learned judges of the European Court can take to reach a decision. The average time for preliminary judgments is close to 12 months. We could have a rather interesting time while we waited for the tablets to be brought down from Luxembourg.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that there are many legal judgments on the matter. Will he confirm that the House has already shown, by an overwhelming majority of 244, its support for the Bill? Does he also agree that the House would probably not endorse the social chapter if there were a vote on it? That is what the public want to know. We should make progress. Many factors affecting this country's interests are at stake in the period in which we continue the debate.

Mr. Anderson: I acknowledge that this is a matter of considerable importance to our country, not least in terms of the confidence that comes from inward investment and the way in which we are perceived by our partners in the Community. Clearly that is part of the problem caused by the Government having tried to play it both ways. They have said that they want to be in, but not quite in. They give some sops to Members such as the hon. Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor), who is a believer in Europe, yet they give other sops to the more nationalist wing of their party. The problem is entirely of the Government's making.

If the Government had said that they would introduce a Bill simply to enact the Maastricht treaty, there would have been no difficulties—certainly not from my party, because there was a clear vote in favour of that at our party conference. But the Government have not introduced a Bill to enact the Maastricht treaty. The Bill seeks to enact the deformation of the treaty, which the Conservatives have brought about by the dual opt-out. The way in which

[Mr. Anderson]

the Government are trying to play it, being partly in and partly out, is the reason behind the legal, technical and profoundly practical and political problems we now face.

Sir Russell Johnston: Will the hon. Gentleman make the point to the hon. Member for Esher that, if we had a genuinely open a free vote in Committee on the social chapter, it would also be carried?

Mr. Anderson: That is a matter of opinion. It could well be. The nearest that the Committee has been able to come to devising an amendment that shows support for the social chapter is amendment No. 27. If the Government, for technical reasons, choose to ignore that, they do so at their peril. They display the same arrogance that they have shown over the years. It would be profoundly anti-democratic for them to ignore the view of the Committee if it were, as I believe that it would be, in support of amendment No. 27.

What is the history of the saga? You will recall, Mr. Lofthouse, that on 20 January, the Minister of State came to the Committee with the authorised version of the Government's then view about the legal effect of agreeing to amendment No. 27. On 15 February, the Foreign Secretary came to the House with the revised standard version of what the legal effect would be. Why was there a profound and total contradiction between the two interpretations of the effect? How can two Government views be at such variance?

Mr. Winnick: I thank my hon. Friend, who is courteous as always, for giving way. Does he agree that it is extremely frustrating that the debate is taking place now, without the Attorney-General having been involved? My hon. Friend asks questions about the conflict of the advice given to the Committee by the Minister of State with the advice given by the Foreign Secretary last Monday. We pressed the Attorney-General to come to the House, which he has done now, but he refuses to speak until the wind-up. Would it not have been a far more informative debate if the Attorney-General had spoken at the earliest opportunity after the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson)? On the basis of what the right hon. and learned Gentleman has said, we could then have debated the matter.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) pointed out, we shall not be able to do that because, once the right hon. and learned Gentleman has spoken, the chance of debate, except for interventions in his speech, will be slight. That is discourteous. Whatever pressure the Whips have put on the Attorney-General, it is unfortunate that he has not risen and responded to the wishes of hon. Members of all parties. I include those who are in favour of the treaty as well as those who are opposed to it.

Mr. Anderson: I agree wholeheartedly. I believe that, on reflection, the Attorney-General would probably concur that it would have been for the convenience of the Committee if, immediately following the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, he had responded to the questions raised and given the Committee the benefit of his views. A debate could then have taken place in response to that speech and the platform that the right hon. and learned Gentleman had provided. Under the procedures of the Committee and with its leave, he could then have responded to the debate as it progressed. Alas, the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), though proper, is no longer relevant because the Attorney-General has chosen, for ill reasons, not to speak.

It is worth examining what happened between 20 January and 15 February. It is clear that the Government had adequate time to work out their response to amendment No. 27 and what the legal effect of passing it would be. After all, that amendment was tabled in the summer of 1992, and the Foreign Office legal advisers had plenty of time between then and January to examine it carefully.

It is important to compare the weight of the opinion of the Foreign Office legal advisers with that of the Attorney-General. Those advisers are a cadre of specialist lawyers who spend their time dealing simply with matters of this nature. Those who resort to law know that it is always appropriate to go to specialist chambers for advice and to someone who is an acknowledged expert in a particular subject of learning. If one wishes to seek advice on the import of the meaning of a particular treaty or the relevance of the implementation of a particular clause relating to that treaty, who better to go to than those Foreign Office legal advisers, whose job and whose expertise relate to such matters? After all, they spend all their time looking at the construction of treaties.

Mr. Budgen: Before Foreign Office lawyers give their advice to Ministers debating a treaty and a Bill such as this, would it not be their practice to give a copy of that advice to Ministers and the Attorney-General, in the knowledge that the Attorney-General might be called to the House and required to justify the opinion, which was, essentially, the opinion of those lawyers?

Mr. Anderson: The hon. Gentleman has raised an important point. In the generality of cases, Foreign Office legal advisers, because of their expertise, would not need to go outside for advice. However, given the certainty that this subject would be debated in Committee and its profound implications, it is likely that the advice that they tendered, or a draft form of it, would have been conveyed to the Attorney-General for concurrence. My first question, therefore, is whether, between May 1992, when amendment No. 27 was tabled, and 20 January, when the Minister of State made his statement, Foreign Office legal advisers consulted the Attorney-General. If so, did he concur with the opinion that they then gave?

5.45 pm

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): I am listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman, and he seems to be making a subversive argument. I am not a lawyer, but the law of our country is based on the fact that specialist lawyers, however expert, may argue their case as well as they can, but, at the end of the day, it is subject to the opinion of people who may not be specialists in that point of law but who, by reason of their office—whether they be in the Court of Appeal, a judge or the Attorney-General—make the appropriate decision. It seems that the hon. Gentleman is arguing that, if one has a sufficiently "expert" expert, no other authority is required.

Mr. Anderson: I was not putting the Attorney-General in the role of a judge of appeal or whatever. The expertise in this subject is more likely to be found among Foreign Office legal advisers than in the office of the Attorney-General. He has a generality of expertise and is not necessarily expert in this matter. With all respect to the Attorney-General, the fact that the strongly held view of Foreign Office legal advisers, decided upon after a long period of reflection and conveyed to the Committee on 20 January, was then undermined so quickly raises important questions.

The traditional role of the Attorney-General is to act as someone who is part in and part out of the Government. Although he is elected, he is there to give independent advice to the Government. It is a bad thing for the country if the impression is given, rightly or wrongly, that the Attorney-General has entered into a partisan role. He does not wear a partisan hat when he makes a great many decisions, and part of the strength, historically, of the office of the Attorney-General has been that, to some extent, it is above the party fray.

The speed with which the opinion offered on 20 January was changed raises questions. One hon. Member referred to the smell surounding this issue. I would not use that argument, because I have great respect for the Attorney-General, but he must accept that the issue raises questions that must be answered. I hope that the right hon. and learned Gentleman will give those answers when he speaks. For example, was the Attorney-General consulted prior to 20 January and did he concur with the opinion that was delivered to the Minister of State?

My next question, which follows chronologically, is in what circumstances was the question that had been answered so confidently by the Minister of State referred to the right hon. and learned Gentleman's office for a further opinion? Further, did he go outside his office to seek opinion or did he do so in-house, from the lawyers around him? They are probably not particularly expert in this matter. It is important for the health of our government that the lid is taken off these matters and that they are clarified.

I have already mentioned the problem that faces the Committee. We are all experts in our own way, but many in the Committee are not lawyers. We are being invited to address a profound legal question. For that reason, I raised the serious point—I was not seeking to be humerous —about the difference beteween our proceedings and those of a Standing Committee. When such a matter arises before a Standing Committee, one has the opportunity to call senior lawyers who can give the Committee the benefit of their views. We might even call Mr. Alan Watkins, who holds strong views on this matter. At the moment, we are unprepared when we give the Committee the benefit of our views. We can only probe the chronology of events in respect of the Attorney-General.

I have posed the key questions that I wished to raise, but there is another question, in part a legal one, but with practical implications, that needs to be considered. It is possible that the Government could have ratified many titles in the Bill through the Executive process and the royal prerogative. Whatever the constitutional experts may say about the technical and legal possibility of doing that, I believe that the political implications of such an act should be paramount. The Government should never lightly ignore the expressed views of Parliament.

Leaving aside what the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) said about the construction of the European Assembly Elections Act 1978, and the way in which the Government are constrained by statute in respect of the protocol, even if it had technically and legally been open to them to use the royal prerogative in this case, they would have been wrong to do so, given the immense political implications of this matter. It would be an arrogant Government who ignored the clearly expressed views of Parliament.

I echo what my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton said. It would not only have been wrong, practically, to ignore the will of Parliament, but it would fly in the face of the whole argument that the Prime Minister has used, rightly in my view, against a referendum relating to the Bill. The right hon. Gentleman has relied on parliamentary sovereignty. The final decision must rest with the House. One cannot clasp the doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty to one's chest as it suits, and reject it when it does not, as in this case. That is another cogent argument why the Government should listen to the voice of Parliament.

I was considering the way in which the law can be brought into disrepute when those who cannot find a convenient opinion look for another one elsewhere that may be a little more convenient. In doing so I was reminded of a jingle in relation to that great Welshman and Liberal, Lloyd-George—I hope that it will not be said of the Government:

"Count not my legal opinion as fine
I meant it as I meant it at the time."

Mr. Cash: We have now reached a stage in the Lewis Carroll saga when we should recall "Through the Looking Glass", when Humpty Dumpty spoke of words meaning what he chose them to mean:

> "'The question is,' said Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be master—that's all.'"

That summarises our position. There are conflicting opinions and words, but the whip, the bludgeon, the heavy instrument is driving the Bill through, irrespective of its impact on people, or their opinions or wishes. Therefore, to paraphrase Lewis Carroll, we are now in a position where opinions appear to mean what we or others choose them to mean, and the question is, when is Maastricht to be passed—that is all.

We have now moved beyond the purely technical questions on the social chapter, and the issue before the Committee is much greater. That is why it is the subject of the motion. The relationship between hon. Members and Parliament is rapidly moving into a black hole. If amendment No. 27 had been passed—or if it is passed in future—that will amount to Parliament instructing the Executive that the provision of the social chapter must be excluded from the treaty.

If that were done, irrespective of the argument about whether one may or may not ratify a treaty by prerogative, we should have to ask what the position would be if Parliament's views, arguments, determinations and will were to be overridden after Parliament had decided to exclude the social chapter. If that happened, we would face a new sort of constitutional problem.

Let us apply the same criteria to any other treaty. Let us suppose that Parliament decided that it did not want a treaty and passed a resolution to that effect. Anyone could immediately see that overriding that decision would constitute a defiance of Parliament. We would rapidly return to a position not far from that of James II, when he turned to the people of this country and said that he had

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got the loot from Louis XIV and did not need Parliament, so Parliament could get lost. He said that he would suspend or dispense with the law, according to his prerogative. I am not sure whether the Government have realised the dangerous hole in their flank that they have opened up by their handling of the short-term issue of the social chapter.

At the beginning of our procedings on the Bill, I raised the issue of the Ponsonby rule. I wanted to elicit from the Minister of State the exact relationship between the prerogative and Parliament in relation to the Bill. I did so because, as I said then, only certain titles of the treaty—titles II, III and IV—together with the other provisions of the treaty so far as they relate to those titles, and all the protocols adopted at Maastricht on 7 February 1992, would be incorporated in the consolidated treaty arrangements of the European Community legislation. The Bill was a proposed addition to that.

Therefore, I wanted to know the position in respect of those other provisions—the so-called invisible and illusory pillars that the Government have erected through their prerogative. I wanted to know the position under the Ponsonby rule if, within 21 days of the treaty and the protocols being laid before the House, we legislated and then discovered that some parts of the provisions that were being dealt with by prerogative required express parliamentary approval.

The argument cuts both ways. If Parliament were to pass an amendment that overrode the use of prerogative, Parliament's views would not only have to be accepted, but would be imposed on the Executive by Parliament. A Government who decided to take such a step would be unwise. If amendment No. 27 excluding the social chapter were passed, we would be in exactly the same position as we are in respect of the prerogative provisions contained in the so-called pillars. There is a profound difference between the provisions presently contained in clause 1(1) (k) of the Bill and the position towards which we are moving. I do not believe that the Government have entirely understood how dangerous the position has become.

That problem has now been compounded by the competing legal opinions. As has been rightly said, it hardly matters which opinion is chosen. Some might wish to defer to the opinion of the Attorney-General and any external advisers that he had chosen. Others—I make no secret of the fact that I am included in the group—have been working out how best to address such important matters, and have been obtaining opinions and seeking advice from external sources.

About two or three weks ago in Committee—before the latest saga—I said that I had been involved in matters relating to the Constitution Act 1982, when I advised Quebec. That issue eventually made its way to the Supreme Court in Canada, and the views that some of us —myself included—had proposed were accepted by the Supreme Court. The Foreign Office advice that had been relied upon during the proceedings was found wanting. I could give many other such examples.

It is by no means unusual to discover that Foreign Office legal advice is wrong. We now have the authority of no less a person than the Foreign Secretary. He had to say that the advice was wrong. On 15 February, he said:

> "I regret that the legal advice then given to the House was not correct . . . we intend to press forward with the Bill so that we can ratify the treaty which I, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer negotiated at Maastricht, and which won an overwhelming majority on Second Reading in this House."—[*Official Report*, 15 February 1993; Vol 219, c.28.]

In the light of what I said earlier, it would be a massive defiance of the House if amendment No. 27 were passed and proceedings on the Bill continued despite the view that had been expressed by the whole Committee.

I do not take issue with the fact that there was, in numerical terms, an overwhelming majority on Second Reading; but the Prime Minister pointed out in an interview in a newspaper article about our scuttling out of the exchange rate mechanism, for good reasons, when it got hot that, when circumstances change, one has to change with them. Of course, circumstances have changed.

The "overwhelming" majority on Second Reading was obtained on the basis of the political landscape at that point. The circumstances have changed with the Danish referendum results, so the consideration that we should apply to amendments such as amendment No. 27 has changed.

In a letter to *The Times* which appeared in that paper only on Saturday, the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) seemed to know that there would be an intergovernmental conference shortly, at which amendments would be passed to the Maastricht treaty. The hon. Gentleman will correct me if I am wrong.

6 pm

Mr. George Robertson: The amendments to which I referred were to the EC treaties. They are consequential on the outcome of the Edinburgh summit. A decision was made to create a European investment fund. That requires a change to the statutes of the European investment bank, an institution which already exists. That requires a formal treaty amendment. The week before last, the European Parliament gave formal agreement for an intergovernmental conference to take place this week or next week. It is a technical change: it requires no huge fuss or constitutional chaos. I used it as an example in my letter to *The Times* to show that precisely the same thing could happen with the social chapter. But the amendments will be not to the Maastricht treaty but to the full EC treaties.

Mr. Cash: The letter left some uncertainty, and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for explaining the context in which he wrote it. However, it would be possible, although highly improbable, that an intergovernmental conference such as those convened at great expense at Birmingham and elsewhere would provide an opportunity to come together to resolve some of the other questions which have arisen, and dispatch the Maastricht treaty with it.

If the 12 Governments are to convene, they might just as well recognise the point which I made to my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary shortly after he made his statement. We have reached a position in which the treaty should be consigned to the dustbin of history, because the circumstances have so changed, and the likelihood that the treaty, in not only its present but its implemented form, would create turmoil throughout Europe, has grown so much that it should be dealt a final blow in a statesmanlike manner by the statesmen of Europe.

Mr. Michael Spicer (Worcestershire, South): Is not the position which the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) described in his intervention even worse than the one which my hon. Friend describes? My hon. Friend was describing the possibility of an amendment to the treaty of Maastricht, which has not yet been ratified. The hon. Member for Hamilton was talking about a mini-Maastricht behind our backs. The position is worse than my hon. Friend outlines to us.

Mr. Cash: My hon. Friend the Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer) would be the first to discover something even worse than I described. I am grateful to him for showing how the appalling nature of the whole exercise has been compounded.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) made a point about the administrative costs which will arise under the social chapter as it now stands. As I said in a point of order, and in an intervention in the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington), the 12 high contracting parties have agreed to the protocol on social policy. To some extent, some people have missed the wood for the trees. Certainly, 11 member states are the participants in the agreement within that protocol, but the same 12 high contracting parties which have entered into the treaty have agreed to the social protocol. They have decided that it will not apply to the United Kingdom.

However, from the long title of the Bill and its scope, and to the provisions of clause 1, it is perfectly clear that for the treaty to have effect it must do so as it has been put together by the 12 high contracting parties throughout. The ingredients of the agreement between the 11 parties is another, but important, question. Therefore, whatever advice my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General might have received, there is a large question mark over whether the original advice should now be discounted.

Even if we knocked out provisions of a treaty to which the 12 member states had signed up, even though any protocol contained an exclusion—for example, for the United Kingdom on economic and monetary union—they are all part and parcel of one grand but dreadful treaty. One may say that the treaty is awesome in the powers that it will transfer away from the House.

The consequences of leaving out any one part of the treaty, if amendment No. 27 was passed, would be that the Committee had instructed the Executive not to include those provisions. Therefore, I would argue that we would immediately run into the problem of whether it was possible partially to ratify a treaty. One cannot partially ratify a treaty.

I am not referring to the agreement between the 11 member states. I am referring to the fact that the 12 high contracting parties have agreed to the protocol. On that argument, it would wreck the treaty to pass an amendment such as amendment No. 27. Of course, I should be delighted about that. On that point alone, a large question mark remains.

There is also an issue of administrative costs. If we excluded the social protocol by amendment No. 27, presumably the administrative costs would fall to be paid by virtue of the prerogative. According to the Government, that is the only basis upon which they would then be in a position to proceed. I should like to have the following question answered: would the Public Accounts Committee be able to inquire into the manner in which the administrative costs were levied? Would such matters be within the remit of the Select Committee on the Treasury?

As some hon. Members have said, there are profound questions as to whether such matters would be Community obligations. If they were pushed through by prerogative alone, they would be not Community obligations but impositions on the British people. There would be a charge upon them through tax as a contribution towards the cost. The fundamental principle applying to the constitutional arrangements of the United Kingdom is that no such provision may be made without the full authority of Parliament. It cannot be done by prerogative.

I spoke earlier about James II. In this instance the Executive would tell Parliament what to do, and if we passed an amendment, Parliament would be defied if the Executive went ahead with the prerogative. That touches another of the central planks of the constitutional relationship between Executive, Parliament and people, that a charge or tax may not be imposed upon the people without their consent and the approval of their Parliament.

As I said when speaking about overriding the prerogative, only an unwise and imprudent Government would imagine that this matter is not central to the running of our affairs. In the past, some people thought that nothing much depended on that, but Pym and Hampden and others—not little Englanders but people who stood up for our citizens when they were faced with absolutism and authoritarianism—understood the principles upon which we then operated and on which we must still operate if we wish to sustain freedom of speech and the principles of free government. I wonder whether the Government appreciate the extent to which their arguments have dislodged that plank.

The explanatory memorandum says that the Bill will have no direct financial effect in the United Kingdom. Some hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), have spoken about administrative costs and the prerogative. There is also the issue if title I, article F3, which deals explicitly with whether it would be right to use the prerogative. That title is not included in section 1(1) (k) of the Bill. Title I, article F3 would give the Community the power to provide resources to achieve the objectives of the "Union" without any apparent reference to Parliament. I shall not labour that point as it has already been made but it is important to add it to the discussion about the administrative costs of the social chapter. The two matters are linked and are symptomatic of a deeper problem.

Defiance of Parliament by the Executive in relation to the prerogative and the overriding of the principle of parliamentary approval to the payment of moneys representing a charge on the people are symptomatic of the draining away of the soul of Parliament. That is because the treaty represents a failure of political will to say no to the demands of Germany and France about economic and monetary union. Further, we did not refuse to accept the nostrums and the intellectual baggage that have developed over time. Circumstances changed when the Berlin wall came down, and there were changes when we had to leave the exchange rate mechanism.

The European framework that is being designed has a corrosive effect upon our parliamentary system. Policies, including the social chapter and the issue of whether we

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should be excluded from it, are being dictated by Governments, influences and circumstances which are no longer as valid as they seemed to be when the whole business of the European Community, which as a whole I support, was being devised in the early 1950s.

6.15 pm

"German comments", published in July last year contained a simple reference by the editor. It is a publication by Konrad Adenauer Siftung, to which I have referred before. That reference stated:

> "Voting has become an instrument of protest. This will make governing even more difficult than it was in the past."

That was published after the Danish referendum, and it is a chilling observation.

A similar problem is arising in this debate. I agree that it is difficult to govern—no one has any serious doubt about that—but the way in which it is done and the extent to which we have regard to the procedures, manners and customs of Parliament and the necessity to ensure that we do not do anything to enable the prerogative to override Parliament, whether in relation to administrative costs or an amendment, remain critical.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East referred briefly to another problem. I was astonished by the extent to which those of us who have taken a certain position about the treaty were smeared—I think that that is the right word—with the charge that we wanted the social chapter to be imposed upon British business. First, we never did; secondly, that is impossible; and thirdly, I understand that the smear was being put around even after the Foreign Secretary had made his statement. Some people, probably because they do not understand, have continued to say that.

Perhaps some further retraction is required of that smear, because we never intended what was alleged, and nobody is certain about what will happen to amendment No. 27. We were criticised for something that we had not done and, with few exceptions, nobody has declared his intention. Above all, the impression was given that we were about to do something that was not even possible. The Government and the Foreign Secretary have conceded that we were right; that in itself is of no little importance for the reputation of hon. Members and is the basis upon which we approach our opposition to the treaty and the Bill.

Mr. Stephen Milligan (Eastleigh): I am interested in what my hon. Friend says about what is possible, and his claim that he would not support anything that was impossible. Does he go along with his supporter in another place, who said that he would be prepared to support the proposition that the moon was made of blue cheese if that would destroy the treaty of Maastricht? Would that not explain why some of us thought that my hon. Friend was prepared to vote for the amendment on the social chapter, the imposition of which might have had that effect?

Mr. Cash: I do not always take the advice of other people, however distinguished and eminent—I make up my own mind. But my preference is for Shropshire cheese rather than cheese that comes from the moon. My hon. Friend should not get too excited about what we may or may not do, because time will tell. The point is, first, that we knew what the words meant, and secondly, that we made them clear. We explained to people why we were doing what we were doing.

It was only because other advice was being tendered about the imposition of the social chapter, as opposed to whether it would wreck the treaty—I make a distinction between the two—that we were led to the view that we would not be imposing the social chapter on British business. The Government have now conceded that, and it is important that it should be on record. That has little to do with cheese, from the moon or from anywhere else, or even with the opinions of some of my noble and distinguished Friends in the House of Lords.

Another issue that arises in the principles that are beginning to come out in the debate is the referendum. It is clear that, if the people were to find that the Government were ignoring Parliament and people, the case for a referendum would become unanswerable. The more that the debate continues day by day, the more complex and confused it becomes, the more the contradictions are revealed and the more the case for the referendum grows. Opposition Members are witnessing a travesty of procedure. They are watching, I have no doubt, with concern, the way in which an opinion goes one way and then another—the switching, the ducking and the weaving. One opinion is as good as another. The legal advice on which the treaty is based is now in serious doubt.

I would go further. When my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister came to the House after the Danish vote, I expected him to say that, because of that vote, the Government would have to reconsider the matter. We heard nothing of the kind. My right hon. Friend said that we were going to press ahead, and that has been the basis on which the matter has been treated since then. I put it to him then, on the basis of what seemed to me to be clear from the treaty—nobody has ever argued with me about this—that it is a centralising treaty. Therefore, I must conclude that, when he replied that I was wrong in every particular, that reply must have been based on the same legal advice that he had received from the Foreign Office in respect of this matter as well.

Therefore, I wonder why people should believe—not only in respect of the centralising realities of the Bill, including the concept of the central bank, subsidiarity and all that goes with it, and a whole raft of other stuff based on legal advice—that the legal advice underpinning the treaty is any more valid that that given about the social chapter. The answer is that it is not. That raises yet another question. I am glad to see him here today, but why is it that my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General has deigned to indulge us with his presence for the first time only today? We have repeatedly asked him to come to answer the questions that I have asked over and over again. Answer came there none—nor did the Attorney-General.

We are dealing here not with a bilateral treaty but with a system of law, which is a legal framework. That is why questions of legal interpretation continually arise. I see my right hon. and learned Friend smiling and looking at his watch and, to go back to Lewis Carroll, he might do so before he slips down the black hole. The legal advice that lies at the heart of the treaty is wrong and imperfect. The agruments with which we are being presented cannot be evaluated against policy because there is no White Paper and no basis on which to form a judgment about the connection between policy and the legal advice that underpins the relationship that will be created between the British people and their Eurogovernment.

For example, in relation to the social chapter, if a matter relating to the administrative costs of the institutions of which the British people would be paying under the Government's propositions, to be implemented solely by the prerogative, were to arise, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer were to appear before the Treasury Select Committee, he would be no more responsible for those decisions than he would be for the entire British Budget. It would be almost a waste of his time turning up.

He might have had some influence on the outside looking in but, for practical purposes, if the central bank provisions went ahead—that is the legal advice given by the Foreign Office, which has led to the treaty being made in line with policies that have not yet been explained—he would not have to give any answers that meant anything to the Select Committee, because the main decisions would be taken by the unelected, unaccountable central bankers.

The Foreign Office has also given legal advice about the European Monetary Institute in stage 2. There is no doubt that, under article 8 of the protocol, the Governor of the Bank of England would effectively be under the thumb of the monetary institute. He would not have to take advice or instructions from the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the House. It would be of no value for the Select Committee on the Treasury to call him before it, because he would have nothing to say to it. He would say, "I cannot seek instructions; I cannot take instructions." Therefore, under stage 2, before we get to 1 January 1994, which is less than a year away, we shall be moving into the transitional phase. That is the basis on which advice is being given.

6.30 pm

We so often find that we fall back upon statements that are made as a matter of policy by Ministers. Only the other day, I heard my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary imply that practical considerations were more important than legal considerations. I heard him say much the same when the Danish referendum took place. To paraphrase him, he said that what the people of Denmark may think is more important than what might be contained in the treaty. I remember that pretty well. It is that approach that lies at the heart of the issue.

It must be recognised that there is a legal framework. It is no good Ministers hiding behind the privilege of the House of Commons and hoping that there are no legal implications in what is being done. The legal advice that is being tendered is fundamental. In the past couple of months, the House of Lords made a ruling which, combined with Factortam, raises an important issue.

As I said to my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary only the other day, it is open to the courts as part of the travaux préparatoires to examine what is said in parliamentary proceedings in deciding the balance of their judgment in the context of the legislators' intention. I see that the shadow Attorney-General, the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris), is nodding his head. He knows that what I say is true. He and I know also that there are difficulties for the Government.

When it comes to interpretation, including the provisions of the social chapter, centralising or not, and legal opinions that have underpinned the basis of the policy on which the Maastricht treaty has gone through, to be considered also are the various remarks that have been made by Ministers. The time will come when the record is read. The history of the Bill will be mulled over against the background of many speeches that may now be regarded as beyond the pale because they are made by individuals who bitterly oppose the provisions contained in the treaty. As and when history unfolds and these matters are judged against the background of what happened, as compared with what it was said would happen, it will be realised that it was the underpinning legal advice that was at fault.

When we consider the treaty's provisions against the background of a massive transfer of power within a predetermined European policy that has drained away the will of the House of Commons and that of the Government to allow the British people to determine their own affairs within the European Community, it is clear that the umbilical cord has been broken by the sort of advice that is being presented. For example, stage 2 of the treaty would enable decisions to be taken on the basis of that advice by unelected and unaccountable persons that would be at variance with the constitutional usages and practices of the House of Commons.

Mr. George Robertson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, because I know that he is just about to bring his remarks to an end. I am sure that he, like the rest of us, wants to hear the Attorney-General, who I understand will speak shortly. We certainly want the right hon. and learned Gentleman to answer some of the questions that have been put by the hon. Gentleman as well as by other hon. Members. In the hon. Gentleman's concluding sentences, will he bear in mind the fact that these matters have little or nothing to do with the law and everything to do with the political convenience of a Government who are facing defeat on amendment No. 27?

Mr. Cash: I am extremely interested in the hon. Gentleman's last remark. Without wanting to cast aspersions on the Government's motives, I must say that political convenience is frequently at the heart of major decision-making. It would, of course, be unfair in any way to suggest, or even to think, that legal advice has been tailored to suit political convenience.

The principle has been enunciated that we should go ahead. That is what my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary appears to be prepared to do, along with the rest of the Government, including my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. The Executive, or the Government, seem prepared to go ahead with the social chapter irrespective of whether the Government effectively give an instruction that that should not be done. It seems that the Government are prepared to go ahead by prerogative alone.

If that is so, I am bound to say that the same principle could be applied to all legislation that flows from the European Communities Act 1972. The same can be said of the treaty. I am bound to concede that there is no good reason, according to our constitutional practice, why it should not go through by prerogative.

The distinction that I am drawing—again I notice that the shadow Attorney-General is nodding in agreement—is that which lies between the ordinary prerogative treaty, which is simply laid before the House, and prerogative treaties that have the effect of incorporating rights, duties and obligations into our domestic law, which have to be

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passed by way of Act of Parliament in order to have effect on the people of this country. It is crucial that that distinction is remembered.

The issue turns not on the arcane theological argument about the ratification of treaties but on the extent to which rights, duties, obligations, functions and powers are created that have an impact on the people by virtue of enactment in the House of Commons. That is why I said at the beginning that the Government have opened up a dangerous flank. If they were to persist with the view that legislation can be taken through the House of Commons merely by prerogative, they would be saying, in effect, "We do not need Parliament."

If that were to be the position, why should we bother with all the legislation that emanated from the European Communities Act and the treaty of Rome back in 1971-72? The answer is that there would be no need for it. That, however, is at variance with the facts, the law, custom, practice and realities. There must be passage through the House of Commons; otherwise, we shall not create obligations, duties and powers.

Baroness Chalker of Wallasey recently made an interesting and revealing speech in the House of Lords. She said that the treaty does not impose any specific duties. This harks back to another question that I put to my right hon. Friend the Minister of State. I asked him about the whole question of citizenship and about the rights accorded to and the duties imposed upon the people of this country. The answer that I received was just the same as the one given by the noble Baroness.

But what I was told does not answer the legal question that lies at the heart of my intervention in the speech of the Minister of State. The people of this country need to know what duties are being imposed upon them and what powers are being accorded to them. Otherwise, their status as citizens of the United Kingdom will be uncertain. They will not know where they are. Are they to be part British and part European, or are they to be made exclusively European? These questions of citizenship must be addressed. They arise from the legal advice that has been tendered with regard to citizenship—a matter with which the noble Baroness did not deal.

The noble Baroness said that, in effect, this was a modest measure about which we should not get too exercised. But if we do not get exercised about the way in which we are governed, about our Parliament, about whether we are to be taxed without consent, if we do not bother ourselves about whether the executive can railroad provisions irrespective, and possibly in defiance of Parliament, we shall deserve the fate which will befall us.

Mr. Hoon: If the judges of the European Court of Justice, in their efforts to elucidate parliamentary intention, look at the speeches of Members of Parliament, I wish them every success in their researches into the undergrowth of the contributions of the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash).

My recollection is that we are debating the legal and constitutional effects of amendment No. 27, which specifically excludes the protocol on social policy from United Kingdom domestic law. Originally, Opposition Members understood that amendment No. 27 would prevent the Government from ratifying the Maastricht treaty without recourse to a new intergovernmental conference. That is what the Minister of State told the House repeatedly and perhaps not in his most careful and considered manner, but rather gleefully—not carefully relaying legal advice, but obviously revelling in what he thought was a political bombshell for the Opposition. In the following days it became clear that it was the Government who were suffering the fallout from the bombshell when they realised that they were likely to lose the vote on amendment No. 27. Only then did their legal advice appear to change.

Last week, the Foreign Secretary's argument was that the passing of amendment No. 27 would have no effect on ratification, as ratification was a matter for the Crown. It was argued that, as the protocol on social policy had no direct effect in United Kingdom law, it would not have to be incorporated in United Kingdom legislation. Of course, that applies to any obligation under an international treaty. It is possible for the Crown to ratify without reference to Parliament. Any such international obligation would have to be put before Parliament in the form of a Bill only if the treaty concerned created obligations involving changes in United Kingdom law—changes which had to be incorporated in national legislation.

The Foreign Secretary was not stating anything new when he said that nothing in the protocol on social policy required United Kingdom legislation and that, as amendment No. 27 would remove the protocol on social policy—it was a negative—it would not create rights in the United Kingdom.

6.45 pm

That is all very clear and unexceptionable, except that, until that point, it had been assumed—not least by the Minister of State—that, if amendment No. 27 were passed, it would require a new intergovernmental conference. The Minister's point was that such a conference would open up the treaty and all the carefully worked out compromises made when the treaty was signed. His threat was that that would allow other countries to change their positions and would enable other considerations to be introduced and therefore raise the question of a fundamental change in the nature of the agreement—indeed, by implication, prevent any agreement at all.

The Government argued further that as some countries had already held referendums and thereby completed the process of ratification that their constitutions required, it would not be possible subsequently to change the terms of the treaty and the protocol without reopening the question of ratification in those countries. The Government were therefore deliberately raising the spectre of a re-run of the referendums in France and Ireland, knowing that the Opposition would be concerned about the prospect of a defeat in either of those countries allowing the Government to blame the Opposition for the collapse of the Maastricht treaty.

That is why there was such political glee about the legal opinion which was relayed to the House. This entire constitutional and legal debate arose simply because the Opposition wanted a means whereby Parliament could vote on the social chapter. They wanted a specific vote on whether the Government's opt-out from the social chapter was or was not a matter that the House of Commons could consider.

Surely, in a parliamentary democracy, it is appropriate that legislators should have an opportunity to debate in Committee the detail of a treaty. That, after all, is what we have been doing. We have been considering in detail the provisions of the Maastricht treaty. However, we now understand the Government's position to be that there will be no opportunity to debate specifically whether or not the United Kingdom should adhere to the social chapter, and no opportunity to vote on that matter other than on Third Reading.

It appears that the Government's position and the Foreign Secretary's view is that, when the House votes on Third Reading, it will, in effect, be voting on the social protocol. In a parliamentary democracy, that cannot be acceptable. It must be open to us to consider specifically what was agreed at Maastricht and to vote upon it. That is why the explanation about ratification which has been given is not satisfactory.

Ratification means confirmation. Historically, it was not necessary—or not significant—for a treaty to be ratified. Essentially, a treaty was signed by the monarch, and ratification was no more than a formality. The significant process was the signature. In modern international law, the reverse is the case: the signature of an international treaty is, generally speaking, no more than a formality—ratification is the key process.

The reason is that, in most parliamentary democracies, ratification follows a parliamentary process whereby some democratic approval is given to the content of an international agreement. This makes possible a democratic veto on Executive action. Thus the practice has developed in virtually every parliamentary democracy, except our own. In the United States, it is necessary to have democratic approval before ratification.

Mr. Budgen: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is especially necessary to have democratic approval for a treaty which envisages a common defence policy and, possibly, the emergence of a common army? It is possible that, in future, people may be found guilty of treason if they do not want to fight in a Eueopean war. Therefore, the consent of people throughout the country is no small matter; it goes to the heart of whether the country consents to be governed in the way envisaged by the treaty.

Mr. Hoon: That is right. We have a representative democracy, so it is right that those decisions should be carefully considered by the House—or, at the moment, by the Committee. That is why I have argued that the Committee should have an opportunity specifically to vote on whether the United Kingdom should adhere to the social protocol.

The Government's argument has always been that because, in the Maastricht treaty negotiations, they opted out of the protocol, it is not necessary to put that before the Committee and, eventually, the House. The difficulty is that the social protocol binds the high contracting parties; it binds all 12 member states, including the United Kingdom. Even if the content of a protocol affects only one member state or fewer than the full 12 members, nevertheless it binds all 12, whatever its content. Each of the 12 member states agreed to the protocol on Denmark, which directly affects only the needs and concerns of that country. All agreed to allow the United Kingdom to opt out of economic and monetary union. Similarly, the protocol on social policy is, legally, made by the high contracting parties, which means all 12 member states, and it is necessary that all of them ratify it.

Mr. Cash: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it would be almost fraudulent for an informal decision or agreement, outside the legal arrangements that he has described of 12 high contracting parties agreeing on a treaty, to give the Danes a special arrangement for matters which cover the whole range of the treaty? In other words, the opt-outs do not add up to a row of beans.

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman tempts me to stray from the specific debate, but I shall resist the temptation to join him in speculation along the lines that he suggested.

Where, in a parliamentary democracy, Parliament has specifically said that a certain provision of an international agreement should not be translated into United Kingdom law—which would be the effect of passing amendment No. 27—it would be hard to envisage how the Government could go ahead and ratify that specific provision. Yet if I understood the Foreign Secretary correctly, that is what he has invited us to do. He is saying that, in effect, even if Parliament agrees to amendment No. 27 and states specifically that the protocol on social policy should not become part of the United Kingdom Bill or United Kingdom law, nevertheless the Government will still ratify because there is nothing in the protocol on social policy that requires it to be translated into British law.

In one sense, that is a political rather than a legal point. Legally, it is possible for the Government to do that, but politically and democratically it is hard to envisage how the Government could argue against what would be the clearest signal from Parliament that they should not ratify on the basis of a provision that Parliament has specifically resisted.

Mr. Iain Duncan-Smith (Chingford): Will the hon. Gentleman enlighten us on his view on the supremacy of the European Court of Justice, which has a bearing on this matter? It is feasible that the Executive could ratify under the prerogative, knowing full well that various parts of the treaty make it possible, in a clash between national and Community law, for the European Court to force us to adopt this or other provisions that we have deliberately excluded. There is a very good case of that happening in German basic law.

Mr. Hoon: So far, I have been dealing with what I consider to be the international law implications of the action that the Foreign Secretary appeared to suggest last week. I want now to deal with some of the domestic implications of passing amendment No. 27.

Paragraph 2 of the social protocol was included at the behest of the Government's lawyers. That paragraph specifically excludes the United Kingdom from the terms of the protocol. Why was that paragraph included? Last week, the Foreign Secretary said that it was a tidying up exercise to ensure the avoidance of doubt. His lawyers had advised him which expression to use. If the Foreign Secretary was right, why was it necessary to include the paragraph in the first place? What would be the effects of its absence from the protocol?

That paragraph could have been drafted only by the Government's lawyers. There would be no advantage in a European Commission lawyer or a lawyer from France, Germany or Italy drafting that exclusion for the United Kingdom. It must have been negotiated by the United Kingdom, having been drafted by United Kingdom lawyers. In those circumstances, why did they think it necessary?

[Mr. Hoon]

The reason is clear, and it was alluded to in the question to which I deferred responding a few minutes ago. It is because the Government want paragraph 2 as a defence, available in the event of anyone challenging the opt-out on the social chapter before either a United Kingdom court or the European Court of Justice. They want to be able to say, "Paragraph 2 includes a specific provision excluding the United Kingdom from the operation of the social chapter."

The Government created legal difficulties by negotiating the opt-out from the social chapter, which in effect allowed the creation of two quite separate legal systems within the European Community. They allowed for a system which would bind 11 member states, which could then produce directives under the social chapter—and eventually lead to cases before the European Court—and also for a system which would bind all 12 member states, which is the conventional legal system to which we are all accustomed.

What the Government never explained—I hope that the Attorney-General will consider doing so—is the legal position of the European Court of Justice when dealing with directives made under the social chapter. Directives will be issued and at some stage a provision in one of them will be challenged. Eventually, the case will go to the European Court. When the court considers such a case, it will not look simply at the narrow provisions of a particular directive; it will look at the directive, the treaty and a whole wealth of decided cases, and will then reach a conclusion.

If it is dealing with a particular interpretation of a directive made under the social chapter, will it say to the European Community "Ah, because this arises under the social protocol, the particular case binds only the 11 member states that signed the social protocol"? Can the European Court say that provision will be binding on only 11 member states? As someone trained in the legal profession in the United Kingdom, it is difficult to imagine a court saying, "This provision binds only some member states and not others."

Mr. Cash: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hoon: I want to make progress and to allow the Attorney-General to answer some of my questions. I shall be grateful for the right hon. and learned Gentleman's advice. Essentially, the Government created the situation and it is they who must explain what it is that they are trying to achieve. The Government negotiated the opt-out and created considerable legal confusion in international and domestic law-potentially. It is appropriate for the Government to offer clarification, and I look forward to hearing the Attorney-General's explanation.

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Janet Fookes): I call Mr. Peter Luff.

Hon. Members: Disgraceful.

7 pm

Mr. Luff: I have to say that I agree——

The Attorney-General: On a point of order, Dame Janet. I have been asked specially to listen to my hon. Friend before I answer. I said out of courtesy that I would do so. I do not anticipate that my hon. Friend will take very long.

Mr. Luff: I shall first make the observation that—*[Interruption]*

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. The hon. Gentleman has the Floor, and I ask other right hon. and hon. Members to listen.

Mr. Luff: Many right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the Committee occasionally complain that the Government do not listen enough. I welcome how carefully my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General is listening to all the valuable comments made in all parts of the House on this occasion. One cannot have it both ways. If the Government do not listen, they are accused by some of arrogance and of not considering an alternative point of view. If they listen, they are criticised by others for doing that.

The same is happening in the debate on railway privatisation. In the early stages of that debate, the Government were again accused of not being prepared to debate the matter. They launched a debate through a series of consultation papers and the Transport Select Committee criticised them for not having a clear view of their objectives. I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for paying such close attention to today's debate.

I agree with the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) that Parliament is not always at its best when it debates closely argued points of law. In common with my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington), I am not a lawyer, so it was with some trepidation that I ventured to intervene in such a careful, legal debate. I refer in particular to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash), which drew widely on historical allusions. His allusion to Humpty Dumpty was particularly valuable, powerful and relevant. Many of us feel that this debate is being used by some as another opportunity to have Humpty Dumpty fall off his wall and experience more difficulty in being put back together again in the shape of the Maastricht treaty.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford confused the purpose of the Bill. In the early part of his speech, he seemed to suggest that the Bill seeks to ratify the treaty, when it does not: it seeks only to introduce into British law those elements of the Maastricht treaty which must be incorporated into British law. It is eminently sensible to propose that a particular amendment to a social protocol which will not affect Britain need not be incorporated.

. While waiting to be called, I glanced briefly through the appendices on the protocols in Cm. 1934 and identified a number of protocols which surely would not significantly impede ratification of the treaty were we disinclined to integrate them in British law. I refer, for example, to the protocol on page 89 about the acquisition of property in Denmark, the protocol on Denmark on page 113, the protocol on Portugal on page 114, the protocol on certain provisions relating to Denmark on page 116, the protocol on France on page 117, and the derogation to Spain and Portugal on page 126 in relation to pollution from large combustible plants. None is central to ratification of the treaty by the British Government, and it is right that none should be incorporated into British law. The same is true of the social protocol.

Mr. Marlow: I wonder whether my hon. Friend has read in *Hansard* a written answer given to me by my right hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones) on Friday:

"The social protocol is an annexe to the treaty of Rome"—

not an annexe to the Maastricht treaty—

"and is therefore an integral part of that treaty. It has been the United Kingdom's consistent legislative practice to incorporate all amendments to the Community treaties into domestic law."—[*Official Report*, 19 February, 1993; Vol. 219, c. *364*.]

Why should we change?

Mr. Luff: My hon. Friend is entirely right. Maastricht is essentially an appendix to the treaty of Rome, as it seeks to amend that treaty in conjunction with it. The fact remains that the social protocol does not apply to and therefore there is no need to incorporate it into British law.

Tonight's debate exposes my central concern about the Bill's passage through the House. Many right hon. and hon. Members, while professing to stand for Parliament's practices and history, are using a series of parliamentary tactics in an attempt to destroy the Bill and to prevent the Government from ratifying the treaty. That is deplorable.

I am puzzled when I hear some of my hon. Friends and some Opposition Members vehemently defend Parliament's privileges and accuse the Government of riding roughshod over it when many of those same hon. Friends and Opposition Members are calling strongly for a referendum. Nothing would more fundamentally undermine the privileges, traditions and power of Parliament than a referendum on this issue.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Rubbish. Power to the people. Trust the people.

Mr. Luff: I do.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): I agree very much with my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff). Is it not worse still that the hon. Members to whom he refers are not only espousing a referendum, which would totally undermine the central sovereignty of this institution, but going further? They would undermine Parliament in an additional, reprehensible fashion, by saying that we must wait for Denmark's parliamentary decisions, legislation and referendum before agreeing to proceed. Is that not in stark contrast with the notion put forward by hon. Members that we should wait for the judgment or opinion of the European Parliament? That would be described by the same hon. Members as gross——

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman and other right hon. and hon. Members that this is a dilatory motion directed at one particular point. We do not want a general, discursive debate.

Mr. Luff: I shall, of course, respect your ruling, Dame Janet, but I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes). I make no secret of the fact —this is the thrust of my speech—that I want the Bill to make the most rapid progress possible. If I have any criticism of the Government, it is that progress has not been made fast enough. I want the Bill to pass through the House at the earliest possible date. It has always been my view that Parliament need not wait on the result of the Danish referendum.

I want to express my strongest possible support for my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary in their revised legal judgment on amendment No. 27. There is always more joy in heaven over one sinner who repenteth, and I am always delighted when the Government have the courage to admit that they may have got something wrong. I can think of a number of issues affecting my constituents where I would welcome a similar change of heart by the Government. However, I am not one to join in the hue and cry of U-turn and scandal when the Government produce a revised opinion.

Opposition Members have difficulty in accepting unpalatable truths. First, they were led to believe that they could incorporate amendment No. 27 in such a way that it would not wreck the treaty. They were led into taking that view by their socialist friends in other European member states, yet they seemed prepared to continue to risk the possibility of wrecking the Bill, despite the advice of my right hon. Friend the Minister of State.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): My hon. Friend says that Opposition Members have attempted to wreck the Bill by introducing the amendment. Does he agree that, if the social chapter were introduced into domestic law, it would wreck the economy of this country?

Mr. Luff: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We have heard comments from a number of foreign Governments —and from Mr. Delors—about the likely impact of the incorporation of the social protocol, and the social chapter, into domestic law. It is no coincidence that we now hear noises from other member states—especially Spain and Greece—suggesting that they are having second thoughts about the wisdom of the social charter, and are recognising the social and economic penalties that they could pay for incorporating it into their domestic law.

Amendment No. 27 does not achieve what Opposition Members hoped that it would achieve. They hoped that it would force the British Government back to the negotiating table at a new intergovernmental conference. Now, they are disillusioned and disappointed.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): The hon. Gentleman keeps saying that the amendment will not achieve what Opposition Members wanted. In column 27 of *Hansard*, 15 February 1993, the Minister of State is quoted as saying, on 20 January,

"that if amendment No. 27 were carried, United Kingdom law would not conform to the provisions of the treaty and that the United Kingdom would therefore be unable to ratify the treaty."—[*Official Report*, 15 February 1993; Vol. 219, c. 27.]

It is nothing to do with Opposition Members; the Minister of State said that. The Government were in a desperate plight looking around for another legal explanation—and, like all lawyers, they got hold of a lawyer to give them the explanation that they wanted. That lawyer happened to be the Attorney-General. I will give the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) some guidance: he should be wary of trusting any lawyer, especially the lawyer sitting on the Front Bench whom he says he is going to trust.

Mr. Luff: Some Conservative Members might give similar advice to the hon. Gentleman about the lawyer who leads his party. He should be similarly distrustful of that lawyer. It must be extremely disappointing for the hon. Gentleman to discover that an amendment drafted by

[Mr. Luff]

a party led by a distinguished lawyer will not have the effect that his party hoped that it would have and will not force the Government into the social charter against the will of the people of this country.

Treaties are difficult to negotiate, and I find it surprising that the Committee should seek to compound the difficulties. Already this country operates the most thorough scrutiny of Government proposals for treaties and of their successful negotiations. I do not think that any other European Community state has such detailed procedural methods of scrutinising treaties. A clear choice faces the Committee. The suggestion that amendment No. 27 is the be-all and end-all of parliamentary sovereignty is ludicrous. Plainly, a further choice faces the House—Third Reading. If Opposition Members feel that the omission of the social charter from the Bill, and therefore from the treaty that we ratify, is such a serious point of principle, they have the option of voting against it.

I believe that a meeting of the parliamentary Labour party took place last week. I pay tribute to some Opposition Members: according to press reports of that meeting, the Labour party will not make it its policy to seek to wreck the treaty. I welcome that, but I find it surprising that the Opposition have again sought to delay progress, using the device of a debate on amendment No. 27. We all remember the debate on the paving motion before Christmas, and the cynical contortions performed by some Opposition Members in order to reach the appropriate position.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) who, in a passionate rejoinder to a comment by me, reminded the House that the country faced more important issues than ratification of the Maastricht treaty. I believe that the treaty should be an uncontroversial piece of legislation, and that it should pass quickly on to the statute book, enabling hon. Members to debate the other crucial issues affecting our country. Later, we shall have an opportunity to debate many of those issues: I am thinking particularly of the development co-operation section.

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. The hon. Gentleman now seems to be making a very general point. Will he either return to the subject or resume his seat?

7.15 pm

Mr. Luff: Let me turn specifically to the question of amendment No. 27. [HON. MEMBERS: "Filibuster."] I do not think that I need to take lessons in filibustering from some of the hon. Members who surround me tonight.

As I have said, I am not a lawyer, but I believe that the statement made to the House by the Foreign Secretary of 15 February has the great merit of common sense. I thought that what he said was true even before he said it to the House. I was surprised, in a way, to hear my right hon. Friend the Minister of State suggest that the amendment would wreck the treaty; I did not think that it would. My right hon. Friend said:

> "Any amendment that would render United Kingdom law incompatible with the treaty would have the effect of making it impossible for the treaty to be ratified. Thus, from the Government's point of view, it is necessary for such amendments to be defeated. Other amendments, while we may oppose them as undesirable, do not render United Kingdom law incompatible with the terms of the treaty."—[*Official Report*, 15 February 1993; Vol. 319, c. 20.]

I think that many hon. Members on both sides of the House can think of a number of such amendments which would be profoundly undesirable—such as the referendum amendment—but we shall resist them. What the Foreign Secretary said is clear.

Mr. Milligan: Does my hon. Friend agree that the reason for the frustration over the incompetence of amendment No. 27 is its support by the wholly bogus alliance of those who wish to destroy the Maastricht treaty with those who wish to insert the social chapter although there is no majority in the House for either proposition? The reason for the anger is not what the Government have done. The Government have behaved honestly and honourably in coming forward with clear legal advice, when it might have been more convenient to wait until the amendment was voted on; the anger and frustration result from the fact that the scheme has not worked.

Mr. Luff: My hon. Friend has put his finger on an important point, but there is a third category in the unholy alliance that he has cited: those who seek to undermine the very future of the European Community.

The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) accused the Government of incompetence. I think that that charge rests far more fairly and squarely on his shoulders, and on those of his hon. Friends who have failed to draft the amendment successfully. I rejoice in that, however, because it means that we do not now face the incorporation of the social charter in British law.

I am anxious for the treaty to make rapid progress, and for the Bill to pass through its stages quickly. [HON. MEMBERS: "Sit down."] I shall sit down shortly. I am eager for the due process of law to be completed, so that we can return to the more pressing matters that confront the House.

The Attorney-General: Those who have been present throughout the debate will have observed that the interest generated in the Committee has fluctuated. A great deal of interest was rightly shown when the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) opened the debate by posing a number of careful and detailed questions of legal relevance, which I hope to be able to answer. Later, interest seemed to wane.

I had looked forward to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash), on the assumption that, as an experienced lawyer, he would ask a number of detailed questions; unfortunately, however, the piece of paper on which I noted them down is less full than anyone who knew my hon. Friend might expect. Indeed, I am not sure that he asked me any real legal questions in his 50-minute speech. Consequently, observers outside will realise that, although this is an important legal occasion, it is also a political one—and the politics and the tactics of the debate seem to have fluctuated from time to time.

I have some serious questions to answer on the legal aspects. Many hon. Members from both sides of the Committee have asked whether the Government would be willing to publish the Law Officers' legal advice in this matter. In answering no, I owe the Committee a clear explanation and I shall give one. I have been a Law Officer for rising six years and I know that Law Officers advise the Government on a variety of issues every week—the variety is fascinating and remarkable.

Only one standard will do for legal advice—the best and the most careful opinion that the adviser can give, on the information available. Drawing on the six years that I have been a Law Officer and the six years or more that I spent as Parliamentary Private Secretary to Sir Michael Havers when he was Attorney-General, I am not aware of any precedent for the publication of Law Officers' advice to the Government, although I stand to be corrected. Occasionally the Law Officers come before the House or a Committee of the House to give prepared advice on an issue.

Mr. Donald Anderson: Were there not exceptional circumstances in this case? Shortly after the Minister of State gave his opinion on advice from Foreign Office legal advisers, the Attorney-General came back with a wholly contradictory view. Does not the House therefore have a right to a view of the opinion?

The Attorney-General: That is important, but the hon. Gentleman does not put his finger on the heart of the matter. If the Committee is given an important statement —such as that made by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State on 27 January, on amendment No. 27—which is later scrutinised in greater detail and the Law Officers' advice sought upon it, as happened in this case, and if the advice of myself and the Lord Advocate is different from that given to the Committee by my right hon. Friend, it is our duty to come before the Committee at the earliest opportunity to correct the matter. We must do so to enable important issues, such as those raised by amendment No. 27, to be debated on the correct basis.

It is not the first time that legal advice has turned out to be different. I cannot recall any occasion when the Law Officers' advice has been disclosed and nor can the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson), and I shall not break precedent.

Mr. Maclennan: Does not the Attorney-General recognise that his experience of practice during the past six years has, to some extent, been overtaken by a recent decision of the House of Lords to treat what is said by Ministers at the Dispatch Box as evidence for the interpretation of what a Bill intends? By his performance tonight, the Attorney-General has therefore contributed to subsequent law-making processes in the courts. By denying the Committee the written opinion, which he might have put in the Library before the debate began, he has denied it the opportunity to examine the advice critically, with the benefit of other advice, which could have enabled our debate to be better informed.

The Attorney-General: I am well aware of the case that the hon. Gentleman referred to because I argued it in the House of Lords.

Mr. Maclennan: And lost.

The Attorney-General: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman has paid a great deal of attention to what was argued in that case or to the issues before the House.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Although I am not a lawyer, I have been listening to Attorneys-General since the time of Sir Reginald Manningham-Buller. Forgive me for being sceptical, but the Attorney-General used the phrase, "in greater detail". Apparently the matter was considered in greater detail. If it had been a trivial matter, we would of course accept that explanation, but the issue is central. Cannot lay people among us ask why the issue was not considered in the greatest detail in the first place? At best, the situation can be described as casual, but I do not think that that is how the Attorney-General's office or his officers operate. They are extremely careful civil servants. Are we really to believe that the "greater detail" altered the substance of the opinion?

The Attorney-General: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not wish to suggest that the legal advice was anything other than careful or accurate. It certainly was careful and accurate—it was the best legal advice that I and my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate could give and I believe that it is the right advice.

The Foreign Office has excellent legal advisers, who advise carefully on a host of matters and since I have had to give some thought to the matter, I have had the benefit of their views.

The hon. Member for Hamilton asked about the substance of the advice given by the Lord Advocate and myself. When addressing the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), I referred to *Hansard* because my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made it absolutely clear that, in expressing the legal view in his statement last Monday, he was expressing the views of the Lord Advocate and myself. The hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) asked me to clarify that advice. It is exactly as stated in columns 27 and 28 of *Hansard* by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary when he addressed the House at this time last week.

The hon. Member for Hamilton also asked about the timing of the advice. I received the request for my advice on 9 February and I understand that my right hon. Friend the Foreigh Secretary asked his officials to obtain advice on 25 January. I did not receive the request or instructions until Tuesday 9 February. The Lord Advocate and I advised on Wednesday evening, and the Foreign Secretary received the advice the following morning, Thursday 11 February. That is the chronology of the matter.

Mr. George Robertson: In the light of that answer, I have two questions for the Attorney-General. First, was any approach made to his Department—at any level—during the 10 months that amendment No. 27 lay on the Table? Secondly, given that his and the Lord Advocate's advice was given to the Foreign Secretary on Thursday morning, did it go to the Cabinet, and if not, why not?

The Attorney-General: I cannot answer the last part of the question—[HON. MEMBERS: "Why not?"] Because I am not a member of the Cabinet. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] That is quite straightforward.

As to the hon. Gentleman's first question—about whether advice was from those who help me in the legal secretariat to the Law Officers in my chambers—to the best of my knowledge, advice was not sought until the dates that I gave. Previously, advice was given by Foreign Office legal advisers.

That takes me on to the way in which I can best assist the Committee with amendment No. 27 and other amendments along the same lines that it will have to consider. I seek to give some guidance about amendments that, if passed, might prevent ratification. I shall make a number of points, and I shall try to make them rather

[The Attorney-General]

deliberately so that they can be not only listened to but read coherently if anybody should wish to refer to them in future debates on the Bill.

The first point, as the Committee will appreciate, is that the Maastricht treaty must be ratified as a whole. Parliament can prevent its ratification by refusing to enact the Bill—by refusing to give it a Third Reading—but it cannot in any way modify the provisions of the treaty.

7.30 pm

The Committee will also have in mind the fact that the Maastricht treaty contains provisions of at least two different types. It contains some provisions that are intergovernmental in nature—one has in mind titles V and VI—and some that amend Community treaties. Here, those who have studied the Bill will have in mind titles II and IV. There is no need to incorporate into our domestic law the intergovernmental aspects of the treaty contained in titles V and VI.

Any amendment to the Bill that, by preventing incorporation of a treaty provision into our domestic law, makes it impossible for the United Kingdom to implement its Community obligations would cause us to regard ourselves as unable to ratify the treaty and would mean that if we did ratify we should be in breach of our treaty obligations as soon as the treaty came into effect. That is the key test. That is the heart of the matter that we are discussing.

More generally, amendments that seek to omit or amend provisions on Community treaties must be strongly resisted. It is important—this is not a matter of the tightest law but it is very important as a matter of legislative practice—to preserve consistency between our domestic law and Community law as it is applicable to the United Kingdom. That is best achieved by following the United Kingdom's consistent legislative practice of incorporating in domestic law not only all amendments to Community treaties but any protocols annexed to those treaties. The Government therefore continue to oppose deletion of the social protocol from the proposed revised list of Community treaties in section 1(2) of the European Communities Act 1972.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): My right hon. and learned Friend speaks of the importance of conformity between the Act and the treaty of Rome, as amended by the treaty of Maastricht. If it subsequently emerged that we had implemented the treaty incorrectly in our legislation, it would not matter because the European Court would direct us to rectify any clash between Community law and our own law. Indeed, if we failed so to amend the law we could be fined under article 171 of the Maastricht treaty.

The Attorney-General: My hon. Friend is half right. He says that it would not matter, but it would matter, because we would be in breach of our Community obligations. After we had been the subject of infraction proceedings, and if the European Court ruled against us—we do our best not to be in that position—it would be necessary for us to come back to the House and move amending legislation to render our domestic law in conformity with Community law. I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) understood that point.

Mr. Budgen: Let us assume that the Government take a chance and decide that they will go ahead with the treaty without the protocol. If that situation arose and the matter were brought before our domestic courts on judicial review, would not that give rise to the risk of a conflict between Parliament and the judges?

The Attorney-General: Not in the way that my hon. Friend may have in mind, no, but I shall deal with that a little later.

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): Will the Attorney-General give way?

The Attorney-General: No.

Mr. Davies: I have the answer here.

The Attorney-General: I am most grateful, but it is just possible that I have it, too.

The Committee will recall that, since the social protocol expressly states that acts adopted under the agreement of the other 11 member states shall not be applicable to the United Kingdom, the deletion of the social protocol from the Bill and consequently the failure to incorporate it in our domestic law would not render the United Kingdom incapable of fulfilling its obligations under the treaty of union and would not therefore prevent ratification. It is a double negative. We would not be incorporating something which expressly by its terms provides that acts done under it shall not be applicable to us—a double negative.

Amendments that seek to incorporate provisions of the intergovernmental pillars as Community obligations would produce a nonsense in our domestic law. Provisions in the intergovernmental titles are not Community law obligations and it would be quite wrong to incorporate them in our law as if they were. Some amendments may affect only our domestic——

Mr. Gould: Will the Attorney-General give way?

The Attorney-General: May I finish the point? I should like to get this on the record, and then I shall give way.

Some amendments may affect only our domestic procedures for implementing the treaty obligations. An example might be amendment No. 28 on the Committee of the Regions, which the House was about to reach until the dilatory motion was moved. If these amendments were passed, we should have to examine carefully whether our law would still be consistent with our international obligations. But provided this condition were met, amendments in that category would not be fatal to ratification.

Application of those principles will, I think, make it clear into which category particular amendments fall. The great majority would be likely to prevent ratification. There are, however, some other parts of the treaty such as the Danish protocol on second homes—here I have in mind the point that was put to me by my hon. Frend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff), who mentioned that protocol and a number of similar protocols—where it is hard to see that non-incorporation would prevent ratification. As I have said, certain amendments relating to purely domestic procedures may fall into the same category because they are not inconsistent with our Community obligations.

If, however, it is not clear how to apply those principles to particular amendments in the future, I am willing to examine the matter carefully and give the Committee further advice. I hope that that is helpful as a broad way of looking at it.

Mr. Maclennan *rose*——

Mr. Denzil Davies *rose*——

Mr. Gould *rose*——

The Attorney-General: I see that three hon. Members are anxious to ask me questions, but, with respect, I see that the hon. Member for Hamilton also wishes to intervene.

Mr. George Robertson: I am not certain whether the Attorney-General is clarifying the point. He is reading from a piece of paper that deals with different issues and he moves smartly from the area about which there is controversy to bits about which there is no controversy. He said that the Maastricht treaty must be ratified as a whole, but then he said that exclusion of the social protocol would not affect ratification. If that is the case, he will ratify that part of the Maastricht treaty by a means other than that which was intended when the Committee stage began. Will the Attorney-General confirm whether the Government will ratify the social protocol, which may by a vote of the House have been missed out of the Bill in which it is presently situated, by using the royal prerogative, because there is no other way of doing it?

The Attorney-General: The hon. Gentleman confuses the two quite different processes of ratification and incorporation of a particular provision into our domestic law. I see that the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon), who understands these matters, is nodding, and I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman does not understand them himself.

Mr. Gould: The Attorney-General's argument rests on the proposition that the omission of the social protocol would make no difference in domestic law, but has he considered the possibility that the explicit disclaimer of any obligations under the social agreement might help a domestic court to decide the extent of our obligations, not necessarily under the social agreement but under the general provisions of the treaty of Rome, requiring us to provide conditions of free competition? If that were the case—and I should be happy to argue that in a domestic court—the absence of that disclaimer would equally make a difference to domestic law and would run contrary to the Government's purposes in putting the disclaimer into domestic law in the first place, which is their intention under the Bill as drafted.

The Attorney-General: The hon. Gentleman is a sufficiently good lawyer to be able to recognise the different way in which the argument threads its way through what he said. Whether or not what he said is true, it has nothing to do with whether we can ratify the treaty. I think that the hon. Gentleman, who is kindly nodding, recognises that, so we shall leave his point.

Mr. Maclennan: Will the Attorney-General deal with the question of ratification of the treaty and section 6 of the European Assembly Elections Act 1978, which requires the approval of Parliament? The social protocol is a treaty like any other. Will he state whether, in his view, clause 1(2), which refers to the treaty, not to the treaty and the protocol, is referring to the protocol, because the advice that I gave earlier is that it does not? Therefore, the protocol cannot under domestic law be ratified if amendment No. 27 is passed.

The Attorney-General: The hon. Gentleman would be taking me slightly off course if I answered that question immediately, but I shall answer it, and clearly. Just to give the hon. Gentleman a quick foretaste, I am absolutely satisfied that clause 1(2) covers that matter comprehensively, but I shall return to it in more detail. I shall give way to the hon. Member for Ashfield, because I mentioned him earlier.

Mr. Hoon: Does the Attorney-General believe that it is possible for the Government to ratify the protocol on social policy if Parliament has specifically excluded it from incorporation into domestic law?

The Attorney-General: Yes is the answer. The hon. Gentleman will know that that must be my answer. Our obligation is to incorporate into domestic law those portions of the treaty that give rise to obligations on the United Kingdom. As the hon. Gentleman will realise, the social protocol expressly states that it does not affect domestic law.

Sir Teddy Taylor: As the Attorney-General has answered fairly, can he help the House by saying when there was a precedent of the Government ratifying part of a treaty which the House of Commons has specifically voted to exclude? It would be helpful if we knew when that last happened.

The Attorney-General: My hon. Friend has probably given more thought than anyone else to the Bill, but, with respect, he should think more precisely. He said that the House has voted to exclude the social protocol from the treaty. That is not correct. If the Committee were to pass amendment No. 27 it would have voted merely not to incorporate the social protocol into domestic law. It must be clear to my hon. Friend and to the Committee—I say this with all respect—that nothing we can do in the Committee can amend the treaty. The treaty can only——

Sir Teddy Taylor: When did it last happen? Has it ever happened?

Several hon. Members *rose*——

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means: Order. If the right hon. and learned Member who has the floor does not give way, other hon. Members know that they must resume their seats.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Has it ever happened before?

The Attorney-General: I do not know the answer to that question, but I do not believe that it is of constitutional importance.

Mr. Cash: Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

The Attorney-General: No, if my hon. Friend will forgive me, I must make a little progress. I want to deal with three other points, including that raised by the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland.

7.45 pm

A number of hon. Members asked about the obligation to share administrative costs of action by the other 11 countries, which is referred to in the social protocol. My view is that the obligation to share those administrative costs is covered by the listing of the own resources decision in section 1 (2) of the European Communities Act 1972 —I believe that this point is of some interest to the House —assuming that such expenses are included, as seems likely, within the Community budget.

If, however, such expenses were not called forward in the Community budget as a whole, in which case there would be the authority that I have just mentioned, expenditure could be made on the authority of votes and on the authority of the annual Appropriation Act alone. In giving authority for that particular expenditure in relation to a treaty obligation, the House will be following exactly the same practice as we follow, for example, in relation to payments to NATO and similar treaties.

The second point is that there is no constitutional impropriety in continuing with ratification if amendment No. 27 is passed. My answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir. T. Taylor) made it clear that Parliament cannot pick and choose which treaty obligations to accept, but it can prevent ratification of the entire treaty by refusing to enact the Bill.

I deal now with the issue raised by the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland who mentioned the opinion received by the right hon. Member the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown). There can be no question of increasing the powers of the European Parliament without prior approval from the United Kingdom in accordance with the European Parliamentary Elections Act 1978. However, I draw to the hon. Gentleman's attention the fact that clause 1(2), if enacted, would approve the entire Maastricht treaty for that purpose. I invite all hon. Members to read the extremely clear and broad terms of clause 1 (2). I am satisfied that they cover that particular point.

Mr. Maclennan: This is the heart of the question. The matter is not as clear as the Attorney-General has sought to make out. In the terms of clause 1(2), the reference to the "Treaty on European Union" is to be interpreted as including the protocol. I say that because it is clear from clause 1(1), which includes the protocol, that the language is explicit and refers to all the protocols adopted at Maastricht. That is a key question.

It is also clear from the language of the treaty that the protocol was adopted as a separate instrument and was annexed to the treaty. Passage was to be considered to be without prejudice to the treaty. I find the Attorney-General's rather glib answer on the point wholly unconvincing, as I believe will many lawyers.

It is not satisfactory to suggest that the Committee has abided properly by the requirements of section 6 of the European Assembly Elections Act 1978. All that the Attorney-General is doing is inviting others to table amendments similar to those tabled for clause 1(1) in respect of clause 1(2) to put the matter beyond any doubt. The Attorney-General does not escape from the trap that he has sprung for himself.

The Attorney-General: I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman is in a good position to start talking about traps being sprung for people. He will be aware that his right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil has now sent my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister three letters on this matter. From the first letter, it seemed pretty clear that the right hon. Member for Yeovil had not read the Bill. Neither the letter nor the advice appended to it made any reference to clause 1(2).

I remind the Committee that clause 1(2) says:

> "For the purpose of section 6 of the European Parliamentary Elections Act 1978 (approval of treaties increasing the Parliament's powers) the Treaty on European Union signed at Maastricht on 7th February 1992 is approved."

The protocols were signed at Maastricht on 7 February 1992. They were all signed at the same time.

Mr. Maclennan: There were separate signatures.

The Attorney-General: Yes, it is true that there were separate signatures. The hon. Gentleman should also bear it in mind that the protocols signed at Maastricht are expressly annexed to the treaty of Rome. He should also bear it in mind that article 239 of the treaty of Rome says:

> "The Protocols annexed to this Treaty by common accord of the Member States shall form an integral part thereof."

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who has written to the right hon. Member for Yeovil on more than one occasion, has endeavoured to explain in his letter, the provisions of clause 1(1) and the provisions of clause 1(2) perform entirely different functions.

Clause 1(1) deals with the provisions of the treaty that require to be incorporated into our domestic law. It is clause 1(2) which provides the necessary parliamentary approval, for the purpose of section 6 of the European Assembly Elections Act 1978, for the whole of the treaty on European union. I emphasise that it is for the whole of that treaty.

Mr. Maclennan: I am grateful to the Attorney-General for giving way and I shall not weary him or the Committee again on this point. The Attorney-General cites the case of the treaty of Rome and the protocols thereto being integral. By so doing, he underlines the precise difference between the treaty of Rome and its protocols and the treaty of Maastricht and its protocols. There is no statement in the treaty of Maastricht that its protocols are integral. Indeed, the treaty expressly says:

> "this Protocol and the said Agreement are without prejudice to the provisions of this Treaty".

That emphasises the independent character as an international agreement for the purposes of section 6 of the 1978 Act. I am afraid to say that the Attorney-General, far from clearing up the matter, has left the position more confused.

The Attorney-General: I say with respect to the hon. Gentleman that the situation may be worse confounded in his mind. I believe that the position will be clearer to those who look at the matter carefully and dispassionately. I simply point out that the protocol on social policy says at item 3:

> "This Protocol shall be annexed to the Treaty establishing the European Community."

If the hon. Gentleman reads that in conjunction with article 239, which I have just quoted to the Committee, he will see that it becomes an integral part of the treaty of Rome on ratification. I believe that that matter puts the question beyond doubt. There are a number of other arguments that I could deploy, but it would probably be unhelpful for me to go further at this moment.

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): Is the Attorney-General saying that, if clause 1(2) were to be amended specifically to exclude the protocol on social policy, it will be impossible for the Government to ratify that protocol?

The Attorney-General: The hon. Gentleman asks a hypothetical question. I have said that if amendments are tabled and if the Committee needs assistance in future, I shall be prepared to consider the matter and to give what help I can. The position must be clear from what I have already said. If the hon. Gentleman had been in the Chamber and listening, he would have heard me say that if the great majority of amendments were passed, they would render it possible for the Government to ratify the treaty. It is not altogether surprising that the hon. Gentleman may be able to dream up one or two others which would make it possible to wreck the treaty, if that was his intention and that of his hon. Friends.

Mr. Macdonald: The question is not hypothetical because I tabled such an amendment earlier this evening. If the amendment is selected, voted on and agreed to by the Committee, would it be impossible for the Government to ratify the protocol on social policy, if that protocol were specifically to be excluded from clause 1(2)?

The Attorney-General: I have sufficient respect for the hon. Gentleman's amendment to say that I should have to look at it before expressing an opinion. He will, of course, have to consider how popular his amendment is with his hon. Friends and whether it is a matter that he wishes to press to a conclusion.

I have covered many points this evening. If I look quickly at my notes, I can see whether any other matters have been raised.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): The Attorney-General is arguing that the social protocol does not affect British domestic law. Let us take the example of a United Kingdom national working for a United Kingdom company who acquires rights while working for that company in one of the other 11 states. Let us suppose that that person returns to the United Kingdom and wishes to enforce in the United Kingdom rights that have come as a result of the social chapter. Surely that means that the social chapter would have created rights that were enforceable in British domestic law. Surely what the chapter does is to exclude the United Kingdom Government from implementing matters in the social chapter. What it does not do is to exclude the creation of rights inside the Community which may be enforceable in the United Kingdom domestic courts. It therefore has an effect on British domestic law.

The Attorney-General: I recommend the hon. Gentleman to look once again at the social protocol. He will realise that the hypothetical position that he has proposed would have been a result of acts adopted by the Council under the social chapter. The protocol on social policy says absolutely expressly:

> "Acts adopted by the Council and any financial consequences other than administrative costs . . . shall not be applicable to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland."

I believe that that answers the hon. Gentleman's question perfectly clearly.

I have just a few more points to make before I sit down. My hon. Friend the Member for Worcester asked whether there were other protocols which, if we did not annex them, might not render it impossible for us to ratify the treaty. I have given an indication of a certain number of those. I have given a general indication as to the guidance which the Committee might seek in deciding upon particular amendments, and I hope that that is of assistance.

Mr. Donald Anderson: The Attorney-General has given a very learned and weighty opinion. Has that opinion convinced the Foreign Office legal advisers of the error of their original opinion?

The Attorney-General: I think that that is unkind, and I can tell the House that I have had an enormous amount of assistance from the Foreign Office legal advisers. They agree with the opinion that the Lord Advocate and I have given to the Committee.

Mr. George Robertson *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The House proceeded to a Division:—

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Hastings and Rye) *(seated and covered):* On a point of order, Dame Janet. I should like to protest most strongly, because I wanted to take part in this debate of prime constitutional importance, but the Labour party has denied me that opportunity.

The Second Deputy Chairman: I have accepted the closure, so there is no further discussion.

The Committee proceeded to a Division; but no Member being willing to act as Teller for the Noes, The SECOND DEPUTY CHAIRMAN *declared that the Ayes had it.*

Question put accordingly and agreed to.

Committee report progress

The Second Deputy Chairman: To sit again what day? —*[Interruption.]* I repeat, Committee what day? [HON. MEMBERS: "Now"] No, it cannot be now. Thursday?

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): Thursday week.

The Second Deputy Chairman: We must have an answer from an hon. Member who acts on behalf of the Government.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Christmas Day.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling): Tomorrow.

The Second Deputy Chairman: I hope that we are now clear that the Committee will sit again tomorrow.

Committee to sit again tomorrow.

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

PUBLIC PATH ORDERS

That the draft Local Authorities (Recovery of Costs for Public Path Orders) Regulations 1993, which were laid before this House on 18th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

FISH (POLLUTION)

That the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Oil and Chemical Pollution of Fish) (No. 2) Order 1993 (S.I., 1993, No. 143), dated 27th January 1993, a copy of which was laid before this House on 28th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

Question agreed to. [Interruption.]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. Before we go on to the next Order of the Day, may I ask for a little peace and quiet?

European Community Documents

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees.).

FEEDING STUFFS (NUTRITIONAL PURPOSES)

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 8412/92, relating to feedingstuffs for particular nutritional purposes, and supports the Government's aims of seeking to clarify the scope of and justification for the proposed measure, and of ensuring that any measures which may be agreed place no unjustifiable burdens on pet food companies or other sectors of the feed industry.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

Question agreed to.

Adjournment

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

8.6 pm

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I understand that the Adjournment is in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Bates). My hon. Friend and I put in for this Adjournment and, as my colleague is not here, I was wondering whether I could start without him.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am afraid that the answer is absolutely no.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Since it is just 8 pm, may I have an Adjournment on the terms of reference of Lord Justice Scott's report? I note that the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the right hon. and learned Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg) is present, and he is always willing to be obliging. If I were to initiate as debate on Lord Justice Scott's terms of reference, perhaps he could answer it. Do I take it that that is in order?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is in error. It is not in order. I must now put the Question.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seven minutes past Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 23 February 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

"The Health of the Nation"

1. **Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on progress in implementing the proposals contained in the White Paper "The Health of the Nation".

7. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps have been taken to implement the proposal in "The Health of the Nation" to consider policies other than those of her Department in respect of their health implications.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): We are implementing "The Health of the Nation" in full, and a summary of current action and initiatives is in the Library. The ministerial Cabinet Committee set up to oversee implementation of the health strategy ensures that it is taken forward on a cross-departmental basis. The guidance on how health issues can be taken into account during policy development will be ready later this year.

Mr. Jenkin: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the health of the nation, and of constituencies such as mine in North Colchester, will benefit from the reforms of London's health service that she announced last week because we shall be able to look forward to a fairer share of the region's resources, of which we have been deprived in recent years? May I draw her attention to the press release issued by North East Thames regional health authority, which made no mention of those benefits to my constituents?

Mrs. Bottomley: I thank my hon. Friend and fully agree with his remarks. The firm action that we set out last week for radical change in London will mean a fairer distribution of resources in London, directing them to primary care, and also a more equitable distribution of resources throughout the country. Generally, it is a policy which will improve the allocation of resources throughout the health service. As my hon. Friend comes from a constituency which has long subsidised excessive provision in London, he is one of many Members who stand to benefit.

Mr. Gerrard: The White Paper acknowledges that there are close links between poor housing and unemployment and poor health. Government policies should take that into account. Can the Minister tell us precisely what her Department is doing to persuade the Department of the Environment that it ought to spend more to improve housing and not less, and to persuade the Department of Employment that creating real jobs is not merely good economic sense but is good for people's health?

Mrs. Bottomley: The great significance of the health strategy is that a Cabinet Committee oversees progress in meeting the targets. My Department is ensuring full implementation of the general practitioner contract—the Labour party voted against it—which is providing deprivation payments for inner city areas and has resulted in great progress with immunisation and cancer screening targets. There have been improvements in health throughout the country for all social groups, and that is the health strategy which we shall continue to carry forward.

Dr. Liam Fox: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that "The Health of the Nation" is a world model for a complete health policy? In congratulating her, may I ask her to consider the mechanism of health funding so that we can perhaps have a system in which funding allocated for the health service is more closely matched to the targets that we have set for ourselves?

Mrs. Bottomley: I can confirm my hon. Friend's remarks; the health strategy was commended by Dr. Asvall, the European director of the World Health Organisation, as a model which he would like others to follow. I was talking today about the importance of purchasing and the role of district health authorities. We are proceeding with those changes precisely so that health authorities can achieve the targets set out in "The Health of the Nation". We are confident about the activities of national health service trusts. The task now is to ensure that purchasers commission health care on behalf of local residents which meets the targets set out in the health strategy.

Ms. Eagle: Does the Secretary of State admit that there are connections between poverty rates, the rate of unemployment and ill health? What is her Department doing? What representations is it making to other Departments to cut unemployment and poverty, to increase the nation's health in a meaningful way?

Mrs. Bottomley: As I have made clear, the health strategy is overseen by a Cabinet Committee in which the contribution of different Departments is identified so that, together, we can meet the targets set out in "The Health of the Nation". The White Paper makes it clear that there are associations between, for example, matters of the environment. That is why the inner-city policies are so important and that is why taking forward improvements in housing is so important.

Over and above all that, the Labour party has failed to explain why it opposed the new general practitioner contract which has resulted in improvements for all social groups in all parts of the country. Above all, it has resulted in the introduction of deprivation payments for GPs in inner-city areas.

Health Care (Rural Areas)

2. **Mr. Ancram:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to promote improved health care in rural areas.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Tom Sackville): Health authorities have a responsibility for securing services to meet the needs of local people regardless of whether they live in rural or urban areas. We have encouraged health authorities to develop local purchasing to ensure greater sensitivity to the needs of individual communities.

Mr. Ancram: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Is he aware that community health care, such as the provision of local hospitals, is especially important in widespread rural areas such as my constituency? Will he encourage the purchasing authorities to recognise that fact in their purchasing policies, perhaps by himself recognising the additional cost of providing health care in rural areas such as mine?

Mr. Sackville: The Government are well aware of the need to preserve the fabric of the countryside, which involves not only transport and jobs, but local health services and taking those services as close to people as possible. My hon. Friend will know that over the past few years £4·5 million has been spent on improving and updating the community hospitals in Malmesbury, Corsham, Warminster and Westbury. Furthermore, £8 million is to be spent over the next few years on redeveloping the St. Andrew's site at Chippenham.

Mr. Denham: Does the Minister accept that there would be a great deal more money for the improvement of health services in rural areas and in many other areas if national health service funds were not wasted? Why has the Department done so little to sort out the scandal in Wessex regional health authority? Tory Ministers have appointed Tory friends to be chairmen of health authorities, and they have been lobbied by Tory Members to give contracts to companies run by friends of the Tory party. Some £40 million is being wasted. Why has the Minister done nothing about that scandal and why have his predecessors done nothing?

Mr. Sackville: I can assure the House that very tight controls are now in place to monitor the procurement of information technology and other equipment. The hon. Gentleman talks about waste. I remind him that, despite limitations on finance, we have put a great deal of money into the health service in recent years. The activity figures continue to go up, more patients are treated and there are more nurses and doctors. Waste is something which we do not recognise.

GP Fund Holders

3. **Sir Roger Moate:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on progress in the number of GP fund holders.

6. **Mr. Jack Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the savings achieved by general practitioners who are fund holders.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Increasing numbers wish to join the scheme. More than 3,000 GPs in 585 practices are now fund holders. A further 600 practices join the third wave this April, when one in four of the population should be covered by fund holding. Overall, fund holders made efficiency savings of between 3 and 4 per cent. on their budgets in 1991-92, which will be ploughed back into patient care.

Sir Roger Moate: Has my right hon. Friend seen the survey reported in *Doctor* magazine which shows that 70 per cent. of GP fund holders have already managed to cut waiting times for their patients? Is it not extraordinary that the Labour party should seek to abolish fund holding altogether, when more and more GPs are seeking to become fund holders, when there is ample evidence of growing patient satisfaction with GP fund holding and when we need to extend fund holding even more widely?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend is exactly right: it is positively bizarre that the Labour party should choose to shun a scheme which is leading to such clear advantages for patients, showing the way in which innovative and pioneering patient care can be organised. I noticed the survey in the *Doctor* magazine. The same survey shows that more than 60 per cent. of fund holders reported improved follow-up arrangements for appointments, more than 50 per cent. were providing extra services in their surgeries and almost 40 per cent. had introduced consultant visits. All those are real improvements for patients of fund holders which the Labour party—as ever, with its politics of spite and envy—wants to abolish.

Mr. Jack Thompson: Is the Secretary of State aware that 30 GP fund holders have made a profit of about £100,000 by establishing limited companies? Is she also aware that 11·2 per cent. of GP fund holders made a profit of £12·8 million in 1991-92? What evidence can she produce to the House that the money is being returned to the district health authorities for patient care?

Mrs. Bottomley: What I have seen is the most deplorable document produced by the Labour party with the most inaccurate data one could believe possible. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) suggested that he wanted the spirit of intellectual renewal in the Labour party. The document on which the information is based has double and treble-counted a great number of the elements. The local element of management allowance is counted three times. Everything else that is covered by the management allowance is counted twice and the Audit Commission component is counted twice. It is the most deplorable document. What I can make clear to the House is that the savings from the GP fund-holding scheme have been ploughed back into better patient care.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Does my right hon. Friend recall the quite outstandingly excellent practice in the southern end of my constituency which has done absolutely everything the Minister could possibly want? That practice has every person in the area—there is absolutely no one else that the practice can get—but it has only 6,500 patients. Will my right hon. Friend stretch the limit and allow the GPs in that practice to become fund holders, which they feel is the only way forward for them in already excellent conditions?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend, as ever, speaks for a great number of general practitioners and their practices in the United Kingdom. The success of the fund-holding scheme is being admired and emulated by many others. We have been able to find new ways of developing the scheme. Recently, I announced that the scheme would be extended to diagnostic and further surgical techniques. This year, we shall introduce the use of community nurses and it may well be that at a later date we shall be able to reduce the numbers required to join the scheme. I know that that will receive a warm welcome from many hon. Members in the House.

Mr. McCartney: We have just heard a rant from the Del Girl of health economics. The Labour party report on GP fund holders was based on information provided by family health services authorities—information which the Government want to keep secret. The truth is that nearly £100 million in the first wave has been spent trying to bring GPs into line in terms of the fund-holding policy. That money was top-sliced from patient care. Thirty companies have been set up and have raided patient care funds to the tune of over £100,000. At the same time, for example, in Manchester 32 seriously ill children have been turned away from Booth Hall children's hospital since October because it has run out of money. When will the Secretary of State stop top-slicing hospital authorities to give resources to GP fund holders and implement the Labour party policy of joint commissioning, which is much more successful in both funding and care for patients?

Mrs. Bottomley: The overall cost of the fund-holding scheme is about £40,000 per year, which is about 2 per cent. of the budget set. There can be no doubt at all that that has resulted in much better patient care and a great spirit of innovation across general practice overall.

The report to which the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) referred is positively bizarre. It mentions people such as Dr. Paul Lambden. I quote from him elsewhere:

> "I remain as convinced as ever that GPs should have financial as well as clinical responsibility for their patients . . . fundholders are pragmatic and dynamic. As time goes by Trusts will come to understand the value of fundholding . . . The scheme is undeniably excellent."

There is no doubt at all that fund holders have developed excellent services.

The hon. Member for Makerfield referred to the difficulties that some hospitals have had in managing their budgets through the year. Those hospitals need to learn from the way in which fund holders have diligently and shrewdly managed their budgets. Instead of begrudging fund holders, hospitals should admire them. We believe in levelling up, not—like the Labour party—in levelling down.

Mr. Hayes: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is either incompetent or downright fraudulent for the Opposition suddenly to claim that GP fund holders are getting an extra £44,000 a year—which, of course, is being spent on patient care—when only a few months ago they were saying that there would not be enough money to treat patients?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend, as ever, is right. He and I will recall that in Committee the Opposition were always saying that fund holders would be too mean to provide care for their patients. Now they spend all their time saying that the care that fund holders provide for their patients is too good. The Opposition always want to have it both ways. The fact is that the fund-holding scheme —a voluntary scheme—has been a great success. We want all GPs to have the same benefits as the fund holders.

Prescription Charges

4. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to exempt youth training scheme trainees from prescription charges.

The Minister for Health (Dr. Brian Mawhinney): Help with national health charges, including those for prescriptions, is already available under the NHS low income scheme and is directed towards people, including youth training scheme trainees, who may have the greatest difficulty in paying. The scheme ensures that no one need be deterred from obtaining necessary medication on financial grounds.

Mr. Miller: Does the Minister agree that it is outrageous that my constituent, Catherine Ormerod, who suffers from a life-threatening illness, should have to choose which medicines she takes? Does he further agree that, but for the good will of pensioners, shop stewards and friends, she would still not be able to afford the season ticket? Is it not about time we saw the same good will from the Department of Health as we see from the people of Ellesmere Port and Neston who have helped my constituent?

Dr. Mawhinney: The hon. Gentleman had a full explanation of these matters in a letter from me dated 15 December——

Mr. Miller: Four lines.

Dr. Mawhinney: It was not four lines, as the hon. Gentleman well knows.

He also had a letter from the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville). In both those letters it was explained to him —but I shall explain it again—that YTS trainees have an income, which may well be supplemented by employers, in which case, like everyone else of relatively low income, they are considered under the NHS low income scheme. I have to tell the hon. Gentleman, although he clearly does not want to accept it, that in this case age is not a relevant factor.

Dame Jill Knight: Will my hon. Friend confirm that even those patients who have no exemption at all from the prescription charge, which I understand is in excess of £4, are paying considerably less than the true cost of the prescription, which I understand is about £9?

Dr. Mawhinney: My hon. Friend is right to point out that the prescription charge is much less than the average cost of the prescription to the NHS.

Mr. Chisholm: Will the Minister take this opportunity to deny the recent report that pregnant women and women with children under one year old will no longer receive free prescriptions? Is it not enough for the Government to have raised prescription charges by 2,000 per cent. without imposing that burden on 1 million extra women?

Dr. Mawhinney: The hon. Gentleman and his question would be taken slightly more seriously by the House if his question had some vague rigour. He knows perfectly well that there was no recommendation or report in the terms that he has described. He is referring to the Bloomfield report, which looked at the system of remuneration for dentists. That report is out for consultation and we shall bring forward proposals in due course.

Community Care

5. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to ensure that the clients of community care services have a wide degree of choice over services which they are to receive.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Tim Yeo): New assessment arrangements will ensure that individual users and carers are fully involved in deciding how their needs can best be met. Public funding will be available for a wider range of services from an increasing range of suppliers. Those requiring residential or nursing home care at public expense will have the right to choose their own home, subject to certain practical limitations on cost and suitability.

Mr. Arnold: Are not competition and choice the best way to achieve standards and services both in the national health service and in community care? Is it a coincidence that Conservative authorities such as Kent county council are already well under way with that, to the benefit of the clients that they will be serving?

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend is right. The Government are promoting competition and choice both through the requirement that local authorities spend 85 per cent. of the money transferred from the Department of Social Security purchasing services in the independent sector and through the binding direction requiring local authorities to honour individual preferences in the choice of residential home. The real way to promote competition, choice and higher standards will be to vote Conservative in the county council elections on 6 May so that there will be more excellent county councils such as Tory-controlled Kent county council.

Mr. Alfred Morris: Does the Minister accept that severely disabled people should have choice and freedom to make their own arrangements for personal care? For that to happen, local authorities must be empowered and adequately resourced to make direct payments which relate to individual need.

Mr. Yeo: The right hon. Gentleman makes a point which has been canvassed before in the House. The cornerstone of our community care changes in April is placing the wishes and needs of individual users of services at the heart of the decision-making progress when the assessment is made. That will ensure that far greater attention than can be paid under the present system will be devoted to the personal needs of each individual who approaches his or her social services department. Further, it is our intention that individual needs should include much better consideration of alternatives to residential care. In future, it is far more likely that people approaching social services departments will be given a package of domiciliary, day or respite care services to keep them in their own homes for longer than was previously possible.

Mr. Sims: Does my hon. Friend agree that in the provision of sheltered housing, special needs housing such as that for the disabled, and what is often referred to as part 2½ accommodation, housing associations have an important role to play in community care policies? Will my hon. Friend ensure that housing associations are fully involved in the preparation and implementation of community care plans?

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend raises an important point. We certainly want to see all local authority social services departments in close consultation with housing associations and with many other bodies. One of the biggest difficulties that we have encountered in making the necessary preparations for the changes is that too many Labour-controlled authorities refuse to engage even in a proper dialogue with independent sector providers of all kinds of care and services. That is why we had to issue a further direction, requiring consultation to take place and authorities to state in their community care plans in future how they will consult independent sector bodies.

Mr. Hinchliffe: How does the concept of choice square with denying the right to advocacy by not fully implementing the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986? How does it square with denying the right to choose good quality public services, and with telling local authorities not to record unmet need during the assessment process? The Minister talks about giving people the right to choose which home they will enter—what about giving them the right to choose not to enter a home in the first place? Is that not the real issue which the Government ought to be addressing?

Mr. Yeo: It is indeed the real issue, and the Government are addressing it. For that reason, every local authority will be required in future to make an assessment of the individual's needs before he or she enters residential care. The exact weakness of the present system is that it is possible to obtain an automatic social security payment to finance a person's entry into residential care. In future, there will be much more detailed consideration of individual needs, so that there will be a good chance that a person who might otherwise have entered a residential nursing home will receive a package of individually tailored domiciliary, day and respite care services. I only hope that Labour-controlled authorities will address that issue rather more successfully than Sheffield city council, which is currently diverting resources from social services into payment for the provision of offices for Labour Members of Parliament.

Limited List Prescribing

8. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate she has of the impact of her proposal to introduce a further limited list of pharmaceuticals available for prescription under the national health service on investment in research and development by the pharmaceutical industry.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The British pharmaceutical industry is a major international success story, accounting for nearly 10 per cent. of global pharmaceutical research and development, and contributing a positive trade balance of over £1 billion. I welcome the fact that the industry recognises the need to reduce the NHS drugs bill, which is expected to rise by over 14 per cent. this year. I also welcome its co-operation in the work that we are taking forward.

Decisions on research and development investment depend on many factors. It is not possible to identify specifically the impact of the proposed extension of the selected list.

Mr. Viggers: Does my right hon. Friend agree that our pharmaceutical industry can be rightly proud of its record in research and development? Has the Department carried out a survey of comparative costs, and the cost saving in the NHS that has resulted from its treating patients with drugs rather than taking up hospital beds? Is my right hon. Friend prepared to meet representatives of Cyanamid, which is the largest civilian employer in my constituency? Its current development plans are being held up because it is concerned about future profitability.

Mrs. Bottomley: I certainly commend the United Kingdom pharmaceutical industry. It is, as I have said, an important industry: two of the world's largest pharmaceutical companies are United Kingdom-based.

My hon. Friend has made an important point. We want to encourage the pharmaceutical industry to assess the cost effectiveness of new products and the contribution that they make to improving health care generally. We are making good progress on health technology assessment and we hope soon to commission a code of practice for economic assessment in clinical trials.

Ms. Primarolo: Is the Secretary of State aware that the contraceptive pill is included in the 10 categories being considered for inclusion in the extended limited list? Is she aware that 3 million women take the oral contraceptive pill, which is 95 per cent. effective? The reduction in availability of the pill will force women to change to other forms of contraception and will lead to an increase in the number of unwanted pregnancies and abortions. Will the right hon. Lady make a statement to the House, agreeing to withdraw contraceptive pills from the 10 categories?

Mrs. Bottomley: Contraceptive pills are free for all women, regardless of means. We are seeking to ensure that all therapeutic categories are safeguarded, but the health service should not fund products that are too costly and have no unique therapeutic value.

The hon. Lady's question is typical of the Labour party's attitude. Labour always shuns or ducks difficult issues. In 1985, when we last introduced a selective list, Labour adopted the same scaremongering approach. It has cried wolf too often. We shall ensure that therapeutic categories are covered, but, in a year when pay increases are being held at 1·5 per cent., we are determined to consider all the options in seeking cost-effective health care.

Sir John Hannam: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the drug wastage that results from the present system of repeat prescription, whereby a three-month supply of drugs is dispensed in one go? Will she consider the triple-prescription scheme proposed by the pharmacists, under which drugs would be dispensed only on a month-by-month basis?

Mrs. Bottomley: I am determined to examine any way in which we can eliminate waste. We spend £100 million a day on the NHS and eliminating waste is the secret of providing ever higher standards of cost-effective care. I appreciate the pharmacists' suggestion: they are an enormously important member of the health-care team and I greatly respect their particular knowledge and skill. I shall explore the suggestion later.

Ambulance Service

9. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information she routinely obtains about the ambulance service.

Mr. Sackville: Health authorities and national health service trusts provide annual returns on ambulance staff numbers, the number and nature of patient journeys and emergency response times, as well as a range of financial information.

Mr. Lloyd: Is it not a disgrace that we had to learn from a leaked document that ambulance stations—for instance, the Sharston ambulance station, which is the closest to Manchester airport—have been closed because of shortage of staff? I understand that the Minister had a recent meeting with the ambulance service in Greater Manchester. Did he receive from the people there a guarantee that all ambulance stations near the airport will be kept open to ensure that, in the event of a disaster, front-line services will be available?

Mr. Sackville: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that adequate arrangements will be made for Manchester airport. He should know that the real test of Greater Manchester's ambulance service is that it achieved a response rate of 97 per cent. of calls met within 14 minutes, making it one of the best ambulance services in the country.

Mr. Tracey: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the London ambulance service is getting £70 million in the current year and that one could conclude that the public are not getting a very good return for that investment? When will my hon. Friend do something positive to improve the disgraceful London ambulance service?

Mr. Sackville: My hon. Friend will know that the publication of a report of the London ambulance service is imminent. We believe that lessons will have been learnt from the events of late last year. We are confident that performance can be improved. As my hon. Friend has indicated, a large amount of money is spent on the LAS and there is no reason why it should not match performance in the rest of the country.

Ms. Lynne: Will the Minister now recognise that the ambulance service should be treated in the same way as the fire and police services by being given emergency-service status?

Mr. Sackville: The hon. Lady will be aware that there has been a transformation in the performance of ambulance services in this country. We are very lucky to have probably the most dedicated and professional ambulance personnel anywhere in the world and it is improving all the time. Soon a paramedic will be on every front-line ambulance. That is something of which we should all be proud.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Following the remarks that my hon. Friend has just made, may I ask whether the service is still on target in its intention to have one paramedic on every ambulance by 1995? We have talked about the importance of health services to rural areas. I represent a rural constituency. It is extremely important that the people there can be assured that all ambulances will have a paramedic on board by 1995—earlier, if possible.

Mr. Sackville: I can provide the confirmation that my hon. Friend seeks. Recently I announced that the target date for a paramedic being on every front-line ambulance was being brought forward by one year—from 1996 to 1995—and that adequate funds would be made available for that purpose. Paramedic training has been one of the great success stories of the modern NHS.

NHS Trusts

10. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total remuneration to chairpersons and members of NHS trusts estimated for 1992-93 in England and Wales.

Dr. Mawhinney: The estimated figure for 1992-93 in England is about £8 million. Questions relating to Wales are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. Foulkes: The estimate is £8 million. How many doctors would that employ? How many nurses? How many physiotherapists? How many chiropodists? Is not it the case that this money is being taken away from patient care and stuffed into the pockets of Conservative cronies? Is not that tantamount to corruption?

Dr. Mawhinney: I hope that the hon. Gentleman feels better for getting that off his chest. If we may take his questions literally, it is clear that he would leave the NHS without any oversight, without any public accountability and without any advice about the issues which, throughout Question Time, he and his right hon. and hon. Friends tell us are important.

Mr. Rowe: I am married to a trust member who has been employed by the national health service, in a fully professional capacity, for many years and my experience is that the amount of work expected from members of trusts exceeds by far what was indicated in the prospectus that was dangled in front of them. The work is done conscientiously and late into the night. Will my hon. Friend pay tribute to all those NHS trust members who give far more to the national health service than the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) could possibly imagine?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am happy to pay such tribute, particularly to my hon. Friend's Gentleman's wife who, as he has rightly and objectively said, makes a significant contribution. As to all trust members, they represent the public. They represent the need to put our reforms on a firm footing and they are largely responsible, with doctors, nurses and the rest, for seeing the increase in the number of patients treated, which is the hallmark of the national health service reforms.

Mr. Blunkett: In the light of the Secretary of State's speech earlier today on the continued future for regions and the role of the management executive and outposts, does the Minister agree that this is an admission that the market has failed and that trusts cannot be left to self-governing status? Will he tell the House why we should be expected to pay £8 million a year to place people who are not accountable in any way to their local communities and who are not democratically elected and where central control is now to be exercised? Why the continued dithering and confusion with further reviews? Why are the outposts and regions to continue? Why more money announced today—on top of the £8 million to keep the trust in place, a £4 million announcement to make the system work better? Who is actually running the Department—the Home Secretary, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury or the right hon. Lady?

Dr. Mawhinney: The hon. Gentleman has just confirmed what we all suspected: he neither understands nor appreciates what the national health service reforms are about. The reforms are now widely seen to be successful, and successful against the target that the hon. Gentleman refuses to recognise: that they are good for patients, although not necessarily good for the National Union of Public Employees. More patients are being treated. What my right hon. Friend said this morning, which is absolutely central to the development of the reforms and even better patient care, is that we shall now focus as much attention on developing the purchasing side of the national health service as we have to developing the trust side. As that purchaser-provider split develops, so even more patients will be helped, treated and cared for, and the hon. Gentleman will no doubt continue to be unhappy about that fact.

Dr. Spink: Does my hon. Friend agree that the very essence of the health service debate is the number of patients that we treat each year? Will he tell us the growth in number of patients treated in trust hospitals in 1991-92 and compare that with the growth in number of patients treated in other hospitals? We need to know these facts.

Dr. Mawhinney: My hon. Friend understands these matters much better than Opposition Members. Last year we saw about a 7 per cent. increase in the number of patients treated within the national health service, and in trust hospitals the increase was over 8 per cent. In other words, trust hospitals delivered better patient care, more patient care and a higher quality of patient care than directly managed units. That is why, as my hon. Friend will understand, more hospitals will become trusts in April and even more will become trusts in April 1994, by which time 95 per cent. of all hospital and community units will be trusts. That is the good news that patients want to hear.

Young People (Secure Accommodation)

12. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will outline her Department's strategy for providing secure accommodation for young people who currently have to be held in prison accommodation.

Mr. Yeo: A number of local authorities have already registered an intention to provide some of the 60 to 65 additional secure places that we have assessed as being required nationally. We are continuing to discuss with other authorities how the balance might best be provided.

Mr. Michael: Does the Minister realise that the problem exists now and has existed for many years? It was two years ago that the Government accepted, under pressure from Labour Members and others, the need for secure places to end the scandal of young people being kept in prison accommodation because there was nowhere else for them to be kept, and there remains nowhere else for them to be kept. Two years later his Department has not provided one additional place anywhere in England and Wales. Is it not time that the Government stopped talking about doing something about this problem and started to provide the places?

Mr. Yeo: As the hon. Gentleman supports South Glamorgan county council, which is resisting a proposal to build a secure unit in Wales—it is almost the only Welsh local authority that is doing so—I am amazed that he asked that question. I assure him that no Conservative Member will take any lessons in how to tackle crime from a party that opposed the Public Order Act 1986, the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, the Criminal Justice Act 1987, the Criminal Justice Act 1988, the Prison Security Act 1992 and the Aggravated Vehicle-Taking Act 1992, which banned joyriding. No amount of philosophising by the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) can conceal the fact that Labour always has been soft on crime and always will be. It is always ready to shed crocodile tears for the camera on behalf of victims, but its real and deep sympathy is always for the criminal.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 23 February.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having meetings with ministerial colleagues and others later today.

Dr. Howells: Does the Prime Minister agree that it is one thing to blame the chairman of the Conservative party for having sent advisers to try to help undermine the Democrats' presidential campaign, but that it is quite another for him to try to dodge the blame for illegal searches of Home Office files? Does he accept the blame for those illegal searches, and if he does not will he institute an investigation to find out who conducted them so that he can sack them?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is characteristically wrong on both points. Let me set out the facts for him. No one was sent by the Conservative party to take part in last year's presidential election campaign. Two members of staff were invited privately by people in the Republican party. Their fares were paid by people in the Republican party; they travelled in their own time; and they paid their own personal expenses. Their expenses were not paid by the Conservative party. In contrast, the Labour party sent people, including its deputy leader, to the Democrat headquarters. It is not the least of the tributes to President Clinton that he won the election despite Europe's most frequent losers giving him advice.

The Home Office's press office received inquiries in early October about whether Mr. Clinton had applied for British citizenship. Inquirers were told that, in accordance with normal practice, details about individual applications could not be disclosed to third parties. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will now accept that that is the fact of the matter.

Sir Terence Higgins: As, unlike the previous Labour Government, this Government are not obliged to do what the IMF tells them, will my right hon. Friend take the opportunity in Washington to explain to the IMF that the economic recovery is still fragile, that the size of the public sector borrowing requirement is still due to a large extent to the recession and that an increase in taxation at this stage in the economic cycle would stultify growth and be likely to increase rather than diminish the size of the fiscal deficit?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend, as a former distinguished Treasury Minister, will expect me at this stage of the economic cycle to take note of his comments rather than to respond in detail to them.

Mr. John Smith: Does the Prime Minister appreciate the full significance of the latest figures showing 1 million long-term unemployed? Is it not appalling that 20 per cent. of the long-term unemployed in this country are aged between 18 and 24, many of whom have never had a chance to work?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree with the right hon. and learned Gentleman that the number of long-term unemployed is too high—higher than anyone would wish to see. That is why we are seeking to reduce it. That is why we have put in place the most varied comprehensive programme ever to help people who have been unemployed for six months or more. Next year there will be more than 1,200,000 places on a number of schemes to help the long-term unemployed, including training for work, job clubs, business start-ups and restart courses. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is considering how we might further help the long-term unemployed. I hope that the right hon. and learned Gentleman will be prepared to match his words with action and support any proposals that we may have.

Mr. John Smith: Is it remotely satisfactory that a problem has to reach crisis proportions before it gets on the Government's agenda? Is it not the case that, whatever the Government say or have been doing, unemployment goes up every month? Indeed, it has gone up every single month since the Prime Minister took office. I will give him one simple and practical suggestion. Why does he not let local authorities spend their own money which they have got from asset sales to build homes and put people back to work? He could do it tomorrow. Why does he not do it?

The Prime Minister: If the right hon. and learned Gentleman recalls the autumn statement, he will know that my right hon. Friend increased the amount of local authority assets that could be used and that local authorities underspend the amount that they are permitted to use. If the right hon. and learned Gentleman is so sure that it is this Government's policies that cause unemployment, how can he explain the fact that unemployment is rising right across Europe and the world and that Governments of all complexions, including socialist Governments in France and Spain, face similar problems? If there is an easy answer, why is it that those socialist Governments and others have failed to find it?

Mr. John Smith: Why is it that the Prime Minister fails to understand the deep concerns in this country? Is he aware that, in the context of high and rising unemployment and high and rising crime, it was reported yesterday in *The Daily Telegraph* that only 10 per cent. of the people of this country felt that we were a nation at ease with ourselves? Since the Prime Minister is so good at blaming everyone else, who does he blame for that sad state of affairs?

The Prime Minister: I say categorically to the right hon. and learned Gentleman that I do not fail to understand the problem of unemployment; I understand it very well. That is precisely why, over the last two years, we have put in place extra schemes—training for work, job clubs, job interview guarantees, business start-ups, workshops and restart courses—all to help people who are unemployed to get back into work. While the right hon. and learned Gentleman admits abroad that it is a worldwide problem, he does not have the courage to admit that here. He comes here with only sound bite politics rather than any constructive help.

Mr. Ashby: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the way to improve the unemployment situation is to improve manufacturing industry, not, as the Leader of the Opposition suggests, by allowing local authorities to spend their capital? Does my right hon. Friend accept, further, that in real manufacturing industry—the engineering industry—there are real signs of improvement and activity and that there is increased employment? Will my right hon. Friend see that that improvement continues by ensuring that we do not have increased taxation, that interest rates are kept low and that there is more capital investment and not so much tax on it?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend sets out a number of important points. Quite apart from the present inflation position and level of interest rates, there are a number of other signs that bode well for our competitiveness and for job creation in the future. United Kingdom unit costs are now growing more slowly than those in Japan and Germany. Earnings are growing more slowly than for 25 years, making us more competitive. Export volumes were at record levels at the end of last year. Our share of world trade has stabilised after decades of decline. Productivity is at all-time high levels. Those are the essential ingredients for growing prosperity and secure jobs in the future, and those are what we are seeking to provide.

Q2. **Mr. Fraser:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 23 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Fraser: Is not the Prime Minister appalled by the fact that when the Conservatives took office in 1979, unemployment was just over 1 million and that now the number of people unemployed for more than 12 months is over 1 million? May I suggest that, as he crosses the Atlantic this afternoon, he dips into "Bonfire of the Vanities" and contemplates the extent to which economic trends in this country are beginning to replicate the horrors of cities in the United States, and perhaps he could resolve to give up making excuses during Lent?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman might do well to reflect on the levels of unemployment throughout the Community, now at 17 million. He might show his concern better if he and his party did not oppose every job training scheme that we produce. While he invites me to look into "Bonfire of the Vanities", he might look into affairs in his borough, where there is the highest poll tax in Britain, the largest number of uncollected rents, the largest number of empty properties and where he and his party have brought despair year after year after year.

Mr. Gallie: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the actions of French fishermen today in destroying £10,000 worth of fish en route from Ayr to Germany? Does he recall similar incidents last year, when £30,000 of produce was lost in a similar manner? May we have an assurance that he will approach the French Government to make sure that the culprits are brought to justice and that compensation is paid to all in Britain who lose out in such circumstances?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes the point. Officials have already lodged protests with the French authorities about the incidents in Roscoff during the weekend. We shall continue to leave the French Government in no doubt that we expect them to act where necessary to safeguard free trade, to pay compensation when losses have occurred and to bring the perpetrators to book. I hope that that will satisfy my hon. Friend.

Q3. **Mr. Enright:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 23 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Enright: If a principal duty of a Government is the prevention of crime, have not the present Government failed spectacularly? Should not the Prime Minister immediately announce the establishment of a royal commission to make urgent proposals on the subject? Or will he just watch the downward spiral continue with the gaze of the dog that does not understand?

The Prime Minister: As I arrived today, the Under-Secretary of State for Health was setting out a list of measures designed to deal with crime that the Opposition had opposed. To illustrate its depth of concern about the matter, the Labour party had 155 words on the subject of crime in its election manifesto. By contrast, since 1979 we have increased the maximum penalty for trafficking in hard drugs to life imprisonment; introduced a power to confiscate drug traffickers' and other criminals' assets, against the opposition of the Labour party; increased maximum penalties for carrying firearms to life imprisonment, for cruelty to children to 10 years and for insider dealing to seven years. I will take Opposition Members seriously on matters of crime when they support, for example, the prevention of terrorism Acts, and we shall give them an opportunity to do that within a few days.

Mr. Luff: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the plans by Jaguar Cars to invest £500 million in the production of a new car at Coventry and of the increases in production planned by Rover Cars, including the excellent Land-Rover Discovery car, which many hon. Members are proud to drive? Does he agree that that is excellent news for the west midlands and the whole British motor vehicle industry?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend and I am—of course—aware of the large investments by Jaguar and Rover. Not only is that excellent news for the motor industry and the west midlands, but it demonstrates the continuing commitment to the United Kingdom as a key manufacturing base by Jaguar's parent company, Ford. The British motor industry was a relic of an industry 15 years ago. It is now profitable, expanding and exporting as a result of our policies.

Q4. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 23 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Beith: Why does the Prime Minister think that the long list of measures that he has just read out, and which his Government have successfully carried through the House to deal with crime and juvenile crime, has simply not worked? Could it be that crime has become too easy, that violence has become too much the theme of television and videos, that respect for other people has gone too much out of fashion and that too many young people see no stake for themselves in society but see more of a future in crime and the black economy? Does the Prime Minister not have to reach out beyond any one party in order to tackle such issues?

The Prime Minister: I agree with much of what the right hon. Gentleman had to say a moment ago, and I addressed a good deal of that in a speech a fortnight or so ago. There is a responsibility that spreads far beyond any Government. It most explicitly includes a responsibility within the family circle. It most expressly includes the churches and it most expressly includes the schools to ensure that there is no truancy. Those children who truant are far more likely to be involved in juvenile crime. It is for those reasons that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary will be introducing measures to deal with juvenile crime very shortly.

Belfast, West (Election)

Madam Speaker: I have a statement to make to the House.

I have to inform the House that, as required by section 144 of the Representation of the People Act 1983, I have received the certificate and report of the election court in the case of the petition alleging corrupt and illegal practices in the Belfast, West constituency election of 9 April last.

The judges have determined that the petition be dismissed, and that the hon. Member for that constituency was duly returned at the said election. I shall lay both documents on the Table, together with the shorthand writer's note, and will cause the full text of the two documents to be entered in the Journal.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Will you confirm that it is entirely a matter for the House to decide on the progress or otherwise of any Bill and that as, so far at least, we remain an independent country, it is certainly not for those abroad, whoever they may be and whatever high authority they may have—be they Chancellor Kohl or anyone else—to tell us how to go about our business? Will you confirm that, because it would be most unfortunate if there were any feelings in the House that pressure is being applied from outside the country by Heads of Government to influence how and when we should decide on the Maastricht Bill?

Madam Speaker: I do not think that any of us in the House, including all 651 Members, give any thought to what anyone else says outside about the way we proceed. It is for the House itself—all 651 of us—to decide what we are going to do.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Although I very much welcome the Prime Minister's remarks on the disgraceful blockading of fish by the French, is it possible for a statement to be made in the House today on the precise action that the Government will take, in view of the mounting anger of fishermen and fish merchants, especially in Cornwall, who find that they cannot get their fish to France?

Madam Speaker: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not seeking a continuation of Prime Minister's Question Time, but I have no doubt that those on the Government Front Bench have heard what he has to say.

Mr. David Jamieson (Plymouth, Devonport): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. Has the Minister of Agriculture asked to come to the House to make a statement about the disgraceful actions yesterday of French fishermen in Roskoff, who have caused the suspension of the ferry service from Plymouth which takes our exports abroad?

Madam Speaker: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I have just given.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will recall that, on 3 December last, I had to bring to the attention of the House the fact that the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) had been using pre-paid stationery in connection with a fund-raising exercise for the Tribune group. As a result of my having brought that to the House's attention, I understand that he was admonished by the Serjeant at Arms and subsequently refunded the money. Needless to say, I gave the hon. Gentleman notice of what I intended to say on that occasion, and have done so again.

Unhappily, I have now discovered that this practice has not finished. I have before me an unsolicited letter which was sent to a member of the public, inviting him to go to a fund-raising dinner. It apparently builds on the success of the first dinner, when 200 guests raised more than £500——

Madam Speaker: Order. I think that I understand the hon. Gentleman's point of order. I am not interested in all the frills on this, but if he puts a point of order directly to me, I shall hear it *[Interruption.]* Order. Hon. Gentlemen will not be wasting time like this when they see how many wish to speak in today's major debate.

Mr. Nicholls: The point of order that I have for you, Madam Speaker, is straightforward and simple. Although the matter came before the House previously, the complaint was not dealt with, and the hon. Gentleman is still using pre-paid stationery for private purposes. Given that clear abuse, what steps can you take to ensure that the taxpayer does not have to pay for fund-raising activities on behalf of a political party?

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I have had absolutely no notice of this complaint. I reject the hon. Gentleman's assertion, which is a disgraceful attempt to divert attention from the real business of the House, and I deprecate his intervention.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. Let me deal with the point of order. The hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) has alleged that a second offence has occurred and I take that seriously. The hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) says that he had not been notified. I take the point of the hon. Member for Teignbridge, that the hon. Member for Neath had been notified, but perhaps the hon. Gentleman has not yet received that notification. In any event——

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley) *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. I am on my feet.

I shall of course report this alleged second offence, which I take seriously, to the Serjeant at Arms and the appropriate Committee.

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I am sure that it would not be the intention of any Minister to mislead the House, but in the response that I was given to an earlier question about the provision of secure units, information was given to the House which is simply not true. The Minister sought to suggest that a Labour-controlled council, South Glamorgan, was preventing the provision of secure places for young people. I wish to tell the House——

Madam Speaker: Order. I am not here for the hon. Gentleman to give information to the House. I am here to deal with a point of order, namely a breach of either our standing orders or our procedures. Will he raise a point of order that I can deal with?

Mr. Michael: I understand your point, Madam Speaker, and I hope that I am correct in putting it this way. Two years ago, South Glamorgan asked for the money to provide secure places——

Madam Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but the hon. gentleman is not understanding me correctly. I have to deal with a strict point of order that concerns the proceedings of the House. I understand entirely what the hon. Gentleman is trying to bring to my attention, but he must do it more precisely and more briskly so that I, as Speaker of the House, can deal with it. I am not in a position to deal with a political argument.

Mr. Michael: I hope that I will get it correct now, Madam Speaker. How can I put right the misinformation that was given to the House when the Minister suggested incorrectly that South Glamorgan, which asked for finances to provide secure places locally, but has been blocked for two years by the Welsh Office——

Madam Speaker: Order. Perhaps I can help the hon. Gentleman. I do not give guidance across the Floor of the House, but if I can point him in the right direction, I have no doubt that the Table Office will be able to help him.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): In view of what happened last night when the Government Whips, or perhaps it was the Government themselves, did not seem to know what to do, can I ask you, Madam Speaker whether there are any facilities under your jurisdiction for what I would call Government whipping classes so that they can understand how to do their job. If you cannot take the Chair in these proceedings, perhaps you could ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, because he is an expert on whipping.

Madam Speaker: Had I not such a busy schedule myself, I would be prepared to take on some seminars for hon. Members in all parts of the House.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): While noting with satisfaction the court decision in relation to the Belfast, West seat, and not missing the irony of those who appealed over the heads of the electorate of the Belfast, West to a court for a decision in their favour, may I ask you, Madam Speaker, to use the weight of your office to look at the entire electoral regulations, which are anachronistic in many ways, so that no other hon. Member will be put through the difficulties that my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, West (Dr. Hendron) had to endure?

Madam Speaker: That is not a matter for the Speaker of the House. It is governed by an Act of Parliament. Some time may be found in the future to look at the entire matter.

BILLS PRESENTED

HARE COURSING

Mr. Harry Cohen, supported by Mr. Tony Banks, Mr. Gerald Bermingham, Mr. Andrew Bowden, Mr. Roger Gale, Mr. Peter Griffiths, Mr. Roy Hattersley, Mr. Doug Hoyle, Mr. Simon Hughes, Mr. Alan Meale, Sir Teddy Taylor and Mr. Andrew Welsh presented a Bill to make hare coursing illegal: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon 12 March, and to be printed. [Bill 140.]

OFFENSIVE WEAPONS (SCOTLAND)

Mr. John McFall, supported by Mr. Tom Clarke, Mr. Henry McLeish, Mrs. Maria Fyfe, Mr. Gordon McMaster, Mr. David Marshall, Mr. William McKelvie, Mr. Michael Martin, Mr. Ernie Ross, Mrs. Margaret Ewing, Mrs. Ray Michie and Mrs. Irene Adams, presented a Bill to create in Scotland an offence of having an article with a blade or point in a public place; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon 26 March, and to be printed. [Bill 141.]

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Madam Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to statutory instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

REDUNDANCY PAYMENTS (LOCAL GOVERNMENT)

That the draft Redundancy Payments (Local Government) (Modification) (Amendment) Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT

That the draft Council Tax Benefit (General) Amendment Regulations 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Council Tax Benefit (Permitted Total) Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Mackay.]*

Question agreed to.

Children (Prohibition of Sex Selection)

3.40 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to prohibit the use of techniques designed to influence the sex of a foetus at conception; to amend the Abortion Act 1967; and for related purposes.

The House will be relieved to know that the Bill is not about Basildon and that I do not intend to mention my constituency in my speech. It has come to my attention that there is confusion about the intentions of the Bill which I seek to introduce. Let me say immediately that it is not a Bill to stop sex. Contrary to what some of my hon. Friends think, I am not that much of a spoilsport.

It is also not a Bill to interfere with the time limit in which an abortion can be obtained. It has come to my attention that the preamble to the Bill has caused controversy. I am seeking today to create all-party support. Accordingly, I give a firm undertaking that, if I am allowed to proceed with the Bill, I shall not seek to amend the Abortion Act 1967.

I welcome, and will take careful note of, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority public consultation on sex selection. The sole intention of the Bill is to stop the grubby little practice, which we witnessed on television the other day, of a doctor selling his services on the premise that he could enable people to select the sex they wanted for their child. I am a strong supporter of the enterprise culture, but the practices of that doctor are commercialism taken too far.

The Bill is entirely to do with the dignity of human life itself. It would prohibit the use of techniques designed to influence the sex of a foetus at conception. It would not in any way alter the present arrangements for dealing with sex-linked genetic diseases.

There is much that I would like to say on the whole issue, but suffice it to say, when life has never been so cheap, with child killing child and all the rest of it, that I hope that the House will agree that, however the arguments are deployed, it cannot be right to influence the sex of a child. Do we really think so little of ourselves? Is our self-esteem so low? Do we not care about anything any more? I hardly think that it is the view of the overwhelming majority of the general public that sex selection is right and proper.

Many of us are blessed with children. I thought that my circumstances were particularly suitable to one who wished to introduce such a Bill. First we had a boy, followed by a girl. When number three came along, people naturally asked what we would like, to which we answered that it did not matter as long as the child was healthy—it happened to be a little girl, and a right little madam she is. The pressure really started with numbers four and five. Everyone was interested and delighted, but the message was clear: "Won't you be disappointed if you don't have a boy this time?"

I was present throughout the labour and delivery of all my children's births. It is not much fun for someone to lie there thinking, "Everyone is expecting it to be a boy, what do I say if it is a girl?", which it was on the fourth occasion.

By the fifth occasion, pressure was mounting. What a lot of rubbish I had to listen to—all the old wives' tales about the way in which my wife was carrying the child, her shape and even a metal ring dangled by a string above her tummy. There she lay, just about to give birth, knowing that everyone, whoever they were, expected her to have a boy. She did not. We had another girl, and what a delight she is.

Every time that we had a child, we were not bothered about its sex, but were concerned about its health. If we have another one, its sex will not matter: we just hope that it will be healthy. We have observed that it does not matter whether one has a boy or a girl—in our case, they are all rather badly behaved.

What is my real argument against sex selection? I have never believed in the equality of men and women—they are quite different, and if pressed I would say that women are superior to men. Nature has a mystical way of balancing the sexes. I do not know what it is called, so let us call it the mystery of life, and I think that it works quite well. I have no doubt that sex selection would probably discriminate against women, and it is especially offensive to women and to feminists.

I do not think that I am being too fanciful in imagining the day when sex no longer matters. One will be able to make a phone call and nine months later order a blonde-haired blue-eyed little girl. The practice of sex selection appears to have come from across the Atlantic, and I deplore it. The success rate of the technique is questioned by many leading medical authorities. Are we certain that the egg would not be rejected?

Finally, it is not acceptable to interfere with the natural balance between the sexes. Nature is best left alone; so let us take this opportunity to restore dignity to life itself. Let legislators and public representatives proclaim our humility at a time when so much that we hold dear has become grubby, and let us leave Mother Nature to take her own course when determining the balance between women and men on our planet.

3.47 pm

Ms. Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I rise to oppose the Bill presented by the hon. Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess), on the grounds that I believe it to be both misguided and premature. I could also argue that it is flippant in the extreme, and that it makes a mockery of the subject under discussion and the debates and decisions reached by the House, not least the creation of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority which, unlike the hon. Gentleman, has issued a public document on sex selection, in which it has asked for the widest ranging responses to the issues raised, not least the consideration of

"the ethical, social, legal and practical issues surrounding sex selection".

The hon. Member for Basildon told the House that he has dropped the amendment that appears on the face of the Bill regarding changes in the Abortion Act 1967. I presume that he has done that because he has recently learnt that it is already illegal to obtain an abortion solely on the ground of foetal sex. A legal abortion is dependent on there being medical reasons, such as a mother tragically being a carrier of a disease that expresses itself only in the male line. Of the 200 such genetic diseases that medical science has discovered, the most obvious examples are haemophilia and Duchenne muscular dystrophy.

The basis of the hon. Gentleman's argument is that there should be no human intervention in deciding the sex of a child. Yet over generations and centuries, the human animal has placated the gods in some form in the hope that they would be able to produce male issue. The ancient

Greeks believed that a male child would be born if the left testicle was bound. Why that should be regarded as an old wives' tale is beyond my comprehension. Even today, couples are advised to go to bed with boots on or with boots off, to make love when a north wind is blowing, when the moon is full or when the sun is going down, or to use liberal applications of lemon juice. Those ideas are as flippant as the hon. Gentleman's arguments in favour of the Bill.

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority published its public consultation document in January this year. The Bill is premature, because the authority will not publish the results of that consultation until June. It seems absurd for the House, having set up an authority whose basis is the ethical issues surrounding human fertilisation, to dispense with the debate, argument, concern and compassion that went into setting up the authority before it has reported to the House and to the country at large.

It is given to few individuals to make a difference, to make a change and to leave the world a better place than they found it. Among that elite pantheon will undoubtedly be the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel). There is also a place for the House in that, in passing the Abortion Act 1967, it released women from the dark cage of fear into which the possibility of an unwanted and an unplanned pregnancy had plunged them. The House should remember the care, compassion, consideration and quality of debate that brought the Act into being. The House should dismiss the Bill out of hand.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—

The House divided: Ayes 87, Noes 106.

Division No. 160] [3.52 pm

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Alton, David
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bendall, Vivian
Benton, Joe
Bowden, Andrew
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Dafis, Cynog
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dicks, Terry
Duncan, Alan
Elletson, Harold
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Fry, Peter
Gallie, Phil
Gill, Christopher
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Harris, David
Hawksley, Warren
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Jessel, Toby
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, Sir James
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Lidington, David
Lord, Michael
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum
Maitland, Lady Olga
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Robathan, Andrew
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Sumberg, David
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomason, Roy
Tracey, Richard
Trimble, David
Tyler, Paul
Waller, Gary
Waterson, Nigel
Whittingdale, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Cheryl Gillan and
Dr. Robert Spink.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Hilary
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bennett, Andrew F.
Blunkett, David
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bradley, Keith
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Denham, John
Dobson, Frank
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Fraser, John
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Henderson, Doug
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Madden, Max
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
O'Neill, Martin
Pickthall, Colin
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Soley, Clive
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Straw, Jack
Tipping, Paddy
Walley, Joan
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Ms. Angela Eagle and
Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody.

Question accordingly negatived.

International Peacekeeping

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Robert G. Hughes.]*

[Relevant documents: The Minutes of Evidence taken before the Foreign Affairs Committee on 27th October and 2nd and 10th December 1992 (HC Nos. 235-i, -iii and -iv); the Minutes of Evidence taken before the Defence Committee on 27th January (HC No. 369-ii) and before the Foreign Affairs Committee on 28th January and 3rd and 17th February (HC Nos. 235-vi, -vii, and -viii), copies of which have been placed in the Library.]

Madam Speaker: Before I call the Foreign Secretary, I inform the House that, between the hours of 6 and 8 pm, speeches will be limited to 10 minutes.

4.3 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Douglas Hurd): I am glad that the House is able to spend time today debating international peacekeeping. This is a fresh dimension to foreign policy. Of course, it is not exactly new, but it has aquired greater importance, and it presents us with a greater range of difficult choices than at any time since we gave up the task of imperial peacekeeping.

I am sure that there should be the widest possible debate in this country on the underlying question—to what extent should Britain, with our history, with our assets, with the limits on our resources, take part in the varied tasks of international peacekeeping?

The familiar tasks of foreign and defence policy remain. We still have to protect British interests and British territory, embracing under this protection dependent territories such as the Falkland Islands, Gibraltar and Hong Kong. We must honour our commitments under the collective security agreements, and in particular to NATO. Those obligations have not been displaced by recent changes in the world scene. Our British Isles and our allies might still be threatened from overseas or from the land mass of what used to be the Soviet Union. It would be foolish to dismantle or run down to a dangerous degree the structure of collective security to successfully embodied in NATO.

The need to resist aggression, an attack of one country upon another, has taken Britain to war at least four times this century. We cannot assume that it will never happen again. But looking at the world as it is now fast changing, I am driven to the conclusion that most of the difficult choices facing us will in future arise not from acts of aggression, but from disasters within a nation state. That creates the difficulty.

Let us consider the countries in which the United Nations is peacekeeping today. Thirteen operations are up and running, and a 14th is in the pipeline. There are 259 peacekeepers in Jerusalem; 1,120 deployed between Israel and Syria; 5,643 in the Lebanon; and 353 in Kuwait, including 18 Britons. In the Western Sahara, there are 332 peacekeepers, including 15 Britons; in Angola, 221; and in Somalia a 28,000-strong unified task force led by the Americans, with 18,000 troops. A United Nations force in Mozambique has still not been put together, but its projected size if 6,625.

In Cambodia, there are 15,549 peacekeepers, including 122 Britons; in Latin America, 227 peacekeepers in El Salvador; and in Europe—in Cyprus—a force of 2,159, including 612 Britons. There are two forces in ex-Yugoslavia, with nearly 21,500 people, including 2,804 Britons. Those are the United Nations' existing efforts.

Some relate to disputes between states, but the most recent relate to civil wars. The list does not include several areas of disastrous conflict inside states, where the United Nations is not yet involved in peacekeeping. Along the southern flank of what used to be the Soviet Union, in Georgia, in Azerbaijan, in Tadzhikistan, there is fighting of a greater savagery and intensity than anything happening in Bosnia.

The public are barely aware of those conflicts, because the cameras do not often visit them—but they exist. In one form or another, in all those conflicts and many others that I have not listed, the cry goes up for the international community to be involved.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Like the constituencies of many right hon. and hon. Members, a high proportion of employment in my own depends on the skill with which large companies manufacture armaments that we sell in large quantities abroad. Does my right hon. Friend accept that, alongside all our efforts to resolve international conflict, an equally tremendous effort must be made to change the nature of the way that we operate our industries, so that we can eventually, by international agreement, reach the point where our money is spent not on creating and exporting weapons of destruction but on ways of making the world work better?

Mr. Hurd: I agree in principle. That is particularly important in countries such as the Soviet Union and China, whose armaments industries play a much larger part in their economies than is the case in Britain. That is why, since the Gulf war, we have taken the initiative in getting the register of arms transfers and trying to work out—particularly with the five permanent members of the Security Council—the criteria that should govern arms sales. That is inevitably a slow business, but my hon. Friend is right about the need for that process.

It would be possible for us in Britain to say—some hon. Members do, and they reflect a part of public opinion—that none of these conflicts are anything to do with us: that, however great the slaughter, the suffering and the crimes, no specific British interest exists that should lead us to contribute our scarce resources or our limited armed forces to help relieve the situation. Alternatively, we could take the view—as hon. Members implicitly do when they write to me or table questions—that, wherever there is injustice or intolerable suffering, it is part of our duty as a nation to do our best to bring it to an end.

I recall what Gladstone said in 1879 at Dalkeith:

> "Remember that the sanctity of life in the hill villages of Afghanistan among the winter snows is as inviolate in the eye of Almighty God as can be your own."

I note that Liberal Democrats are nodding piously in response to those sentiments.

Somewhere between those two extreme answers, as I am afraid I must term them—somewhere between the saloon bar and Gladstone—lies the policy that any British Government would in practice seek to follow. I shall say more about that shortly, but before dealing with the general issues of the choice that I have outlined, I wish to discuss one or two specific disputes on which I am always cross-examined in the House. Perhaps some analysis of the state of those disputes will help us towards the answer to the general question that I have put.

The dispute in Cyprus is one of the most long standing. Britain is one of the guarantor powers there, and the United Nations has been involved continuously since the outbreak of intercommunal violence in 1963. The peacekeeping force is still there, and—as I have mentioned—we still make a big contribution to it, although it is becoming smaller. The United Nations has also acted as a forum for negotiations between the two sides.

We believe that the set of ideas produced by the Secretary-General last year should form the basis of negotiations for a settlement. After the last round of talks in November, the Security Council endorsed the Secretary-General's approach in resolution 789, and all parties agreed to resume in March. Now, there has been a change at the top in Cyprus: I congratulate President Clerides—who is well known to many of us—on his success in the presidential elections, and I hope that he will work with determination towards settling the problem. We hope that both he and Mr. Denktash will attend the next round of talks chaired by the Secretary-General. I am encouraged by the first indications that I have had in that regard. We urge all parties to move towards a fair solution, and we are involved in efforts to help prepare the ground.

As hon. Members know—particularly the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher)—Somalia, which I also mentioned earlier, is a particularly stark tragedy. A whole population suffered the ravages of civil war, anarchy and drought; a whole society collapsed. We supported early efforts by the United Nations to feed the starving and bring some order to the chaos, but the warring factions effectively impeded us. We therefore supported resolution 794, which provided for all necessary means to be used to create a secure environment for relief.

The United States initiative followed. I congratulate the unified task force, especially the United States force, on the success of Operation Restore Hope. Relief centres have been secured, and aid is flowing. Britain is not involved on the ground, but the RAF helped with the airlift, and we remain the second largest aid donor in Somalia—so, in a sense, we are involved on the ground, although we are not involved in a military sense.

We want the United Nations to take over from the task force, but it will need a firm mandate and adequate strength. Recently, there has been heavy fighting between two rival warlords battling for control of the southern port of Kismayo, and 11 Somalis have been killed. That last incident shows that the position in Somalia is still tragic and volatile, and illustrates the case for a tougher mandate for the follow-on United Nations deployment.

That deployment will need to cover the north—what was formerly British Somalia—where an international rehabilitation effort is now urgently needed, as my noble Friend Baroness Chalker reported to me after her visit. Although the television cameras are no longer present in force, the problems in Somalia are still pressing and tragic, as the killing of Valerie Plaice, an Irish aid worker, showed.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I am pleased that the Foreign Secretary has paid tribute to the Irish aid worker who was murdered yesterday.

I hope that I shall not, as a result of asking this question, be put into the camp of those who want Britain or the international community to intervene everywhere. Does the Foreign Secretary agree that the fact that the international community, led by the United States, has intervened shows that we are no longer in the situation that prevailed during the years of the cold war?

Does he agree that, whatever the extent to which the rule of law in a given country breaks down, however much chaos and hunger there may be, it is no longer the case that no action can be taken? While it may be impossible to intervene in other countries in which similar circumstances prevail, what has happened in Somalia shows how, under the auspices and authority of the United Nations, it is possible to take action that must be welcomed by the vast majority of the people of that country.

Mr. Hurd: I agree. This is a high water mark of United Nations action. It shows that the will exists, but it also shows the extreme difficulty of putting that will into practice over a long period.

I should like to turn briefly to the question of Iraq. Here we are still coping with the aftermath of the Gulf war. Over the past two years, coalition forces, acting in support of the United Nations, have effectively deterred Iraq from attacking its own citizens in both north and south. This is a development of the hon. Gentleman's point. We are talking about disputes within Iraq as well as the dispute between Iraq and Kuwait.

The operations against Iraqi air defences in January went well. Despite some rhetoric to the contrary, the Iraqis, over the past month, have steadily abandoned their defiance of United Nations resolutions. Border incursions into Kuwait have stopped, and the Iraqis have conformed to United Nations requirements for unrestricted flights for United Nations special commission inspectors into Iraq.

This, to a limited extent, is good news, but all experience shows that we must remain vigilant and keep up the pressure until all Security Council resolutions are fulfilled. We cannot trust promises of co-operation; we have to rely on our own monitoring of actions. Under Security Council resolution 687, the Iraqis must allow the destruction of all weapons of mass destruction; agree to long-term monitoring of their programmes on weapons of mass destruction; compensate the victims of aggression; and return third-country detainees and Kuwaiti property.

We also want, as should others, the release of Mr. Ride and Mr. Wainwright, British citizens imprisoned in Iraq, whose families I saw yesterday. Their severe punishment in no way fits their supposed offence. Iraq would gain some credit for releasing them but none for continuing to keep them in unjust captivity.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Why did it take a brilliant cross-examination in the Old Bailey by Geoffrey Robertson, QC, to elicit the fact that on, 19 July 1990, the Foreign Secretary himself chaired a key Cabinet meeting, which reported to Mrs. Thatcher, urging that all arms embargoes in relation to Iraq should be done away with? If the right hon. Gentleman denies this, he ought to answer the allegations that are made by David Leigh on page 226 of his widely read book "Betrayed". Did that meeting take place on 19 July 1990, was it chaired by the Foreign Secretary, and what were its recommendations to the right hon. Gentleman's Cabinet colleagues, including the Prime Minister?

Mr. Hurd: This will come out before the Scott inquiry. There was such a meeting, but it did not reach the conclusion that the hon. Gentleman supposes. Everything

[Mr. Hurd]

will come out—the background, the context, the results and the conclusion that the results should be announced to this House.

I should like to turn to another matter that, rightly, takes up much time in this House—the Arab-Israel dispute. Three different peacekeeping forces are deployed in various parts of this dispute. The involvement of the United Nations has lasted for many years and is the basis for international efforts, but now the peace process sponsored by the United States and by Russia is, in effect, the only game in town.

Mr. Warren Christopher, the United States Secretary of State, is in the middle of his first foreign tour since his appointment, and he has chosen the middle east. He has taken up the process—I welcome this warmly—where Secretary Baker left off, and this effort, which is firmly based on Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, must be the focus for the whole international community.

We cannot realistically expect an early and complete solution. Those of us who have watched the twists and turns of this problem for so many years know that progress is bound to be painful——

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland) *rose*——

Mr. Hurd: In just a minute, yes.

—but all sides seem genuinely now to contemplate the possibility of compromise, of real peace, and that is a change. There will never be a better background for the work to which Mr. Christopher has set his hand.

Obstacles remain. A serious one was the decision of the Israeli Government last December to deport over 400 Palestinians. This was wrong. It was a mistake that we and the rest of the international community have condemned. Since then, the Israelis have taken a significant step—not a total step but a significant one—towards carrying out Security Council resolution 799. We believe that they must build on that. The objective must be not to allow this obstacle to derail the peace process. That would be in no one's interests—certainly not the interests of the Palestinians.

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to the Foreign Secretary for allowing me to intervene. A few moments ago, he spoke with great force and clarity about the need for Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq to comply totally with the resolutions of the Security Council. Now he is talking about compliance by Israel.

I agree with what he said about the terrible political error made, regrettably, by the new Israeli Government. Why, however, should it be acceptable for us to tell the world that Saddam Hussein must comply totally with UN resolutions—he is not allowed 25 per cent. compliance—yet the Israelis' offer to comply with only 25 per cent. of resolution 799—that is, to return one quarter of the expelled Palestinians—is regarded as a basis for progress? That is surely totally unacceptable. If UN resolutions and compliance with them is to mean anything, everyone should comply.

Mr. Hurd: Saddam Hussein went to war. He committed aggression, he invaded Kuwait and he obliterated Kuwait. The resolutions under chapter 7 of the charter flow from that situation. The Israeli situation is different, but the resolutions are clear and should be complied with. That is what I am saying. A step has been taken towards compliance, but it is not sufficient.

The two situations are not the same—the hon. Member is not suggesting that they are the same—and therefore the means of compliance, the time allowed for compliance, the background and the atmosphere of the background are bound the be different, because the situations are different. But the need for the wishes and declared intentions of the Security Council to be respected remains the same.

I turn to the problems of the former Yugoslavia.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): On that same point, surely the last UN resolution was quite specific in including the words "all" and "immediately". There is no room for doubt about what the resolution meant.

Mr. Hurd: That is what I said. I am not saying that the resolution has been complied with: I am saying that a significant step has been taken towards that and further steps are needed.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): Will my right hon. Friend not agree that, while he is absolutely right in talking about the problems caused by the deportation of the Palestinians, any flexibility that the Israelis may show over the Golan heights will be a much more welcome development in the context of these talks, and that such a development deserves every encouragement?

Mr. Hurd: I agree. The two critical parts of the bilateral negotiations are the one with Syria, on which there has been some progress, and the one with the Palestinians, which is more difficult and requires more effort by both sides if it is to succeed.

Of all the miseries and conflicts of which our constituents are so aware, the cry for action is heard most persistently about the situation in Bosnia. Press articles and television programmes crowd in on us, and there is no shortage of suggestions. Often, the suggestions that appear most satisfying to far-off observers overcome by anger and frustration are those that make the least sense on the ground.

Every hon. Member shares that sense of anger and frustration, but the closer one is to the action the more apparent is the misery, and the less easy it is to put the guilty and innocent into separate clear-cut categories or to devise simple courses of action that will end the fighting and produce peace with justice.

I must admit to some irritation in the past few days at comments from abroad that assume that nothing helpful is being done.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East) *rose*——

Mr. Hurd: I want to get on a bit.

Last week, the Government of Bosnia drew attention to the fact that United Nations convoys had been unable to reach certain towns in eastern Bosnia. They did this by denying supplies to their own hard-pressed people. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mrs. Ogata, temporarily decided to suspend some aid convoys in Bosnia, and that came as a short, sharp shock to all three communities. Much comment followed, as if the relief effort had collapsed or was useless. An editorial in yesterday's *New York Times* claimed that Mrs. Ogata had suspended all shipments to Bosnia, which is not true. Throughout this period, the relief effort continued.

The editorial went further, claiming that,

> "all along, the supplies have not been reaching those most desperately in need . . . The lives of thousands of Bosnians are at stake. Decency requires that America and the world provide prompt relief."

Such ignorance of what has been happening warps the understanding of the public. Europe, with Britain in the lead, has for months been providing prompt relief, saving the lives of tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, who would otherwise be dead.

Britain is providing the biggest contingent of troops in Bosnia of any United Nations country. We are keeping three power stations running in central Bosnia. Our troops have escorted 279 United Nations convoys, carrying some 20,000 tonnes of desperately needed food and medicines. In 351 flights since last July, the Royal Air Force, in dangerous conditions, has airlifted 4,700 tonnes of supplies into Sarajevo. In addition, under our aid programme, the Overseas Development Administration's civilian drivers have carried some 16,000 tonnes in more than 180 convoys. We are in the forefront of what the *New York Times* called for—prompt aid—without apparently realising that it was happening.

But our commitment is not unique. The French, Spanish, Danes and Portugese and the Benelux countries have all contributed troops to the United Nations Protection Force and helped to fund the UNHCR. France, for example, has committed 4,800 troops, and $10·2 million. We argue strongly with the French on quite a number of trade, European Community and other matters. That is a straightforward argument, but on Yugoslavia and many United Nations peacekeeping matters, our views and our interests, because we are broadly comparable countries on this, run closely together. We work well with the French as well as with others.

The success of this European relief effort under United Nations auspices has been about the only good news coming out of Bosnia so far, and I was glad to learn a few moments ago that a United Nations convoy, escorted by British troops, today reached the eastern Bosnian towns of Tuzla and Gorazde.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: I endorse everything that the Secretary of State has just said, having visited British forces at Split and Zagreb last week. Does he share the scepticism of many hon. Members at the suggestion that relief may be dropped by air—a proposal that, it is said, has attracted some support from the British Government? That must be a matter of considerable difficulty, not least because of the free availability of portable surface-to-air missiles. Will he give an undertaking that no British resources will be applied to any such proposal unless there are considerable guarantees and understandings about the level of risk to which forces might be exposed in such a venture?

Mr. Hurd: I welcome what President Clinton and his team have said about the willingness of the United States to join in the humanitarian effort. If, as I believe, the Americans are devising ways of doing this from the air, I welcome that too. If they can reach by that means, without undue risk to themselves, parts of Bosnia which the land convoys have not been able to reach, well and good. In that case, they too will be contributing to the task of keeping people alive who would otherwise be dead.

We believe that we are doing our bit in this respect by land, and have been doing so successfully and over a long period. Therefore, we do not have the intention of using our aircraft for this exercise, although we welcome the intention of the Americans to do so.

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for allowing me to intervene again.

However well intentioned this proposal may be, is the right hon. Gentleman satisfied that dropping aid from aircraft flying at, perhaps, 12,000 ft is sensible and practicable in the circumstances? Is he also satisfied, given the comments coming not only from aid workers on the ground in Bosnia, who think that this is not a very sensible idea, but also from representatives of the Serbs and others, who will say—perhaps dishonestly—that they feel threatened that these drops may contain arms, that this will not disrupt the aid on the ground?

We need convincing that this proposal deserves our support. If there is no alternative to dropping aid from several thousand feet—if otherwise people would starve to death—it will have to be tried, but we need convincing that this not only will work in practice for the people that it is targeting, but will not fatally damage the existing effort on the ground, which he has rightly praised.

Mr. Hurd: The last point is a very important one. As I understand it, the Americans are discussing their ideas with the Secretary-General of the United Nations either today or tomorrow, and they will, of course, also be discussing them with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. The last point will, I think, be in the minds of both the Secretary-General and the Prime Minister.

However, as the hon. Gentleman said—[HON. MEMBERS: "Right hon. Gentleman."] Indeed? I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman. It comes a little early in his career as shadow Foreign Secretary, which no doubt will be long and successful. I had some inkling of that news, but I had not realised that it had hit the public press. I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman very sincerely.

The right hon. Gentleman's last point was entirely correct. If the Americans, who clearly are working very carefully on the techniques involved, find that they can contribute to the humanitarian effort by delivering supplies from the air to people whom the United Nations, the British and the French, and so on, have not been able to reach by land, we will welcome their contribution. I do not know enough about the techniques or how far their thinking has gone, but those are matters that will be discussed with both the Secretary-General and the Prime Minister.

The background is that, last autumn, experts predicted 300,000 deaths from cold and starvation in Bosnia this winter. One cannot say how many people have died, but until now the winter has been rather milder than usual, and we think the number is only a tiny fraction of what was predicted. That achievement of keeping people alive has been perhaps the main, indeed the only, piece of good news out of Bosnia in recent months.

I accept that, as hon. Members have pointed out before and as critics in America, Germany and other countries have pointed out, keeping people alive is not the full answer; it deals with the symptoms and not the disease.

[Mr. Hurd]

So one must be looking all the time with some humility at all the possible ways of curing the disease. One should not be obsessed by the idea, "We have not thought of it before, so it cannot work." That is why it is healthy for President Clinton and the incoming Administration to be looking at all the possibilities, as we have tried to do continuously over the last two years.

President Clinton came to the conclusion, as we have done, that one cannot impose a political solution by military force, unless one is to undertake what would be an imperial commitment requiring many thousands of men for many years. No western Government support that. No Government—it is not true of all individuals—believe that it can be done simply from the air. From the air, one can destroy particular targets and achieve a limited purpose, as happened in Iraq, but one cannot from the air, as has been shown time and again in different examples, change a policy.

The United States has also looked, as have many others —certainly as we have done—at the possibility of a partial lifting of the arms embargo. The trade sanctions, as the House knows, apply only to Serbia and Montenegro, because we believe that they are primarily responsible for starting the war in Bosnia and for continuing it, but the arms embargo, which is mandatory under the Security Council resolution, applies to all the parties.

The idea of a partial lifting, in favour either of the Muslims or of the Muslims and Croats, is often canvassed. Again, I believe that that looks less practicable and less desirable the closer one gets to the action. It is incompatible in practice with the humanitarian effort that we have discussed in recent minutes. If one encourages the sending of arms into a war zone, one is choosing war rather than peace.

In practice, I do not think it could be partial. When one creates a loophole, one cannot be sure in a situation such as we are facing that only those whom one intends to receive help will actually get it. In other words, even if one intended to supply only the Bosnian Muslims, one could not be sure that the supply would end up there. This is a confused war, village by village and valley by valley, and it is easy for weapons to go astray.

Moreover, I believe that, faced with the arming of the Bosnian Muslims, the traditional friends of Serbia would rearm the Bosnian Serbs. We would, in effect, be throwing arms into the ring hoping for the best, rather like spurring on cocks to fight it out in a cockpit. The only certain result would be more bloodshed.

Those are arguments against courses which we think are not sensible, but if we argue against courses of action which we think are not sensible, we have an obligation to press on more energetically with the courses that we believe are sensible, of which there are three.

First, we offered, and created at the London conference, a peace process. In the end, it will, in my view, work. People say that it is an illusion and is just diplomatic talk, but in the end, force does not provide an answer in situations such as this. Cynics sometimes say that force in the end is the only decisive fact, but in Yugoslavia, as in the Arab-Israeli dispute, just about everyone has tried force time and again. Force is actually a grossly inefficient arbiter of this kind of conflict. It settles nothing. Only negotiation can produce a settlement that lasts, although one cannot be sure that that will achieve it, either. Even so, only negotiation can do it.

The Owen-Vance plan, which now has general United States and Russian backing—I am not talking about details—is a good plan. It is new, but the situation is new. It is not set in concrete and it is open for discussion, particularly the map, and its authors admit that much negotiation remains to be done. But I believe that a final settlement, when it becomes possible, will be close to the present outline.

I pay tribute to the representatives of the United Nations and the European Community, and in particular to David Owen, whom we have all known in different capacities and whose different characteristics have been copiously commented on in the House and elsewhere. Whatever our views about that, it is clear that he is now tackling the issue with a great deal of dedication, energy and ingenuity, and we can be proud of what he is doing.

Secondly, behind persuasion has to come pressure, and we are talking about sanctions. In the autumn of last year, it was clear that sanctions were beginning to bite, but they work only when continuously applied over time. At perhaps a crucial moment, the international community relaxed its grip on Serbia and supplies got through. We must plug, and we are plugging, the holes.

We have sanctions assistance missions posted to Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia and Ukraine. This month, the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe appointed a sanctions co-ordinator—it was, in fact, a suggestion of mine that hung fire for a bit. There is now someone—not a committee but one man—whose job it is, day in, day out, to do his best to plug the holes and to make sanctions effective. We are supporting his work with skilled manpower and money, and we expect our EC partners and other countries also to support his work.

Thirdly, we aim for justice. I shall not go into the details, because every lawyer knows how complex it is, but the fact for the layman is that people have been sickened by war crimes in the former Yugoslavia—by the rape, torture and ethnic cleansing. The rapes have been authenticated by the commission set up and presided over by Dame Anne Warburton, the head of Lucy Cavendish college, Cambridge. That very sober report is all the more compelling because of the objective way in which it was prepared and presented.

Yesterday, the Security Council passed resolution 808, deciding that an international tribunal should be established for the prosecution of persons responsible for grave violations of international humanitarian law in former Yugoslavia since 1991, and requesting a report from the Secretary-General including specific proposals for the tribunal.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): The Secretary of State referred to the fact that many of our constituents have found it difficult—as, indeed, have many hon. Members —to comprehend the situation in a country that many of us used to think of as a holiday destination. Many of the victims of the systematic rape will bear children in the spring of this year as a result of that rape. Are any specific steps being taken by the international community to enable those who wish to foster or adopt those children to do so, as many individuals wish to contribute in that way?

Mr. Hurd: When we heard from Anne Warburton and considered her report at the previous Foreign Affairs Council, we decided to set in train steps to help mothers in that position. Of course, the desire of the mothers and of the Governments of Bosnia and Croatia is that, to the greatest possible extent, the children should stay where they are. However, I shall write to the hon. Lady with the particulars of what is done to help.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): Before the Secretary of State leaves the question of the former Yugoslavia, will he comment on the future arrangements for Croatia, where, I understand, the arrangements for the monitoring force will expire shortly? Does he expect that the arrangements will be renewed? Does he think that there is a prospect of renewed conflict there? If so, what are the implications for the Owen-Vance plan in Bosnia?

Mr. Hurd: The Security Council has renewed the mandate for the United Nations protection force in Croatia, but only until 31 March. It is intended to provide a breathing space during which everyone involved—the Government of Croatia, the Krajina Serbs and the troop contributors—can work out a new arrangement, probably a new and, I hope, better mandate, so that the international effort can continue and make progress. As the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) knows, the situation has been very dangerous, but there is a little respite.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Hurd: No, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be able to make a speech in a moment.

I return to the general question that I asked at the outset. I believe that there is a solid British interest in reducing the amount of chaos in the world. We, more than almost any other, are a trading nation, and conflict is an enemy to trade and thus to our prosperity. However, there is also a less tangible issue: we are not given, thank heaven, either in the House or in Government, to great grandiloquent proclamations, and we should not pretend more than we can achieve.

However, there is, I hope, a sound instinct in this country that we, as a decent people, should make some contribution towards working for a more decent world. We cannot be everywhere or do everything, and there is no question of Britain or any country becoming the policeman of the world.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Hurd: No, I shall not give way.

All countries work under constraint and, in practice, it means that they have to work with international institutions. I shall not work my way through an analysis of all those institutions. I shall not, for example, deal with the way in which the countries of the European Community are steadily working more closely together on matters of foreign and security policy; there will be other opportunities to do that.

I wish to talk about NATO. It was created for one purpose, and is now adapting itself to cope with another as well. In NATO, we agreed last year that it should be ready to undertake peacekeeping outside its area. Today, there are NATO ships in the Adriatic, stopping and searching vessels which might be breaking sanctions. There are plans for a NATO operation to monitor the skies over the former Yugoslavia. There are components of a NATO headquarters serving UNPROFOR in Bosnia. If there were a durable ceasefire in Bosnia which needed underpinning with a peacekeeping force, I do not doubt that that force would include a major NATO contribution as part of a United Nations operation.

I deal finally with the United Nations, which has a unique legal and political authority in these matters. As the House knows, we welcome the Secretary-General's report "An Agenda for Peace" on how the United Nations might improve its capacity in preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peacekeeping. Preventive diplomacy is an arm of United Nations activity which we must strengthen. We need to make a concerted effort to solve international disputes before they reach the point of armed conflict. It is a criticism of the United Nations, and therefore of all of us, that it has not done enough in that crucial aspect in the past.

Under international law, it is possible for any country to use force in self-defence without the specific authority of the Security Council, but chapters VI and VII of the charter provide a flexible legal framework for many types of such action, and they are now invoked more often than at any time in the history of the organisation.

That leads me to say a few words about the discussion on reform of the Security Council. The only person whom I have heard suggest that Britain should give up our permanent membership was a member of the Opposition who is not now in her place. The debate is not about giving up the British seat but about whether there should be additions to the permanent membership to reflect changes in the world since 1945. We have neither the will nor the power to stifle such debate, but some words of caution are perhaps in order.

Mr. Corbyn: Does the Secretary of State not think that there is a case for ensuring that there are permanent representatives of at least Latin America and Africa on the Security Council? Does he not think that consideration should be given of the removal of the power of veto of the permanent members of the Security Council in order to make the organisation more democratic and more reflective of the world's population as a whole?

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman's suggestions flow straight into the words of caution that I am about to utter. It is precisely such suggestions which feed the debate. The debate is likely to continue for a long time, because I cannot imagine a solution that would satisfy all aspirations to the extent necessary for the reform of the charter, which needs unanimity among the permanent members and a two-thirds majority of the General Assembly.

A proposition has been heard, although it is not the hon. Gentleman's, that one could solve the problem merely by adding Germany and Japan to the list of permanent members. That will clearly not provide a solution in itself, because candidates from other continents would also make claims.

Permanent membership carries certain obligations, and I doubt whether it could easily be extended to countries which, for their own constitutional reasons, have up to now been unable to contribute troops to the full range of United Nations peacekeeping activities. In fact, of the permanent members, it is the French and the British who

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are currently contributing most in the form of peacekeeping forces. Perhaps that introduces a touch of reality to what is often a theoretical debate.

It is sometimes suggested that instead of the British and French permanent membership, there should be an EC membership. The Maastricht treaty establishes in a satisfactory way the position of Britain and France as members of the EC who are also permanent members of the Security Council. The treaty recognises our responsibilities under the charter, and we accept the need to take the views of our partners into account as we fulfil those British and French responsibilities.

Of course the discussion will go on and we shall take a constructive part in it. However, I am particularly anxious that the discussion should not frustrate or undermine the actual efforts of the Security Council to deal with the problems of the moment. The Security Council has never been more in demand. It must be able to do its job effectively without too many distractions.

Britain will continue to do her bit. We are not pretentious or in search of glory. Perhaps more than most we tend to weigh the consequences of an action before we embark on it. For all the reasons I have given, we may more often have to say no than yes when asked to take part in peacekeeping actions, but we have, both in our foreign service and our armed forces highly professional national assets which are greatly in demand internationally. We need to look at the way in which the resources for our overall effort overseas are distributed. We need, both as a national Government and in the international institutions, to learn three lessons from experience so far.

First, it is easier and better to move earlier to avert a disaster than to clear up its consequences. In another field, we know that primary health care costs less than hospital treatment and an ambassador costs less than an infantry battalion. An international conference can cost a lot, but it costs less than military intervention, and peacekeeping costs far less than war. At the end of the day, as I have suggested, force usually proves to be a hopelessly inefficient arbiter in such disputes as we are discussing, and there has to be a negotiated settlement either between states or within states—better earlier than later.

Secondly, there has to be an equitable sharing of burdens in any substantial international enterprise and that has not always been so.

Thirdly, and most importantly, there has to be a disciplined analysis of risks and benefits. The international community should not lurch into enterprises the scope and duration of which have not been thought through.

If we follow those principles and encourage others to do so, we may together, case by case, cope with at least some of the problems of world disorder. We in Britain will try to bring a sound mix of prudence and courage to those choices, as is certainly expected of us by our friends abroad, and by our constituents.

4.52 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): The House will be grateful to the Foreign Secretary for his thoughtful speech this afternoon and I personally am grateful to him for the kind remarks he directed towards me.

Even before I heard the right hon. Gentleman's speech, I decided to start this afternoon where he concluded, with the United Nations. I do that for two reasons—first, because Labour has and has always had a positive commitment to the United Nations, and that support is based firmly in our party's constitution. I say to those involved in the current debate about clause 4 of the Labour party's constitution that, whatever else they want to change, they will certainly not change with my agreement clause 4(7) of our constitution, which commits our party to the support of the United Nations.

Britain is in a unique position in what are rapidly changing times. As a member of the European Community, NATO and the Commonwealth and a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, we can exercise influence and maintain our presence in a whole variety of places, forums and discussions which are not open to many of our partners in the European Community or even the United States of America. In many ways, we can play a pivotal role in working towards a more peaceful and prosperous world where human rights and the needs of environment and sustainable growth are high on agendas. I welcome that position for our country. Whenever the Foreign Secretary seeks to use it positively with those aims and objectives in mind, he shall of course have our support.

We actively support the peacemaking role of the United Nations as it has been given effect in difficult circumstances in Cambodia—although that is an extremely fragile situation—Somalia, and elsewhere. I shall return to more specific areas of difficulty later.

There must be a debate on the future of the United Nations. Although we have always supported it, we do not believe that the status quo is adequate, for a number of reasons. We believe that a debate, and more, is essential about membership or permanent membership of the Security Council. I see no good or reasonable argument why Britain should not retain a seat as a permanent member of the Security Council, and it would not be fair to my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms. Eagle) to whom the Foreign Secretary referred, to say that she was suggesting we should give up, but only that the matter seemed to be under debate.

Yes, let us have the debate about the nature of the United Nations and the increase in demand being placed upon it, because there have been more demands placed on the United Nations in the past five years than in the past five decades, and increasingly, when people call for something to be done, they expect the United Nations to be able to respond. Clearly it does not have the resources, the staff, the financing or the cash to respond everywhere, even in those circumstances in which it decides that peacekeeping should be deployed.

I choose my words carefully when I say that, before the new President of the United States, whose election we welcome, or his Administration, start talking about the reorganisation of the Security Council or the reform of the United Nations, the United States should pay its subscriptions. We cannot blame President Clinton for that as he has only recently come to office, but, regrettably, the United States is the biggest single debtor to the United Nations and that is most unsatisfactory. It is not the only debtor but the biggest single one.

Mr. Dalyell: And UNESCO too.

Dr. Cunningham: UNESCO is not really on today's agenda, but since my hon. Friend has mentioned it, I urge the Foreign Secretary to renew Britain's membership of UNESCO at the earliest possible opportunity.

I return to the financing and organisation of the United Nations. The former Soviet Union is a major debtor, and, in some respects, so are Germany and France. Although figures vary, it is said that something approaching £2 billion is currently outstanding in unpaid contributions to the United Nations. At a time when the organisation is having to spend more than £3 billion on its efforts, that is most unsatisfactory.

The need to face up to the changing role of the United Nations was addressed by the Secretary-General himself when last June he produced to members of the United Nations his report entitled "An Agenda for Peace", covering preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peacekeeping. That addressed the issues in a detailed way. It is not my intention to go through them all in detail, except to say that there are some positive proposals for peace in that agenda. We hope that Her Majesty's Government will take a positive, indeed a leading, role in discussing those changes.

The role for preventive diplomacy was very much part of the right hon. Gentleman's speech. It is far better for us to be active early to prevent or head off dispute and ultimately conflict, and far more beneficial to all concerned, than to see the United Nations so paralysed by lack of resources, support or political will that considerably later we are urged, and sometimes obliged, to intervene with military support or humanitarian aid, as is happening now in so many places. Peacemaking and peacekeeping are far more preferable to armed conflict, about which I share the views of the right hon. Gentleman.

Between 1945 and 1987, 13 peacekeeping operations were established by the United Nations; 13 others have been established since. An estimated 500,000 military, police and civilian personnel served under the flag of the United Nations during that time. Over 800 of them, from 43 countries, have died. The cost of those operations aggregated some $8·3 billion until January of last year. The unpaid arrears towards the operations stand at over $800 million, a debt to the organisation from the countries which contributed to the peacekeeping operations.

Peacekeeping operations approved at present are estimated to cost close to $3 billion in the current 12-month period, while patterns of payment are unacceptably low. Against that, global defence expenditure at the end of last decade approached $1 trillion a year or $2 million per minute, according to the analysis in the Secretary-General's "An Agenda for Peace".

When the Foreign Secretary recently made a speech on the subject of "The new disorder", he went into the issues in detail. I do not agree entirely that there is a new disorder. There are new circumstances in the international community with the collapse of the Soviet Union, and there are new circumstances in the United Nations because the frequent use of the veto has gone. There are not the same mechanisms available in international discussion, and there are not the same certainties about spheres of influence.

Long-established existing disorder has continued, and it has got closer to the European community in the former Yugoslavia. It is interesting to reflect on what the new United States Secretary of State, Mr. Warren Christopher, said about the United Nations in his congressional confirmation:

> "It will be this administration's policy to encourage other nations and the institutions of collective security, especially the United Nations, to do more of the world's work to deter aggression, relieve suffering and keep the peace. In that regard, we will work with Secretary General Boutros Ghali and members of the Security Council to ensure that the United Nations has the means to carry out such tasks."

That was what Warren Christopher said in his testimony. I hope that means that the United States will pay their dues.

I welcome the debate about the future of the United Nations, but I also welcome what the Foreign Secretary said about the necessary debate on the changing role of NATO. The original purposes of NATO have gone, but before we end effective international organisations, we need to know what the alternatives are and what other nations think.

In that regard, in the debate going on in the Federal Republic of Germany, I have urged our colleagues in the SPD to support the proposed constitutional changes. If the federal republic is to play a bigger role in the international community, it must support not just particular decisions or resolutions, but their effective implementation. That means constitutional change in the federal republic. It is an important debate there. On my recent visit I made it clear that the SPD should support those changes and that they should be agreed.

In respect of some of the areas of conflict that the Foreign Secretary put on his agenda, it is not a surprising coincidence that the same areas are on my agenda for discussion. No doubt some people will say that there is awful Front Bench collusion, but that is not the case. It would be difficult to speak in such a debate without coming to broadly the same conclusion about what should be discussed, even if we do not agree on all the proposed solutions.

As to the solution in Israel, about which I intervened in the Foreign Secretary's speech, I am a committed supporter of the Labour Government in Israel. I am delighted by their election. I recognise the force of the right hon. Gentleman's comment about the peace process being the only show in town, to use his phrase, and that everything possible must be done to get it further down the track. Therefore, the Labour Government in Israel must comply with resolution 799 of the Security Council—not next month, not in six months' time, not next year, but now. Those were the terms of the resolution and that should be the outcome.

I hope that our friends in the Parliament and in the Government of Israel are listening carefully to what we say, because we shall not change our position. It does nothing for the credibility of the United Nations as a whole or of the permanent members of the Security Council if some Governments can be seen to—"flout" is perhaps too strong a word—ignore the decisions of the United Nations while others are expected to comply absolutely and, if they do not, to bear the consequences. I agree that circumstances in Iraq and in Israel are different and are not comparable at all. Nor, for that matter, are the resolutions, but the principle is the same. I hope that the House will agree that no one should be able by any means to wriggle out of compliance with the decisions of the

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Security Council: otherwise, any talk of a new constructive, effective world order will be seen as meaningless by many.

Many years ago I had the experience—very interesting for me personally but very sad—of being involved with Lord Callaghan, then the Foreign Secretary in Harold Wilson's Government, at the United Nations peace talks following the Turkish invasion of Cyprus. The talks were held in the Palais des Nations in Geneva where I met the new President Clerides and Mr. Rauf Denktash, who is still the leader of the Turkish community. The Foreign Secretary has mentioned the United Nations peacekeeping force in Cyprus, but the most threatening force is that of Turkey, which has 30,000 troops on the island. That is unjustifiable.

Sadly, Mr. Denktash blocked and stalled the talks on a solution to the problems in Cyprus, held under the auspices of the Secretary General at the end of last year. At least during his campaign for election, President Clerides does not seem to have said anything very helpful about his attitude towards United Nations' efforts to produce a solution in Cyprus. We support the United Nations Secretary-General's efforts to seek a solution and we shall continue to take that view.

The situation in Iraq is rather like that in Bosnia. People are demanding that more should be done and I understand why, but as a nation and within the international community, we simply cannot have a blueprint that will produce a solution for every trouble spot in the world.

Representatives of the Kurdish people from northern Iraq and of the Shiah Muslims from the south are asking one simple question: why does the United Nations allow Saddam Hussein's regime to control the humanitarian aid going to their communities? They want to know why the aid cannot be provided directly to them. Everyone knows that the regime in Baghdad is not following the letter of the law in that respect. I suggest to the Foreign Secretary that that matter should be raised at the United Nations and that—under existing resolutions if possible, or if not, under new ones—it should seek to reorganise desperately needed aid to people who have suffered for so long. They continue to suffer deprivation in humanitarian terms and military harassment and threats to their lives and well-being from Saddam's forces. At least in humanitarian terms, we should be doing much more to satisfy their legitimate needs and demands.

When I intervened in the Foreign Secretary's remarks about Bosnia I was reflecting a fairly widespread view in the House that we need to be convinced about the Prime Minister's discussions. I know that he has some fence-mending to do and some ground to recover. Nevertheless, I wish him well because it is important for our country to have an effective working relationship with the United States. I hope that he will question President Clinton thoroughly and at length about the practicality of delivering aid in the way that has been suggested.

Two Hercules planes, flying at 2,000 ft or higher, will be threatened by the ground-to-air missiles that we know exist because, tragically, an Italian plane has already been shot down. There are questions about the efficiency with which that aid will be delivered. Will it go to the people who so desperately need it, or will it go to their persecutors?

Sir Jim Spicer (Dorset, West): Perhaps I may be of some assistance to the right hon. Gentleman. I do not know where the idea of two C-130s flying at 2,000 ft emerged. I heard it on the wireless today, but it is absolute nonsense. We must leave the Americans to do their own thing in their own way, if they are going to do it. I was grateful to my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, who made it clear that we shall not take part in the operation. Hopefully, if the Americans carry it out, it will be for good reasons, and they will take into account the problems that it may present for our ground forces.

Dr. Cunningham: I do not agree. In such difficult circumstances, we should not let the Americans do things in their own time and in their own way when the United Nations is involved. I do not agree with that principle, any more than I agree with the proposition that we should support what President Bush did in Iraq during the last 48 hours of his mandate. Such matters must be discussed with the international community.

The Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister have every right to question in detail the American proposals in that regard, not merely in respect of the effectiveness of what they propose to do, but because of the serious consequences that it could have for British ground troops in Bosnia. We cannot tell the Americans to get on with it and to do as they wish, as long as they get some of the aid on the right target. It is more complicated than that and there is much more at stake. Opposition Members must be assured on those questions before we can support the proposals.

I accept that the hon. Member for Dorset, West (Sir J. Spicer) may be right that the details being bandied about are not accurate. However, I stand firm on a principle that is important to Opposition Members and, I believe, to the Foreign Secretary.

In general, we welcome greater humanitarian aid efforts in the former Yugoslavia—especially in Bosnia—and have called for them consistently. We want more United Nations involvement on the ground in Macedonia too. Macedonia has a clear case for, and should be given, international recognition. I cannot understand the continuing delay, although I know that not everyone shares my strongly held view—including some Opposition Members.

I share the views expressed by the Foreign Secretary on the brutal crimes of violence against women in the former Yugoslavia. The organised, criminal rape of women, which has taken place there must be condemned and prosecuted as a war crime with the full vigour of international law. Her Majesty's Government and the international community will have our wholehearted support in their pursuit of the perpetrators of such crimes against women. I urge them to continue their wholehearted efforts to pursue the criminals, as I know that the Foreign Secretary is doing, and to bring the full vigour of law to bear upon them.

Mr. Winnick: Has my right hon. Friend seen the newspaper reports which demonstrate that those terrible crimes—especially the rape of Muslim women—were not committed on the spur of the moment but were organised deliberately beforehand by criminals and gangsters? Some of the Serbian political leadership who were involved must bear responsibility for the actions of soldiers and criminals against women. I agree that those responsible, including the people who took the decisions, should be held to account and brought to justice.

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support. It is unthinkable to Members of this House and to people in this country that such crimes could be premeditated and carried out so systematically—indeed, they still are being carried out. Perhaps more than on any other issue, there is unanimity in this country about the need to prosecute the perpetrators of such unspeakable crimes.

Angola is another area of United Nations activity, which attracts fewer headlines but where the problems are no less acute. It is important to remind the House of the elections held in September last year following the peace accords, which were universally recognised as free and fair. Their conduct was a great tribute to the people of Angola. The present troubles and the dreadful violence that has occurred are a direct result of UNITA's refusal to accept the democratic verdict of the Angolan people. It is deplorable. UNITA is attempting to achieve by force of arms and the bullet what it failed to achieve through the ballot box.

I cannot emphasise too strongly that if UNITA is allowed to succeed, there will be the most profound implications for every other part of the world where United Nations-supervised elections are being planned or are shortly to take place.

Especially worrying are the repeated reports of support being given to UNITA by Zaire and by South Africa. I refer to two such reports. There was the seizure by the Namibian authorities at Rundu airport on 23 January of three South African four-engined Douglas DC6 aircraft. The Namibian Government issued a statement on the seizure of the aircraft on 26 January. On 21 January 1993, 120 Zairean and South African troops were landed on the outskirts of Huambo by Puma helicopters. Three Zaireans and a wounded South African were captured.

At 7 am today, I returned from South Africa. I raised the matter directly with the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs in the National Government. During our discussion, I was assured that the Government of South Africa had ceased to provide support for UNITA in Angola. Of course I accept what the Minister said, but I believe that it flies in the face of the evidence being provided by the Namibian authorities. The circumstances are causing great concern on all sides of the debate in South Africa on the future of the country.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): I was the leader of the British parliamentary delegation of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association to observe the elections, and I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that the elections were free and fairly held. However, I counsel strongly against a partisan view of the two groups. We have witnessed the savage butchery of supporters of UNITA and the hounding down of such supporters and their families in Luanda and elsewhere. We must take that into account if a new Angola is to be built. There are brutal thugs on both sides and it is incumbent on the leaders of both sides to bring their people under control so that the country can achieve freedom, peace and democracy.

Dr. Cunningham: Much of what the hon. Gentleman says is true. However, the clear reality is that it was UNITA that refused to accept the results of the election. UNITA first resorted to force of arms when the breakdown occurred. We know, because tragically there are too many examples all around us, that once a breakdown happens, there are few innocents on either side in such conflicts. Such brutal conduct is deplorable: I share the views of the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) on that point.

I know of and congratulate the hon. Gentleman on the good job that he did as leader of the delegation. However, I disagree on one fundamental point. It was UNITA that resorted to violence. Such violence should be condemned not just because of Angola, but because of the threat it poses to other United Nations-brokered peace accords and planned elections.

What steps are the Government taking diplomatically, through the United Nations and elsewhere, to isolate UNITA militarily and diplomatically and to try to bring to an end the appalling conflict which, as the hon. Member for Gravesham says, is costing thousands of lives?

Wherever there is war, famine and disease are not far behind. An estimated 3 million people could be at risk in Angola. There is a need for urgent international assistance, and I urge the Government to acknowledge that fact.

Western Sahara is another part of the world that receives few headlines, but where the United Nations is involved and where progress towards a settlement is painfully slow. It is now almost two years since the peace plan was drawn up by the then Secretary-General, supported by both sides and endorsed by Security Council resolution 690/691. A referendum should have been held under United Nations auspices in December 1991, with the real prospect of bringing an end to a conflict that has lasted for 18 years. We are still waiting for that referendum to take place. The United Nations must stand firm by the Security Council resolutions on Western Sahara and the referendum should take place as soon as possible on the basis of the agreements reached.

In common with other right hon. and hon. Members, there are many other parts of the world to which I could refer. As I have just returned from an interesting visit to South Africa, I shall speak on the position there next. The momentum of change is both challenging and exciting. I had the opportunity to spend three days at the African National Congress conference in Johannesburg and then to spend two days talking with leaders of other political parties and with Government Ministers in Cape Town.

No one should be in any doubt that the African National Congress wholeheartedly supports a peaceful transition to a non-racial, democratic society in South Africa. The magnanimity of people who have been imprisoned, banned, and exiled, and who have seen their families tortured and sometimes sadly murdered is astonishing. People want a peaceful transition. They want to avoid conflict and they want reconstruction in a political as well as in an economic sense in South Africa.

From my recent experiences, I believe that that goal is shared by almost everyone, regardless of political persuasion, in the Republic of South Africa. Happily, talks are now proceeding again and constitutional talks will recommence early next month. It is hoped that elections will take place 12 months from now.

There is broad agreement between the ANC and the National party Government on a proposed five-year

[Dr. Cunningham]

period for a Government of national unity. The ANC refers to a Government of national unity and the National party call it power-sharing. They must make their own decisions about how they describe such a Government. It is a positive proposal which is full of hope.

We had the opportunity to meet Mr. Nelson Mandela. I am happy to tell the House that reports of his illness, like reports of Mark Twain's death, have been much exaggerated. He was in a happy, confident and ebullient mood on Saturday morning in Johannesburg, although he was clearly tired because of the strenuous demands placed on him by the peace process, and by the discussions within his own organisation and bilaterally. There is no doubt that he remains determined to play a full part in the continuing process.

Another piece of important news announced on Saturday by the ANC was its willingness to name dates for a complete end to sanctions, with the exception of sanctions on arms, on oil and on nuclear materials. Assuming that the arrangements on the transitional period are agreed, assuming that announcements are made on an agreed date for elections, on the establishment of a transitional executive council and on independent electoral and media commissions, and assuming the passing of the Transition to Democracy Act, sanctions affecting diplomatic relations, transactions in gold, trade and trade credits, new investment, loans and other financial links will be lifted. Clearly, the ANC recognises the importance not only of reaching political decisions, but of trying in the shortest possible time to begin the important process of regenerating the economy in the interests of all in South Africa. All that was very positive.

What was far more worrying was the experience of visits to Alexandria, to Soweto and to Crossroads, where —I say this with gratitude—I was accompanied by the excellent staff of the British Ambassador, Sir Anthony Reeve, and by the Consul-General, John Doble. In black communities and townships where millions of people live in appalling circumstances, there is a clear appreciation of United Kingdom support for them and their efforts. I want to place that on record. Sadly, it is also clear that that support is infinitesimal when it is set beside the huge scale and nature of the problems in those communities and townships: illiteracy, unemployment, illness, tuberculosis —which is rampant in some communities—poverty and malnutrition.

I met an old lady in Alexandra who was being supported by our aid programme. She was running a hostel for elderly people. She said that she wanted, first, peace more than anything else and, secondly, more support to continue doing her work, giving warmth and comfort to old people who had been abandoned, sadly, by their families or had lost contact with their families completely.

I met and spoke with a woman in Crossroads whose son had recently been assassinated. She was running a co-op for African young people to develop skills and opportunities to create jobs for themselves. Her view was the same: no more fighting, no more war and no more killing; peace and help for reconstruction.

In my talks with representatives of the executive of the African National Congress and Ministers in the Government, and in a brief exchange of views with the president, the leader of the Democratic party and a member of the Conservative party—simply to show that I worked hard to get across the political spectrum—there was universal support for the move towards free and fair elections. There were also widespread demands especially in the black community, as one would expect, for a greater commitment on behalf of the United Nations to provide monitors and more assistance and to ensure that elections are free and fair when they take place.

The future of all southern Africa is bound up in a successful outcome to democratic change in South Africa. The essential huge social and economic reconstruction which is required in South Africa will, if successful, have important consequences for neighbouring states in that part of Africa.

I urge the Foreign Secretary and Her Majesty's Government to continue the excellent work which is being done but to provide more support both directly through our aid programme and at the United Nations for a greater presence in South Africa to give the best possible chance for a peaceful transition to take place.

5.32 pm

Sir Geoffrey Pattie (Chertsey and Walton): Once again, when we are talking about peacekeeping, the distinction must be made—and emphasised—between peacemaking and peacekeeping. The arrival of hi-tech developments in modern warfare has encouraged too many armchair strategists and their leader-writing friends to believe that there is a hi-tech fix for the rather confused situation that we have on the ground in places such as Bosnia.

I believe that military forces can be deployed under the appropriate United Nations resolutions to prevent the outbreak of conflict. They can also be deployed to keep the peace once a ceasefire has happened. I do not believe that any army in the world can insert itself between warring factions such as those in Bosnia.

Humanitarian aid convoys are a different matter. In Bosnia, the convoys are operating in a situation before the fighting has stopped. The fear must now be that any escalation in United Nations military action will create severe difficulties for the highly vulnerable British forces on the ground.

I know that many hon. Members want to take part in the debate, so I shall simply make some brief points about co-operation on the ground between non-governmental organisations and Government Departments such as the Ministry of Defence and the Overseas Development Administration. First, I urge that there should be a collocated headquarters for both military and civil authorities, exactly as there was in northern Iraq. That operation was the success that it was precisely because of the close operational relationship which existed on the ground. Secondly, there is a need to establish as a matter of urgency standard operating procedures which must be agreed between the Ministry of Defence and the Overseas Development Administration.

Thirdly, I draw attention to the great success of the military in Bosnia in providing communications networks. I noticed with something of a wry smile that it was the French general in command who requested that it should be the NATO communications cell and the British in particular who would provide that support for him. That is an example of the way in which the military can be used as enablers without their in any way owning, filtering, censoring or controlling the messages passed down that communications network. Understandably, there are many suspicions between non-governmental organisations and Government Departments.

NATO has made considerable strides recently in working out ways in which it can be involved in emergencies operations. Often, the military cannot be used because of the question of cost. Nowhere is that more glaringly seen than in the United Kingdom, where the Treasury requires the recovery of the full costs of, for example, aircraft when a more reasonable policy would be to charge only the incremental costs, recognising the training value which comes from acting in military operations.

In conclusion, it must be recognised that, although the military can help to stabilise a situation, they cannot provide solutions to the basic problems which exist on the ground.

5.36 pm

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): This has been a sober, thoughtful and constructive debate. The right hon. Member for Chertsey and Walton (Sir G. Pattie) caught us slightly by surprise with his commendable brevity. Because the debate has been sober, thoughtful and constructive, probably very little of it will be reported in the media outside, who are much more interested in the occasional hysterics and histrionics of conflict in this place.

Nevertheless, the debate has been extremely worth while and I generally congratulate the Foreign Secretary on the tone that he set from the outset. I was disturbed only to the extent that I thought he was straying for a moment to try to position British foreign policy somewhere between the saloon bar and Gladstonian rhetoric. He will forgive me if I prefer to move it slightly more in the direction of Gladstonian rhetoric.

The Foreign Secretary mentioned leader writers and commentators. I have noticed recently—I do not know whether others have noticed this—that there is an unfortunate tendency among some writers and commentators to hanker after the old certainties of the cold war and wish somehow that we were back in those reasoned days. That nonsence must be exploded immediately. We should remind ourselves that our children were, until recently, growing up in a world of increasing tension and risk of nuclear terror and that that has been greatly diminished and dispelled since the end of the cold war.

The effect of the cold war was to intrude its malign influence into so many of the conflicts around the world which have involved us from time to time, including today. For example, I do not believe that the peace process in the middle east would have got as far as it has today if the cold war had still been in existence. Certainly, in southern Africa and in the areas to which the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) referred in the western Sahara and the Horn of Africa, one could see the meddlesome influence of the cold war everywhere. The disappearance of the cold war must be welcomed.

There is no doubt that the emergence of a single world super-power brings other problems in its wake. The Foreign Secretary gave us an interesting Foreign Office statistic—that the cost of an ambassador was certainly less than the cost of a military battalion. Let us take that as read. Perhaps much more telling and precise a statistic is that the cost of two days of the successful Desert Storm operation would have covered the entire annual cost of all United Nations peacekeeping efforts around the globe. That is why I start with the proposition that investment in peacekeeping and the building up of the authority of the United Nations is, apart from all other considerations, good value for money for the taxpayer, and infinitely preferable to the necessity to resort to conflict in order to put out world bush fires.

I hope that we shall move forward in the spirit that the Foreign Secretary has outlined in developing the new world order and making it a reality by building up the authority of the United Nations. Undoubtedly, during the cold war, the balance of the super-powers tended to curb the threat of excesses by either of them through fear of the other.

Some of the rhetoric in the recent presidential debate in the United States was a little disturbing. The use of military might without moral authority is not leadership but a form of strong arm dictatorship. A solitary super-power, even in agreement with its allies, deploying high tech military might around the globe according to its own whim is a different proposition from creating a new world order under the specific authority of the United Nations charter, which is what we should clearly be aiming for.

At the time of the publication of the Government's White Paper, "Options for Change", I was critical of its lack of content, pointing towards the future commitments that the British military would have to make to United Nations operations. In a speech in my constituency at an enormous rally in protest against the proposed amalgamation of the King's Own Scottish Borderers and the Royal Scots, I pointed out that, while many were there for reasons of past sentiment, I was there to express my concern because of our future obligations. Anyone with an eye to the pattern of future world politics would have to recognise that while there may be peace dividends and cuts in the overall defence budget, the one thing that could not possibly be cut if one was to have a responsible attitude towards the United Nations, was the levels of infantry. I am glad that there has been at least some back-tracking in the Ministry of Defence since the White Paper was published.

Among the opportunities for cuts are cuts in the development and spread of armaments. I have spoken on the subject before, and I do not wish to repeat myself, but it is interesting that the American Government should be wrestling with the question of air drops over former Yugoslavia when the biggest inhibition against such air drops is the scale of surface-to-air missiles which have found their way into that territory from American supplies to the Afghan rebels. That is a good specific example of how we in the developed world have tended, for short-term reasons, to be rather gung-ho in our supplies of weaponry to particular bush fires or incidents, only to find them spreading elsewhere. There is a moral there which should be firmly taken on board.

In considering defence cuts, we must be careful not to allow the Treasury to impose particular cuts which will inhibit the very kind of role that we might want our troops to continue in future. Peacekeeping will certainly require Britain to be able to put forces such as the Royal Marines where they are needed. That will require amphibious capacity which the landing platform helicopter has been planned to achieve. I believe that the Government saw that

[Sir David Steel]

clearly when the amphibious package was set out exactly a year ago. It is worrying that that project now appears to be threatened by Treasury-led cuts, which are not based on defence requirements. The House and the Select Committees on Defence and on Foreign Affairs have been right to insist that we must establish our defence and peacekeeping needs first and deal with cost second, rather than the other way round.

Like others, I want to be brief, so I come now to the peacekeeping machinery itself. I well remember more than 12 years ago spending some time with the United Nations peacekeeping forces in the Lebanon and being struck then, as I am today in the case of Bosnia, by the limits on the mandate of the United Nations peacekeeping forces.

Incidentally, as tribute has been paid to David Owen and smiles were turned in my direction, I am happy to endorse what the Foreign Secretary said. I know David Owen's qualities well, although I must admit that I never regarded peacekeeping and conciliation as highest among them; none the less, I readily acknowledge the tremendous effort that he has made, with Cyrus Vance, in this difficult situation.

To return to the United Nations mandate, it clearly is not satisfactory to have military operations which cannot exert their authority in the area to which they are sent. The Secretary-General was right to argue in his document "An Agenda for Peace" that, even if the political concurrence of the five permanent members of the Security Council is necessary, the United Nations should have a standby capacity of its own for the purpose of enforcement. If such a force were created—to which we, among others, would have to assign troops—the organisation would be able to react at even shorter notice. Such a capacity would also fulfil a preventive function by giving added seriousness to the resolutions and positions adopted from time to time by the Security Council. As the Secretary-General proposed in his report, those forces could be set up by agreements mentioned in article 43 of chapter VII of the charter. I hope that Her Majesty's Government will give high priority to that.

When one considers the need for such a standby operation, there is no doubt that the United Nations—any criticism of which is a criticism of ourselves—was far too late into Somalia. Somalia is an example where I would argue, again in the best Gladstonian tradition, that we have a particular responsibility. Last October, when I visited a refugee camp in northern Kenya on the borders of Somalia and Ethiopia, I was taken aback by a man who came up to me and said that he should not be there because he was a British passport holder. I asked to see his passport, which he produced, and it turned out to be a British passport, the cover of which looked exactly like any of ours, but it had been issued under the Protectorate of Somalialand around 1950 and so was a valueless document. But the moral was there. We had a responsibility for part of Somalia at one time. That is why I argue, perhaps against the trend of the Foreign Secretary's remarks, that there are cases in which Britain has a particular lingering moral responsibility to be involved and to be taking the lead in United Nations activities—and Somalia is one of them.

When one considers Britain's history, it is undeniable that we grew strong and wealthy through our imperial connections and that legacy also means that we have a particular responsibility to take the lead in trying to develop the new world order and to create peace in areas where there is conflict.

My last point has not yet been mentioned and I hope that the House will forgive me if I dwell on it for a few minutes. An important part of international peacekeeping should be the development of international election monitoring and election machinery. I was pleased, 10 days or so ago, to be at a round table in the Palais des Nations in Geneva and to find that the British Government had sent a senior official to a meeting which was at the invitation of the Swedish Government. They are proposing that an international electoral institute should be established under the authority of the United Nations but not a part of the United Nations machinery, with the capacity to assist the process of creating multi-party democracies.

The reason why that is directly related to international peacekeeping is simply that if one looks at conflicts around the world today, or historically, it is difficult to find examples of mature parliamentary democracies, responsible to people, which have gone to war with one another. War is almost always created through some autocracy or other, so the development of genuine multi-party democracies as part of good government, as part of the new world order, should be attended to with far greater priority.

The moral that I draw from the experience of Angola is slightly different from that of the right hon. Member for Copeland. Like the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold), I was a monitor there, and I was also a monitor in the elections three years previously in Namibia. The two were like chalk and cheese. My conclusion is that there cannot be effective international election supervision on the cheap.

In Namibia, for an electorate of about 1 million, because of the unique circumstances there of the joint administration of the South Africans and the United Nations, about 4,500 international personnel were involved in the elections. In Angola, the figures were the other way around, with something like 450 personnel in charge of an electorate of 10 million. Although those elections were broadly described as free and fair, I am not so sanguine as the right hon. Member for Copeland. Those of us who stayed on after the election saw the difficulties created by the computer counting system breaking down and the suspicions that were aroused.

Mr. Jacques Arnold *indicated dissent.*

Sir David Steel: The hon. Member shakes his head, but I cite in support of my contention not an outside observer but the director of the elections himself, in an interview a few weeks ago on Angolan radio. His view, as the organiser of the elections, was that not enough international personnel were present to ensure that fraud and mistakes did not occur.

Mr. Arnold: I stayed on a little longer and returned on the same plane as the right hon. Gentleman. The problem was that the election authorities were so concerned with accuracy that they adopted a belt-and-braces approach and kept checking and rechecking the results all the way through. As is the case with our elections, certain results arriving first from the inner cities produced a distorted anticipated result. They gave a four-to-one lead to the MPLA in the early stages—in the same way as a Labour lead is seen in the early hours in our elections.

Sir David Steel: I do not dispute that. I am only saying that Angola's election monitoring mechanisms—the hon. Gentleman and I both witnessed them—and the preparation of the register were inadequate by our standards. I am not arguing for a series of operations concerned with making sure that the icing on the cake is right—frankly, that is what election monitoring is all about, and I have been involved in quite a lot of it—but for the existing arrangements to be replaced with something that will ensure that the cake itself is baked in the first place: that is to say, the underlying conditions for elections exist; the electoral organisation in the particular country is genuinely independent; broadcasts are available equally to all parties; and the electoral register is properly prepared well in advance. All of that requires something more than visiting experts such as the hon. Member for Gravesham being present for a few days.

Dr. John Cunningham: The same is true in respect of the South African elections.

Sir David Steel: The right hon. Gentleman is right. With the South African elections in prospect, there will again be the need for something like a monitoring exercise.

I hope that the Government will give even more support than that which they have already lent tentatively to the Swedish Government's initiative in establishing an international monitoring agency. It would have the added advantage of being independent from government. Commendable though the work of the UN and of the Commonwealth election monitoring teams has been, both are organisations of government. One needs an organisation which is not directly related to government but only to nation states and is able to deal with all parties in nation states on a genuinely independent basis.

Such an agency would also have the advantage of co-ordinating the work of the many existing organisations —they are beginning to multiply—which deal with election monitoring. We saw in Kenya the difficulty that arises if people arrive and say that the elections are free and fair and then depart hastily, perhaps leaving others to make more critical judgments. There is a strong case for one expert, international body co-ordinating all the others. I hope that the Government will give that proposal much greater and more urgent public support as part of the general scene of international peacekeeping.

5.53 pm

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): This debate provides a welcome opportunity to discuss international peacekeeping and the United Nation's changing role. I hope that the evidence given at the Foreign Affairs Select Committee on the subject is of some help to the House, and that the same will be true of the Committee's report on the "Agenda for Peace" agenda and of this country's interest in seeing it unfold when it is finally published.

We have been given, in knowledgeable speeches, an interesting grand tour of all the world's trouble spots, which add up to one central reality that we must confront. In the post-cold war world, there is increasing demand on every side and on every occasion for United Nations resources and troops and military personnel, and for United Nations-blessed military personnel. That will develop in every conceivable way. We heard from the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) that the United Nations is being urged to move in to election monitoring, producing new constitutions, and perhaps even producing mandates to run whole countries—as has been hinted, in Somalia, possibly in Bosnia, and elsewhere.

From the old attitude that the United Nations could not do very much, the view today is at the opposite extreme, and the United Nations is expected to deliver fantastically high expectations on every front. We must adapt our own thinking, policies and interests to that new reality, if we do not want to be caught out by the pace of events.

Demands will be increasingly insistent, especially on countries such as ours that are permanent members of the Security Council, and there will be an increasing blurring of roles between peacekeeping and peace enforcement—the idea touched on in "An Agenda for Peace", which itself raises the difficult question of how one enforces peace and what kind of heavy weaponry should be used.

There is also a blurring between humanitarian activity and military intervention. Nowhere is that more evident than in the Bosnian tragedy. Bosnia is supposed to be a civilian operation by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to deal either with refugees or people whom it is thought will become refugees. It is to those people that the UN has tried to provide relief. The military involvement, in UNPROFOR 2, is to protect those delivering the relief.

We see before our eyes—this process is continuing even as we debate—a gradual merging of the need to deliver relief into a greater and greater military commitment. Those right hon. and hon. Members who have been to the region—I believe that a number have—have heard the debate on the ground. Some relief workers asked for the military to go away altogether because soft-skin vehicles escorted by hard-skin vehicles become the unnecessary targets for snipers.

Other relief workers asked for the military to transport all the relief supplies, because that was thought the only way that the supplies could get through. That view was prevalent a week or two ago in the UNHCR—particularly after it tragically lost some of its personnel.

In the past two or three weeks, other voices have been raised, asking whether the military could not go a little further and open the roads by force, because it was ridiculous that the roads should be closed by one Serbian waving a kalashnikov. It was said that the roads to Sarajevo and to the isolated and beseiged Bosnian-Muslim towns in eastern Bosnia should be forced open.

The latest development is the Washington proposal, which is being aired and considered, to make massive air drops of relief supplies—not just into Sarajevo from Zagreb and Split, as in the past, but into the Serbian-Bosnian heartland, where such a move would be regarded as against the Serbian-Bosnian agenda. That view may be regrettable, wrongful, and monstrous, but such air drops may be regarded as potentially hostile acts. That is a dangerous further move and one that must be carefully considered. Our eyes must be wide open to the fact that humanitarian relief and the desire to deliver it through international agencies and the United Nations is gradually being transformed into a military commitment.

We played it slightly differently in Iraq, where the military carried relief supplies from the start. The

[Mr. David Howell]

UNHCR did not have a mandate to organise aid. Many would say that the Iraqi operation was highly successful, especially where British forces were involved. We should continue to take that kind of approach in Bosnia. Incidentally, I agree with the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) about getting relief direct to the Kurds and Shi'ites.

I ask those responsible for policy not to contemplate the argument that some deal ought to be done with Saddam Hussein because he is the only man and a counterweight to Iran. That is nonsense. Far from being a counterweight, Saddam creates a weak Iraq. As long as he rules there, there will be no counterweight to the mullahs and the ayatollahs. We need a democratic Iraq, autonomous and federal in nature, to provide a balance with Iran; otherwise there will be no stability in the middle east.

All the principles by which we used to stand—no intervention in internal affairs, humanitarian relief only, blue beret peace-keeping involving very light weapons—are being breached as the demands of the world, and the new conditions there, impose pressure for more heavily armed and more direct intervention by the military. Let me issue a plea to the Government, and to others who think about these matters: we should anticipate the problems, observe new situations as they emerge and prepare for the event—indeed, try to shape it by our policy.

We should apply our minds, with the greatest vigour, to four major aspects. First, there is the question—raised by both my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the right hon. Member for Copeland—of the United Nations and its resources. Clearly, United Nations financing is not satisfactory. It is not just a case of delayed payments, although the amount involved is considerable: I have been told that $908 million is unpaid for routine United Nations operations, and about $850 million for peacekeeping. Against that, however, must be set the substantial physical contributions made by both the United States and Britain.

My point is both that the finance must be organised more effectively, and that the problem of trying to organise the military forces needed for every emergency on an ad hoc basis must be overcome. By the time the forces have been organised and the funds raised, the whole situation has changed, often for the worse. I know that the Boutros-Ghali proposal for earmarking or standby forces is not popular in London, but I think that it should be examined carefully. We might be able to make real economies in our defence expenditure if we could organise our forces logistically, in ways likely to meet the pattern of United Nations demand—likely, that is, to fit into an overall pattern, in which every country produces a particular logistical capability rather than an amorphous block of forces.

Secondly, we shall have to develop a much more effective contribution to preventive diplomacy. As has been pointed out, the deployment of forces in Macedonia and Kosovo is rightly being considered; in such cases, "a stitch in time" applies vividly, and effective preventive diplomacy will save many costs later.

Thirdly, we must recognise that the old restraint of the United Nations charter concerning intervention in internal affairs has, in practice, begun to crumble. It began to crumble in Kurdistan and Iraq; it has crumbled further in the new Balkan states that have sprung into life. The activities of the United Nations are now creeping out of the chapter 6 area into the area of chapter 7 and article 42: soon, they may creep into the area of article 43, which sanctions the organisation of military force to take military action in various countries in the name of international peace and security. In a world that is expanding before our eyes, we must organise our own military and other resources to make an effective contribution.

Fourthly, there is the matter on which my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary rightly touched—the strengthening of the United Nations itself. Several questions arise. First, is the set-up—the establishment of the veto, the five permanent members of the Security Council, the rotation of Security Council members and the General Assembly—capable of giving authority and power to United Nations activities in the future? I entirely accept that the present operation works extremely well; certainly it worked in the Gulf, although things are not going at all well for the United Nations effort in other areas, such as Cambodia, and possibly Angola. That is very regrettable. Nevertheless, the Security Council has operated pretty effectively, and it seems a great pity to try to stir it up.

The fact remains, however, that two of the richest countries in the world—Japan and Germany—are not involved. They are moving very slowly, because their constitutions do not allow them to take on the responsibility of permanent Security Council membership at this stage, and they will not be ready to make their pitch until they have that status. In the meantime, however, I am sure that it is right for other Security Council members—us in particular, perhaps—to say, "We continue to be members of the Security Council, but we recognise its inadequacies, the difficulties and the case for change."

We should present constructive, not obstructive, ideas—I am not saying that we are presenting obstructive ideas—showing how the structure of the Security Council can be reformed and modernised in ways that will not damage its efficiency, and will not open up an unending squabble between all the continents about which should be Security Council members. Some interesting and positive ideas are floating around, and I feel that they should be codified and supported by this country.

Those are the new roles that will be imposed on us—roles that, indeed, we already face as we contemplate the vast spread of troubles that exists everywhere from Liberia to Cyprus. I have mentioned Cambodia, but a dozen other places are involved. I believe that, in all, 26 operations are proceeding: now that the Americans are in Somalia, more than 60,000 troops are operating around the world, either UN-blessed or wearing blue berets.

This is a major operation, and it can be said without fear of contradiction that it will expand, placing enormous additional strains on the United Nations and its secretariat—which, far from being an overblown bureaucracy, is grossly undermanned in many respects. We in this country must develop effective policies to deal with those developments, both in our own interests and in order to contribute in the way that we wish.

To do that, we need to adopt three stances, or qualities, here in London. First, we need a strong United Kingdom foreign policy, which must not be seen simply as a Euro-blur. Of course we have interests in common with our European neighbours; but, to be an effective United

Nations member, the country needs effective and well-articulated foreign policies, and an explanation of those policies to offer our United Nations and, in particular, our American colleagues. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will put those points to the President of the United States when they meet.

Secondly, we need a strong Foreign and Commonwealth Office. UN work is beginning to overload the FCO with all sorts of new requirements that are not often debated, but are very time-consuming. I note from our work on the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs that the FCO is considering not opening new missions but closing existing missions, in order to meet some of the overload. I also note that, in terms of overseas missions, we run well behind our neighbouring continental allies, the French and the Germans, and only a little ahead of the Italians; and that our cultural diplomacy effort, which is all part of weaving an effective role in the UN, is very much weaker than that of the French and the Germans.

We could pay a high cost for those deficiencies if we do not analyse carefully what we are trying to do. We want a strong Foreign and Commonwealth Office, capable of meeting the large load of new work.

Another Department that needs strength and support is the Overseas Development Administration. In the world that we are discussing today, the ODA is becoming less a development Ministry than a Ministry of emergencies—a Ministry that must meet an endless string of emergencies, ranging from the manmade horrors of Bosnia to the natural disasters and starvation in the Sudan and Ethiopia, and to earthquakes and so forth.

We need to be sure that we are not getting our priorities wrong in retaining our undoubtedly limited resources in areas where they are not contributing to the meeting of emergencies, and starving our agencies—led by the ODA—of resources. Those agencies, usually prompted by enormous public pressure, must swiftly meet the emergencies that develop.

Those emergencies are being met very effectively in Bosnia, but I suspect that, even in Bosnia, the balance of resources between actual relief work and the military input—an excellent job is being done in the military respect—suggests that protection costs much more than actual relief. This raises questions as to whether the balance is right.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chertsey and Walton (Sir G. Pattie) set a standard of brevity that we cannot beat. None the less, we are required to be brief. Thus, I do not have time to mention all the environmental, development and arms control work of the United Nations. These are all aspects of the attempt to keep peace, to prevent conflict, to prevent endless killing and horror in this uni-polar—no longer bi-polar—world.

I recognise that such operations mean expenditure in terms of manpower and resources. Our instinct is to say that we cannot afford them. I end by saying that, against that——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. The right hon. Gentleman is equally caught by the 10-minute rule, which is now operating.

6.10 pm

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): I hardly needed that reminder, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Anyone rising to take part at this stage in a debate on such a subject and speaking with some authority might be considered by some people to be somewhat arrogant. That may be seen as applying especially to me, as my track record shows that I asked a Conservative Member to see me outside the Chamber for less than pacific purposes. However, in the remaining nine-and-a-half minutes, I want to make specific remarks about the British role in peacekeeping.

When I was on the Parliamentary Armed Services Trust, I spent some time in Northern Ireland with the Light Infantry. I suppose that the role is more policing than peacekeeping, but there is a great common area. About 18 months later I met the same unit in Berlin. As I reported to the House on a previous occasion, members of the unit dragged me to one side and, while expressing great joy at seeing me again, belaboured me for being "one of those bloody politicians who sent us over here to do a soddin' awful job with one arm tied behind our backs". That is the kind of approach that I want to talk about.

Last week the Select Committee on Defence visited Split and Zagreb and areas of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The group that I was with had direct experience of the rules of engagement of our troops in UNPROFOR 2 and those in UNPROFOR 1. There are some serious differences. UNPROFOR 2 is concerned largely with humanitarian aid to the heartland of Bosnia, which is either distributed by our personnel or made ready by our personnel to be collected by local bodies. The United Kingdom's contribution to UNPROFOR 1 is somewhat different. That group is concerned largely with medical and hygiene provision for the battalions that have been installed to supervise the United Nations protection areas under the first Vance plan. It includes contingents from Russia, Belgium, Argentina, Canada, Nepal, Jordan, Czechoslovakia, Nigeria, Denmark, Poland, France, Kenya, Sweden, Finland, America and quite a number of other countries.

I learned the chilling lesson that some of those contingents had arrived without any kind of equipment. They expected to be kitted out on arrival. Some of them turned up without any kind of training or experience. I learned that there is no proper planning cell in the United Nations and that there is no CQ module, no command, communications and control. General Sitash Nambia, to his eternal credit, was very loyal in saying that he had no problems with this. Contrary to some press reports, he said, he had the home telephone numbers of his United Nations superiors and could contact them at any time of the day or night.

Nevertheless, there are a number of engagements across the globe where United Nations contingents are trying to fulfil their mandate, and they can hardly be expected to communicate with superiors, at their homes, 24 hours a day. The whole situation is a farce and must be seen as such. Her Majesty's Government represent this nation, which prides itself on the way in which our young men and women are trained to fulfil political objectives on our behalf. The Government must see that those young men and women are not exposed to such nonsense.

I will tell the House about one of the more crazy things that we learned. Not only are United Nations personnel

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allowed to fire when they are fired upon, but in the Krajina protection areas they must surrender their weapons if required by a Serb or a Croat to do so. Is this why we train young men and women to defend this country? Is it right to tell them that they must not fire unless they are fired upon and that weapons must be given up if that demand is made? I do not want to spell "preposterous", as I am sure that hon. Members see what I am getting at.

To date, 27 United Nations personnel have been killed,and more than 300 seriously injured. Some of the latter were injured in road traffic accidents, but the accidents occurred as those people were trying to fulfil the crazy, confused mandate that we have allowed the United Nations to give them. I wish to make it very plain that I am not in any way criticising the personnel, and I am not being chauvinistic when I say that the professionalism, dedication and spirit of the people we met, travelled with and dined—ate, rather than dined—with was quite exemplary. It was great to see how they performed their duties. Indeed, it bred in me a kind of pride that I never thought I would feel.

It must be made plain, however, that if we are serious about maintaining a mature and responsible role in the international arena we must ensure that other nations engaging in such activity accept their responsibilities beforehand in a serious manner and send to the theatres people who are experienced, well trained, well equipped and dedicated to the task in hand. The political task that we set must be very clearly defined, and the personnel must be suitably equipped to achieve it. We must also ensure that, if an operation starts to fall apart, withdrawal can be accomplished with some semblance of security—and without undue casualty, which is the great danger in Bosnia.

6.19 pm

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): I will not follow the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) except to say that I thought his speech was most compelling and well worth reading by those hon. Members who did not have the privilege of hearing it.

My remarks will be a trifle heretic, and for that reason I preface them by saying two things. The first is that I strongly agreed with the cautionary words of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary in the concluding part of his speech. The second is that I strongly welcome the all-party agreement which is obvious in the House, at least today, on the importance of Britain's commitment to the United Nations—something voiced by the spokesmen for both the Labour and Liberal parties.

It is a platitude that most hon. Members and, I suspect, many in the country—but perhaps not quite as many as we in the House imagine—believe in the virtue of international peacekeeping. Indeed, both the need and the opportunities for it have grown dramatically in recent years, especially since the end of the cold war. I will not give the figures, because they have already been put on record in the debate.

Furthermore, the problem is given an extra twist by the dramatic growth of the global media, which has enormously increased public pressure on national Governments to "do something" when we see heart-rending pictures on the television screens in our living rooms night after night.

As well as these changes, however, which have driven events and the response to events in one direction, other things have changed over the years, which ought to give us pause for thought and which constitute the basis of my argument this evening.

In particular, two forms of relative economic decline have taken place over the past two or three decades. One is that the United Kingdom, within what we now call the European Community, has declined in importance. Make no mistake: that is the reality borne out by the figures. The second is that the European Community itself, although it has grown from nine to 12 since we have been a member, with the prospect of a much larger Community towards the turn of the century, is nonetheless of relatively declining importance in the global economy and the global polity. Hon. Members on both sides need to understand these rather bleak and important facts.

So my conclusion already at this stage in my speech is that the time has come for us to cut our politico-military coat according to our economic cloth. I make no bones about that. I was glad to see that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, in his thoughtful speech at Chatham House a while ago, said:

> "We cannot be everywhere and we cannot do everything."

That is obvious.

Singing the same song, or at any rate in harmony, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, in his lecture at the Royal United Services Institute, said:

> "We should not commit military forces in circumstances where there is no military solution"—

I would add, as my own gloss, where there is no realistic prospect of a political solution, which I think is more relevant—

> "but only a clamour for something to be done."

Amen to both sentiments.

Other things have changed as well which should necessitate a fundamental review of our whole external role in the world—I put it no lower than that. The first is the problem of military overstretch, which has been well identified by hon. Members on both sides, most recently in the report of the Select Committee on Defence. The second is the prospect of a fundamental review of all forms of public expenditure, which, I would remind the House, was announced to the House by my right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo), the Chief Secretary, just a few weeks ago.

The third is the developing debate about the new role and structure of the United Nations, already alluded to in the debate, and notably the vexed and rather ticklish question for us, as British citizens, of British and French participation as permanent members of the Security Council reflecting as it does two of the greatest myths—or pretences—which emerged from the immediate post-war period, if we are honest about it. So we must be concerned about the point that Joe Rogaly made very well in an article in the *Financial Times* a while ago, when he warned us of the insidious danger for this country of being "hooked on the glory drug" when we can afford the drug less and less.

The fourth point is the parallel increase in the economic capacity, and increasingly in the political will as well of countries such as Germany and Japan, the two so-called losers of world war 2, which now enables them notwithstanding their constitutional inhibitions, which are beginning to be dispelled, to carry more of the burden of global responsibilities and of international peacekeeping; and it is absolutely right that they should do so. In this context, it is perhaps quite encouraging—a sign of the times—that German troops now serve on UN operations, as I understand it, in Somalia, and Japanese troops on UN operations in Cambodia. It is a good step in the right direction.

It is sobering again to note that, in 1970, on the basis of gross domestic product per capita—I want to read these figures into the record—Germany was fifth, Japan was 17th and the United Kingdom was 12th in the world. The latest figures that I have are for 1991. On the same basis, Germany was fourth, Japan sixth and the United Kingdom 18th. That is the economic basis on which we must build whatever policy we can sensibly afford.

My fifth point is the evidence of declining public support among the British people to allow any Government of this country gratuitously to accept disproportionate global peacekeeping burdens, especially if other, stronger, nations seem not to pull their weight, and if our external effort appears to be made at the expense of more pressing domestic economic and social needs. A good deal of opinion poll evidence, which I have no time to read into the record, shows exactly how the public reacts to these matters. It is somewhat different from the way in which some of us here who follow these matters see it ourselves.

So what am I saying? My argument is not that we abdicate altogether our external role in the world, but rather that it should be given a sharper and more concentrated focus—less of the wide angle, and more of the telephoto lens. We should limit the range of roles that we try to perform We should concentrate on fewer of them, but do them even better than we already do them.

We should concentrate on things like more rapid response intervention, which we do well; this implies fewer long-term peacekeeping roles of the kind that we are doing in Cyprus, for example, and for which I see little justification in today's world. We should put more emphasis on the support for the civilian power in Northern Ireland, because we have to—it is an integral part of our country—but that implies less emphasis upon the minimal, residual presence, which is the result of historical factors, in Germany, through the British Army of the Rhine.

We should encourage our stronger allies, particularly our partners such as Germany and Japan, to do more. In this process, we should recognise reality—here I make an unfashionable point—and consider ceding our place as a permanent member of the Security Council to Japan, while encouraging France to cede her place to Germany. After all, she appears to have been prepared to cede practically everything else to Germany in recent times, including her currency, so why not cede her place on the Security Council as well, for good measure?

Beyond the military sphere, we should concentrate more on our considerable diplomatic, cultural and overseas development skills of the kind to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) referred, We have a top-notch diplomatic service and priceless assets in the British Council, the BBC and our higher education institutions. We have one of the most respected and cost-effective overseas aid programmes in the world. We should play to those strengths. It is better to do fewer things well than to attempt to do too many and fail for lack of capacity, and increasingly for lack of public will.

6.27 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) made a courageous speech, which will not go down too well with his colleagues when they get round to reading it. He argues that we should become Belgium with nuclear weapons, and I do not think that everybody on his side is quite prepared to make that leap in their own lifetime from super-power, to major power of the second rank, to slipping down the second division into the third division and out into the Beazer Homes league, if the league still exists, because military power underpins diplomatic power. It is absolutely right that one must develop one's roles commensurate with one's economic ability to sustain those roles.

The irony is that, with the transformation from the cold war, far from cuts being easily made, quite the reverse is the case, because one does not, if one wishes to embark on peacekeeping operations, dispense with those weapons that were necessary in the previous era and move into light tanks and equipment that was not central in the cold war. We need both capabilities, because there is no guarantee that the only conflicts that we are likely to be engaged in for the future will require Warrior and light tanks and light equipment. There are so many threats that still require the old-fashioned military capability. It is right to repeat the thesis of Paul Kennedy from "The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers" that countries that overstretch themselves eventually collapse.

A famous hymn says:

"Crown and thrones may perish
Kingdoms rise and wane."

That is most apt in relation to Britain. I shall not belabour the tempting political point that our economic capability has so deteriorated that the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington can contemplate our playing only a minute role in international relations. That is one of the consequences of our economic decline in the past 13 years.

Boutros-Ghali said recently that there would probably be 400 countries in the world in the next decade. Many of them will be created as a result of conflict. It was not meant to be like that. The end of the cold war was meant to usher in an era of peace and harmony. In many ways, we can look back on the cold war—this sounds rather perverse—with some nostalgia. It might have been uncomfortable if one lived in eastern Europe with low living standards, but nevertheless there was some stability, which has disappeared.

We are now facing a crisis. The shifting of the tectonic plates is the finest analogy used to describe the fundamental transformation in international security. We are entering such a period of instability that even the Ministry of Defence recognises it. The uncertainties that we now have to cope with will cause enormous problems to the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign Office.

The late Evan Luard identified in the mid-1980s 127 wars that had taken place since 1945, during the period of apparent stability. *Jane's Defence Weekly* identified no fewer than 73 hot spots throughout the world. In 1991, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute identified 30 wars that were taking place, and the Royal

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Military College, Sandhurst, identified 45 possible sources of conflict and tensions in the former Warsaw treaty organisation area alone.

What is more threatening is the fact that some of those crises have already surfaced. In some, the tensions are quickening; in some, the tensions and problems are stirring; but there are many instances, largely unknown, in which the issues are quiescent—lying dormant—but could escalate to a crisis at any time. Those are the sort of crises that we shall have to cope with.

In its seminal and influential report, the Select Committee on Defence made its own threat assessment, a "Strategic Setting". The warnings were there that one does not have the luxury of simply employing light forces on United Nations missions. We have identified a series of potential threats and crises to our national security that will be met only by a defence policy that can cope with a variety of contingencies.

The United Nations will be pivotal during the dangerous era that we are entering. It was rescued from its impotence by the ending of the cold war. The United Nations and the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe will be very important, but they will not be panaceas for a more secure world or a substitute for institutions that, historically, have served us well and are undergoing a period of rapid transformation.

Until we achieve a more harmonious world, I argue very strongly that NATO is still required. The initiatives that NATO has taken to reach out to former eastern European countries and the former Soviet Union are very important, not simply an exercise in finding a job to do. We would be foolish indeed to see even the European Community assume that responsibility before it is time. We would be even more foolish to assume that one can abandon collective defence and security for a rather nebulous concept of the League of Nations revisited. Although the United Nations will be very important, it must surely be seen as a complement to existing institutions.

The Ministry of Defence has now recognised that the world is rather dangerous. The statements of previous Secretaries of State and the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Mr. Hamilton) would make amusing reading in the light of their sudden Pauline conversion to a Hobbesian interpretation of international relations.

One must look for the institutions that will be important in the forthcoming decade. NATO will still be very important. The stakes have been raised by the Vance-Owen plan and by the Clinton acceptance of an American commitment to the plan. Up to 25,000 American troops have been promised to police the Vance-Owen plan, and NATO will probably be the implementing body of this. It has been said that 50,000 to 60,000 troops—a corps—will be necessary to police the plan. Many would argue that we should not get too deeply into such a crisis.

I argue that not getting more deeply involved in the long term, and even in the medium term, is likely to be more horrendous and to have more devastating consequences on European security. When the Select Committee on Defence visited Croatia recently, I led the rear area brigade—what I call the lack of moral fibre brigade, which was not chosen to go into more dangerous country, several members of which are with us this evening. Most people assume that the only troops in Yugoslavia are the Cheshires, but many other troops from the Army, Navy, Air Force and Royal Fleet Auxiliary and from other countries are doing an excellent job.

The UN must look at its rules of engagement and its mandate. I have been told that our commitment is likely to be short, but I give the House this pearl of wisdom and information. I saw in the port of Split 12 pool tables waiting to be delivered to the Army. That does not show that a British withdrawal from former Yugoslavia is imminent, nor should it be. The United States should exact something from its allies in any activity that it undertakes. That is the only way to bring the negotiating parties genuinely to the negotiating table. Diplomacy alone is superfluous; diplomacy backed up by the threat of force is still critical.

The United Nations will assume an increasingly important role. If we are going to be 400 countries, the UN must play its part in securing that new world.

6.37 pm

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): I must first apologise to the House for missing a number of the speeches which followed the opening speeches and thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and Madam Speaker, for your tolerance; I had to attend a meeting that I could not avoid.

I was much taken with the speech of the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), who spoke of some people's nostalgia for the cold war. When the Warsaw pact and the Berlin wall crumbled, few people realised how within so few years we should find ourselves in the difficulties and uncertainties that grip us today. A number of bodies around the world are commendably seeking to find a new role in the dangerous world that has emerged. The United Nations—I shall talk about this later—is doing its best to cope with the rise in prestige in recent years. NATO is seeking a new role, we hope as an agency of the United Nations to deal with regional problems. The conference on security and co-operation in Europe, the other newly fledged organisation, is acquiring more expertise in peacekeeping and in actions to reduce tension. All these are to the good, and all must be encouraged.

We have to remember that, where there are international tensions, there are various levels of international response. First, we very often apply sanctions, and it is to these that I shall devote most of my comments today. Then there is the role of peacekeeping and, above all, the role of peacemaking and the reversal of invasion situations, as in Kuwait and the Falklands.

I believe that there is in the House, quite rightly, an understanding of the dangers of peacemaking and of how ill-fated a massive peacemaking operation in Yugoslavia would be. The lessons of the last world war are well remembered in the House, and rightly so. The public would soon tire of a procession of body bags coming back from Yugoslavia with little sign of peace being made. The House's advice to the Government to avoid peacemaking in Yugoslavia if they possibly can has been absolutely right.

There is in the world, particularly over Yugoslavia—and, indeed, Cambodia, where I am going with a delegation from the Foreign Affairs Committee at the weekend—a feeling of hopelessness, exasperation and frustration. I want to suggest some of the things that I believe should be done.

First, we need major changes at the United Nations. In November I went to New York with the Foreign Affairs Committee; we met Mr. Boutros-Ghali, and the Committee will be reporting in the near future to the House and making its recommendations. Clearly, there continues to be a major cash crisis. That must be put right, and it is hoped that the Americans, in particular, will play their part in this. There is also a major problem with regard to communications. The hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) spoke about that a little earlier. There is clearly a major problem, too, over the control of military forces deployed in various parts of the world by the United Nations, and a great deal has to be done to improve that situation. I believe that the Government should do all that they can as soon as possible to get a new basis for the new role of the United Nations—a good deal of it on the back of "An Agenda for Peace", which I was very glad to hear the Foreign Secretary welcome in his opening speech today.

I return, however, to the issue of sanctions, as they so often constitute the first measure agreed by the international community. We ought to be thinking a great deal harder about how we can make sanctions and trade embargoes a great deal more effective. The imposition of sanctions and embargoes is a vital part of preventive diplomacy. On far too many occasions over the years we have seen the imposition of sanctions which really have not worked.

When I first came into the House, the Conservatives were in opposition and I was one of the 30 Members who voted with the Labour Government to impose oil sanctions on Rhodesia. I still believe that that was the right thing to do. The tragedy of the situation was that the oil sanctions were not properly enforced. That continues to be the problem with sanctions. We all know that, with the exception of oil, the sanctions that have been imposed upon Iraq are not especially effective. We all know that, particularly through Syria, and perhaps through other places, there is a great deal of leakage, which should not go on.

In Yugoslavia, the effectiveness of sanctions can only be described as pathetic. I had an answer from the Government on this only the other day. We know that a large number of our tankers have been going into the former Yugoslavia up the Adriatic. We hear stories and read in the press about convoys of barges doing the same on the Danube. We hear of Iranian aircraft flying into the Muslim areas, and we know jolly well what they will be carrying.

The tragedy is that people tend to dismiss sanctions and embargoes curtly, saying that they do not work and that we should not do any more about the problem, but my question to the Government today is this: should we not be giving a good deal more thought to making sanctions and embargoes more effective than they are? If we could, that would be a great prize, because the more effective one makes sanctions and embargoes, the less need there is for subsequent peacekeeping or even peacemaking arrangements. It is quite useless, having imposed sanctions, to send an American fleet up the Adriatic to monitor what is going on. That is no good at all. One has to be able to enforce the sanctions.

To my mind, it would improve matters no end if, at the same time as one imposed sanctions, there was automatic deployment of enforcement and supervisory forces in adjoining countries. It is clearly better to do it at that stage, at the beginning, than to try to impose those forces months later when serious shortcomings become apparent. National dignities are much more offended and upset if one then wants to put enforcement and supervisory forces into adjoining countries to see that the sanctions are properly applied.

There are, of course, major problems in doing this. Sanctions can never be made 100 per cent. effective; we all know that. There are always problems of transhipment, which can be a method of abuse. There is the problem of compensation for losses in adjoining countries, including trade lost through the imposition of sanctions. There was a classic example of that in the case of Jordan and the Gulf situation. Then there is the final difficulty, to which the hon. Member for Stockton, North referred in his notable speech—that of finding suitable troops. This is one of the major problems that the United Nations faces.

There are great advantages in ensuring that sanctions are properly enforced, above all because that does not lead to casualties among the enforcement bodies in adjoining countries. I strongly believe that there are great opportunities for making sanctions much more effective. I greatly welcome the CSCE initiative in appointing a sanctions co-ordinator; I was glad to hear the Foreign Secretary welcome that today and I know that it was partly through his initiative that it was done. I urge the Government to give a lot more thought to this, because it is a relatively painless way of enforcing the international will.

6.47 pm

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): This debate is a chance not only to assess the participation of our armed forces in peacekeeping operations, but to address the deep-seated and widespread desire of the peoples and nations of the world for some form of collective security. They want a means of ensuring uniform rights and protection for the individual and respect for and compliance with international law. They want to be certain that, if conflicts arise, the suffering of those directly affected, but not directly responsible, will be alleviated quickly and efficiently.

In short, I speak of a new world order, given life by the ending of the wasteful years of cold war stalemate, given energy and sustenance by the allied response to Saddam Hussein's rape of Kuwait, and given hope for the future by continued progress on strategic nuclear arms reductions, by the ever closer co-operation of international agencies and states and, most of all, by the release of the United Nations from a 45-year-long relegation to the periphery of international affairs. There are good intentions and a will to achieve, but no backing and no will on the part of key member states to let the work begin.

I noted with interest that in his address at Chatham house on 27 January this year, the Foreign Secretary dismissed the idea of a new world order as being not helpful, yet he and the Secretary of State for Defence recognise in the public response to each fresh international crisis the must-do-something factor. Yet they fail to realise that, here and abroad, there is a will to accept change for

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the common good. The means exist to achieve that change, provided we grasp the opportunity while the will and determination remains.

In "An Agenda for Peace", the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, sets out the way ahead, and the British Government should take a lead in promoting and advancing the principles of that agenda. After all, we are a permanent member of the Security Council and we belong to NATO, WEU, CSCE, EC, the Commonwealth and the G7 group. We may be a medium-size power with a developed sense of international responsibility, as the Secretary of State reminded us, but there is no shame in that. If one sits at all the top tables, one has access to all the key players. One also participates in taking decisions that affect a large percentage of the world's population. So we should examine what the British Government are doing to meet the ends set out by the Secretary-General.

There are several important aspects of "An Agenda for Peace" concerning peacemaking and peacekeeping. Do the Government support the idea of centralising the control of military operations via a military staffs committee? Is it not fair to argue that the problem with United Nations operations in the past has centred on the inability of the participants to communicate and associate in the necessary functions of a complex logistical undertaking, such as humanitarian relief in Bosnia, around a single source?

Does the Foreign Secretary accept that a logical conclusion of the confusion experienced by the United Nations forces in the former Yugoslavia in communicating with each other, let alone with the warring parties, cries out for a centralised structure as part of the United Nations peacekeeping effort based around a major signals unit and expanding to take in infantry, medical and supplies units?

Indeed, would it not be advisable, if we are to promote the role of the United Nations in those areas, to take on board all the points mentioned in paragraphs 42 to 54 of "An Agenda for Peace", drawing on the military resources of member states for a permanent standby force, trained and ready to hit the ground running, in response to Security Council resolutions? We welcome NATO's offer to place its resources at the disposal of the United Nations, highlighting the significance of the merging of Britain's foreign policy interests with the roles being created and played by international agencies.

I also read with interest the speech by the Secretary of State for Defence to the Royal United Services Institute in which he made many good points with which I agreed. But I question whether he was correct to say that there was no need to address "Options for Change" and that little could be achieved by setting aside troops for peacekeeping duties. The United Kingdom is the second largest contributor to United Nations operations, with nearly 4,000 personnel committed. Their experience and expertise is highly valued.

We can be proud of the role played by our forces in peacekeeping operations and should not shirk from the possibility of expanding that role. After all, even right-wing columnists are beginning to acknowledge the need for a more interventionist United Nations and the promotion of "the right people to the right jobs". The British Army, Navy and Air Force are packed with the right people. The Government should, perhaps, accept that "Options for Change" is full of decisions but lacks direction. A blend of foreign and military affairs would be of use to the world as well as to the United Kingdom.

The UN peacekeeping operations cost money, so I urge the Government, who have access to all the key players, to push for the prompt payment of debts. I also urge them actively to consider the direct funding of peacekeeping operations from the defence budget. The idea of a peace endowment fund is also worthy of further consideration.

Dr. Boutros-Ghali talked at the UN about an excess of credibility. In his Chatham house speech, the Foreign Secretary highlighted the magnitude of that job, which involved, he said, running a foreign ministry, defence ministry and a world ministry for planning, all without adequate funding. We can play our part by bringing pressure to bear on other member states to pay their fair share and by assisting the Secretary-General in his attempts to streamline the administration in New York and elsewhere. We must also continue to promote the involvement of regional organisations, so allowing the appropriate implementation of UN initiatives at the local level. That should go some way to help clear up confusion over the UN's roles and capacities.

I urge the Secretary of State to advance the principles contained in paragraph 18 concerning the protection of minorities, a factor of great significance in a world ridden with disorder. I hope that, when he replies to the debate, the Minister will clarify the Government's position over the International Court of Justice and will say that we strongly support the implementation of the measures in paragraph 19 of "An Agenda for Peace", at home and abroad, to strengthen further the acceptance of the jurisdication of the court under article 36.

While these issues may not appear to be closely linked with peacekeeping efforts, there is clearly a need for the UN to create a feeling of wide-ranging justice in pursuit of Security Council resolutions. It must also instil confidence in the even-handedness of their application.

In that context, my right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) explained the fear and concern that currently exists over the situation in the middle east. He spoke of the fear felt by those who had been asked to participate in the continuing middle east peace process and of the concern of their relatives and friends. Somewhere between Israel and Lebanon are 390 of their colleagues. Unless we are totally even-handed over the issue, they may find that their lives are at risk when they return to their homes, especially if some of their friends and neighbours are still stuck somewhere between Israel and Lebanon. For that reason, we must enforce Security Council resolutions in an even-handed way.

In his Chatham house speech, the Secretary of State talked of an imperial role and concluded that it should be implemented only by the international community, with no claims or priviliges as the result. My hon. Friends and I have no difficulty in associating with that idea, and we urge the Government to move further and quicker in pursuit of it.

The men and women who wear the blue beret, whether they are operating in peacekeeping, observing or peacemaking tasks, are the instrument with which the world can restore order and sanity amid chaos. It is achievable. The cost, though high, is worth paying. A new world order and a rejuvenated United Nations cannot promise total peace on earth, but we cannot afford to miss the opportunity to advance the peace process further.

6.57 pm

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Although the subject is wide, I shall restrict my remarks to Bosnia which, with other members of the Select Committee on Defence, I had the privilege of visiting last week.

The situation there is very confused. Reading the newspapers, one might think that there are three sides—the Serbs, the Croats and the Muslims—but it is more complicated than that. The Serbs have received most of the equipment of the Yugoslav national army and its disciplinary procedures, whereas the Croats and the Muslims tend to have local militia raised locally and not always under full control. So the level of discipline depends greatly on the leadership of the individuals in the area.

That makes the whole area extremely dangerous. There are many bombs, bullets and shells, and our troops, faced with that situation, are behaving superbly. We are greatly impressed by all the troops there—the Cheshires, the Royal Irish Regiment and others; and the Royal Engineers, who have done a magnificent job in building a huge road from Tomislavgrad north—and morale is high. We were greatly impressed by everything we saw.

Our troops have a specific role, which is to assist in the distribution of humanitarian aid. It is a narrow role. Guestimating from various press estimates, about half the aid arrives in the hands of the people for whom it is intended, the starving and those in great difficulty. Much of the food and aid is taken en route. It is estimated that the Serbs allowing food into Sarajevo take between 25 and 40 per cent. of the food as it goes through.

The instructions from the United Nations are that the UN forces should not prevent that food from being taken, because that would be confrontational and provocative, whereas the whole point of the UN role in Bosnia is to be completely independent. They must remain independent because their vulnerability, were they perceived to be taking any side, would be extreme.

We were all shaken to discover that we were walking past armed troops from the Croat national army and even finding them in the same building in Tomislavgrad, carrying weapons. We nodded to them and they nodded back. The same neutrality applied to other militia forces. That is how UN forces have to operate because, if they were perceived as being on one side or another, it would be the end of their role. In such a dangerous situation, what is the possibility of a solution?

The Vance-Owen plan is a solution and, as has been said, it is the best one on the table at the moment. It is perceptive and it deserves our full support, but I have one observation to make. The Vance-Owen plan expects that it would require about 15,000 to 25,000 troops to monitor it. Let us extrapolate our experience in Northern Ireland which is a well-policed Province of 1·5 million people, where there are 20,000 troops maintaining one area in which guns and weapons are not permitted. By comparison, Bosnia has 10 such areas where weapons are rife and where everyone over the age of 16 has a gun. If the Vance-Owen plan were to be implemented, the call for 15,000 to 20,000 to monitor it is an underestimate by a factor of about 10. It is more realistic to think in terms of 250,000 to 500,000 troops if we are seriously to police such an operation.

That underlines the main point—that, if peace is to come to the former Yugoslavia, it will come only with the wholehearted desire of the people of that country—there is no question of peace being imposed from outside. That would not work.

If a solution is not readily available, perhaps we should consider building blocks which are as constructive as far as they go. My right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) made a cogent case for further sanctions and their greater implementation, which I fully support. We must do all that we can to reduce the heavy arms and the armies, and I believe that there is a useful building block to be taken from the arms control measures of the Vance-Owen proposals, even if the proposals themselves cannot be implemented in full.

Perhaps as a minimum lowest common denominator factor, we might need to consider as a building block the creation of Muslim safe areas. The Croats and Serbs each have allies and somewhere to go but the Muslims, who represent 45 per cent. of the people and are the largest single minority in Bosnia, have nowhere to go and represent most of the victims in the current unhappy situation.

Finally, we must consider the economy. Certainly the southern part of Bosnia used to depend crucially on tourism, which has now gone. The biggest show in town, the biggest industry in Bosnia, is now the war and the second biggest is the United Nations humanitarian aid relief. Somehow we have to find ways to develop Bosnia's economy. It is sad, although perhaps good for British industry, that all the food and virtually all the supplies used by our troops in Bosnia come from the United Kingdom. One would like to think that some of the very small amount of hard currency coming into Bosnia from aid agencies and the troops would find its way into the Bosnian economy which desperately needs regenerating.

They are positive building blocks, and I now suggest three actions which could cause a great deal of damage if we were to undertake them thoughtlessly. The first, which was promulgated a month or two ago, was bombing the Serbs wherever they may be with a view to preventing them carrrying out atrocities or continuing their aggression. I think that I am quoting the Foreign Secretary when I say that the concept of bombing the Serbs into submission is ludicrous and will not provide a useful way ahead.

The second is the imposition of no-fly zones. Such a step would lead to our being perceived as being on one side or another. The third is the concept of air-dropping aid, which is not realistic: from a high level it would miss, and from a low level it would be extremely dangerous. The Serbs who are currently preventing humanitarian aid from reaching its destination are unlikely to find a low-flying aircraft less aggressive than a truck as a way of distributing aid, and the risks would be enormous.

I underline once again the vulnerability of the troops, especially the English and French United Nations troops, if a move were made which would cause them to be perceived as being on one side or the other. United Nations forces in Bosnia can succeed in their present role only if they are seen to be independent. We must avoid anything that makes them seem less than independent.

[Mr. Peter Viggers]

I am seriously worried about the danger of our being sucked into a wider role. When the Secretary of State for Defence made a statement to the House on 14 January he talked about 2,300 troops. The Foreign Secretary today talked about 2,804 troops in Bosnia, so there has been an escalation without us noticing. The troops are keen and will wish their role to be enhanced because of their enthusiasm, which I greatly applaud. However, they must not allow their enthusiasm to carry us along. The media show us atrocities every day, and there is a great demand for "something to be done". I put a contrary view.

The present role is valuable, but we must not drift into a peacekeeping role without a clearly agreed plan which is accepted by all sides. If we later accept a peacekeeping role, it may not be in Bosnia but in Macedonia or elsewhere. We must not allow the present narrow role of distributing humanitarian aid to drift into peacekeeping.

I was so worried that I read carefully the words used by the Minister of State for the Armed Forces in an Adjournment debate on 2 February. He referred to the task force led by HMS Ark Royal and said that its role was

"either to provide additional protection for our personnel or to assist with a withdrawal".—*[Official Report, 2 February 1993; Vol. 218, c. 302.]*

I suggest that it is completely unrealistic to think that we can distribute humanitarian aid if we need to back it up with 105 mm field howitzers and strike bombers. I am very concerned that we should at all times keep open the option of withdrawal, and I fear that it may come to that.

I hope that the Vance-Owen plan is allowed to succeed, but we must not be sucked into a wider role without thinking through the consequences.

7.6 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Like many previous speakers, the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) understandably concentrated on Bosnia and made a very sober and realistic analysis of the problems there. Much of the debate has been consensual. The starting point for many hon. Members has been the wish to know ourselves as a country, to know our economic strengths—or, in many cases, our weaknesses—and what we are able to do and, equally, what we are unable to do.

The Foreign Secretary's theme in his Chatham house lecture was fine as analysis, but it was overladen with a certain world-weariness and a minimum of zeal when perhaps a little more zeal might have been called for. The second aspect of the consensus is the background of international disorder: the six months that shook the world in 1989, the end of the Soviet empire and the subsequent problems in eastern Europe, the end of the Soviet Union itself, and areas such as Nagorno-Karabakh and Tadzhikistan which are flaring up and about which the international community can do very little.

The situation poses new questions for the international community, such as the limits of non-intervention and the point at which the international community can establish government where there is no government, as in Liberia and Somalia. It also raises questions about areas in which, because of the intractable nature of the internal problems, it would be unwise on a risk analysis for the international community to respond to television images and the impulses of public opinion; it should perhaps refrain from dealing with such disorder and possibly exacerbating matters.

There is a question of credibility. Failures by an excess of intervention can do immense damage to the international community and to the United Nations. The United Nations and its role has been a proper focus of the debate today. In its totally new and fundamentally changed context, the United Nations is the repository of all our hopes. As the current Secretary-General said, it has an excess of credibility. Just as, according to the Foreign Secretary, we in Britain cannot be everywhere and do everything, so the United Nations cannot be everywhere and do everything. In some cases it will have only a co-ordinating role. It may subcontract the issue to be resolved to an appropriate regional organisation.

However, the United Nations is beset with enormous problems. It has no proper computer infrastructure for keeping in touch with various operations in the field. I understand that the United States State Department has offered to provide that, and I hope that that offer will be speedily accepted. Then there is the problem of the $1 billion arrears in contributions. There are also particular problems involving personnel which we need not dwell on. I have said all those negative things, but the United Nations is the only show in town. It is therefore wholly proper that the international community should consider it the world's best hope, and that we should do everything we can positively to encourage its development.

I recall going to Namibia at the same time as the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel), who knows Africa extremely well. Perhaps the operation of bringing Namibia to independence was too easy, but it was grand to see the enormous enthusiasm and commitment of United Nations personnel on the spot. Having achieved so much in Namibia, they were saying, "Today Namibia, tomorrow we shall go on to the western Sahara and Cambodia". Alas, realism has set in as we reach rather more difficult and turbulent terrains, but it was good to see that degree of commitment and enthusiasm on the part of the United Nations.

We talk about peacekeeping in rather a negative way. Just as peace is not simply the absence of war, so peacekeeping is not simply a question of keeping the sides apart and preventing something worse. One is bound to ask the reasons for doing so. Surely there is a positive element of seeking to build structures which will last while we are involved in the negative side of peacekeeping.

I see that the hon. Member for Arundel (Sir Michael Marshall), the very distinguished international president of the Inter-Parliamentary Union is present. There is an enormous role for the international parliamentary community in establishing the bases of democratic institutions in new countries. I believe fundamentally that the investment in democracy and its institutions is an investment in stability. Democracies tend not to go to war with one another. When there are internal procedures for accommodating disputes, it is less likely that a country will fall apart.

It is extremely important that the relevant international organisations, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, European Parliamentarians for Southern Africa and others gather together in the hope that in the breathing space provided by the military they can build up the democratic structures as an investment in democracy. In many places, the United Nations has done that successfully.

Finally, one area which resembles a laboratory experiment going wrong is Mozambique. There was a peace accord in October in Rome after 16 years of brutal civil war which left more than a million people from Mozambique in adjoining countries. People were maimed and had limbs amputated. Everyone's hopes were raised by the agreement in Rome last October, but what have we seen since? After the agreement between RENAMO and the Government of Mozambique and the establishment of the United Nations operation with the awful name of UNOMOZ, which stated that there should be 7,500 United Nations troops in place to maintain the ceasefire, there is not one United Nations soldier there at the moment. Under the terms of the October agreement, there should by now have been the demobilisation of 48,000 of the estimated 80,000 Renamo and Government troops there. Not one soldier as yet been demobilised.

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Anderson: I am sorry, but I have only 10 minutes and I want to make this one point.

Similarly, the hoped-for elections have again been put off indefinitely. As for the sums voted by the United Nations, a budget of £233 million has been lost in labrynthine discussions in the corridors and committees of the United Nations in New York. It is a disgrace that there has been such delay. As the Italian head of the operation has said, there is now a real danger of Mozambique following the tragic path of Angola where, because there was a cheap operation by the international community, what could have been a major contribution to peace in the region has fallen apart with tragic consequences.

When we consider the categories that the Foreign Secretary properly raised—I well understand the reasons why he dwelt particularly on Bosnia and the conflict which is so close to us and which could well lead to a war which would have enormous repercussions on us in terms of refugees and so on—we must also examine other areas in the third world where, because of the collapse of the cold war, new conflicts have now emerged. We must look at the bad example of Angola, and draw our conclusions.

7.17 pm

Dr. Charles Goodson-Wickes (Wimbledon): I welcome the opportunity to take part in a wide-ranging debate on international peacekeeping in the context of foreign policy. There is an inevitable logic in this arrangement, reinforcing the view that our Foreign Office and Ministry of Defence work in rather closer harmony than many of their counterparts in the western world.

The euphoria of the end of the cold war certainly did not last long. Although we heard talk of the new world order during the American presidential campaign, there is an increasing perception that the world is not inherently more stable after the collapse of the Soviet bloc—indeed, quite the opposite. The disintegration of the Warsaw pact brought in its wake instability throughout the former Soviet Union, outright conflict in the Balkans, the redrawing of boundaries in central Europe, and economic and social difficulties in the reunification of Germany.

As the Soviet threat has disappeared, new and dangerous situations have emerged, and there is an understandable, if misplaced, nostalgia for the certainties of the previous balance of power. Against that background, not of order but of disorder, we re-examine the means of providing international peacekeeping. I shall concentrate on the wider issues before discussing the British role in peacekeeping.

The combination of western democracies cutting their forces and their reluctance to put their soldiers at risk undermine their ability to restore peace in trouble spots throughout the world. If they are neither threatened directly nor have any commercial or other national interest to protect, is it reasonable to expect altruistic action, and if so, how can it be co-ordinated?

The United Nations will have to develop. The right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) had some interesting views on that. It can develop in one of two ways, either by setting up its own command structure, with national assets committed to it, or by using an existing military organisation which has proved so effective in co-ordinating military forces of different nationalities to work together.

Perhaps NATO, said by many to be seeking a new role, is staring the solution in the face. As the United Nations' agent, it could continue to bind together north American and west European democracies for the future stability of the world. There would be no shortage of work for it to do. As Enoch Powell once said:

> "History is littered with wars that everyone knew could not happen."

It will need true co-operation between the various national members. We recognise, for example, the constitutional problems of Germany and the sensitivities of France about the United States, but the whole venture will be fatally flawed if historic inhibitions are not overcome. If that can be achieved, the United Nations, through NATO, could indeed arrange pooling of resources and the matching and allocation of national forces to specific areas of conflict.

I should like to consider the particular difficulties of the British contribution. The third defence requirement set out in the last "Statement in the Defence Estimates 1992" stated that our policy was

> "to contribute to promoting the United Kingdom's wider security interests through the maintenance of international peace and stability."

To achieve that, we must have sufficient forces. Those of us who declined to support in the Division Lobby the scale of reduction in the debate on the estimates last year believed that the manpower available after the implementation of "Options for Change" could not cope even with existing commitments, let alone the unforeseen ones that many hon. Members have discussed today. We did not think that "Options for Change" would stand the test of time, but it has taken the deployment of British troops in Bosnia, and necessary reinforcements to Northern Ireland, to show that the sums do not add up, never did add up and will not add up in future.

This country has already had to decline to commit troops to Somalia, which many may think for historical and other reasons is a more suitable place to send troops than to Bosnia. I endorse the comments of one of my hon. Friends on the policy that should restrict our commitment in Bosnia to a humanitarian role.

[Dr. Charles Goodson-Wickes]

With respect, I remind my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) that it was our right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary who earlier this year admitted what many of us had said and what the Select Committee on Defence said in its last report last week: that the British Army is indeed overstretched—the very phrase which has been forbidden within the Ministry of Defence for months, if not years. The Foreign Secretary admitted the overstretch, and now we look for further remedial action.

For years we have presumed on the good will of our NATO allies by deploying soldiers committed to NATO to so-called emergency tours of Northern Ireland and elsewhere. That has been tolerated up to now, but it will not be tolerated indefinitely. The worst scenario is that our hard-won leadership of the ACE Rapid Reaction Corps could be challenged by those who feel that we are not pulling our weight.

The fundamental task of that new corps is to have the right forces in the right place at the right time. It is no longer possible for the United Kingdom to "two-time" NATO. We may as a nation punch above our weight, to use my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary's phrase, but we may be accused of not pulling our weight in a multinational peacekeeping role.

I finish by asking what we are trying to achieve in the debate. I suggest that it is the proper use of our forces, recognised to be the best professional non-conscript manpower in the world, as a force for good to restore peace, far outstripping our economic and numerical military strength. I cannot urge strongly enough that the future shape of our armed forces must be influenced strongly by the civilised exposition of the country's policies, as set out today by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary.

7.24 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The hon. Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes) made some telling points. Fascinating insights have been given during this wide-ranging debate. A basic lesson that the world will have to learn is that countries must recognise one another's frontiers and that the United Nations and treaty groups with whom nations have signed treaties will keep their undertakings. That would make a major contribution to international peace and peacekeeping.

The Foreign Secretary referred to a scale between Gladstone and the saloon bar. He would not expect me, with my background, to make a division there, especially not to go for the silly middle—a common solution to many problems throughout the world.

I was fascinated to hear the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) comment that he had previously misjudged Lord Owen. He did not realise that Lord Owen had such capacity for reconciliation. I am concerned that the plan for Bosnia might become a pattern. If the country is divided in the way suggested in the Vance-Owen plan, will that not be a spur to people in Kosovo and Macedonia to go for their stated territory, with a knock-on effect and a further division of countries?

The recent involvement of United States troops in overseas distribution of food in Somalia, and the deployment of our own troops as part of a UN multinational force escorting food convoys in Bosnia, suggests, as in the Gulf conflict, that individual countries are making decisions to commit forces as international policemen throughout the world. Humanitarian aid is vital, but is it possible for a few countries to carry on that role by deploying their forces without practical support from other Governments?

I signal a warning. The right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) referred to different developments within the United Nations in its expanding role. He mentioned article 43, under which the UN proposes to set up a military task force. I counsel against that. The concept of training together and working together comes about only through long practice, as we discovered in war time. Experience in Northern Ireland of dealing with guerrillas and terrorists has shown that forces under one supreme commander, but operating under different sub-commanders, may shoot one another instead of the terrorists. Therefore, I caution care in setting up a task force.

I was alarmed when the United Nations spokeswoman, announcing the withdrawal of some UN food convoys in Bosnia, stated that she placed responsibility on different Governments for not implementing the decision of the United Nations—her implication was, by force. There comes a time when we have to stand up to a bully or, as in Kuwait, to invasion by a neighbouring country, but I caution that force is not necessarily the best means to achieve peacekeeping.

Some hon. Members have mentioned other issues and in passing I must refer to Indonesia, which is possibly the fourth largest nation in the world, and its relationship with East Timor. As I am aware of some of the hasty judgments which are based on biased reporting from Northern Ireland, I tend to question the accuracy of some of the information emanating from East Timor. Therefore, will the Minister of State tell us whether the Government have received a copy of the report that the Australian Federal Government were compiling in Melbourne a year ago in January and February, when they were taking evidence on East Timor? If so, will a copy be available for us to study in the Library?

The Foreign Secretary referred to the history and traditions of our commitments. South and southern Africa is one of those historic commitments and it is amazing that, while we welcome the fragmentation of the former Soviet Union into separate nations, there does not seem to be any awareness of the different nations which make up the state of South Africa. There is a tendency to treat all black South Africans as the same. Historically, we contributed to the division of southern Africa into its various components. Although I believe that a final settlement will have to come through internal agreement, could not a co-existence of the individual nations in a federation of southern Africa offer the most acceptable solution?

The hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) referred to an assessment of our troop commitment. Germany has constitutional reasons for not sending troops outside the NATO area, and some of its political parties and people are also reluctant. With the increased deployment of our troops overseas, is it not time that Germany was given the task of countering potential threats from the east? Such a move would allow the United Kingdom to withdraw the 1st Armoured Division from Germany, convert it to an out-of-area role and give enough British troops to carry out most potential tasks world wide. A force of that size would, however, require an increase in amphibious and air support. Some people still have a tendency to be little Englanders, but before long I suspect that we could have a force with a worldwide capability, comparable with our days of empire.

There is an increasing demand on our armed forces. Surely it is time to carry out a thorough defence review to identify the force level required to meet the demands of the international community and to meet our political aspirations and ambitions.

7.33 pm

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): This debate on international peacekeeping is long overdue. Events in Yugoslavia during the past two years are not only a challenge to the authority of the United Nations but an indictment of the rest of Europe, and especially of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, which is our principal peacekeeping institution.

However, what is happening in the former Soviet Union should concern us even more, as they are so serious that events in Bosnia will be nothing in comparison unless we respond more effectively than we have done to date. As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said in his opening speech, conflicts and confrontations are taking place all around its southern perimeter, and are causing the deaths of thousands and the displacement of millions.

In Moldova, the continuing presence of the 14th Russian army is encouraging the Russian-speaking population to resist the realisation of Moldovan statehood. Deaths, destruction and displacement have been widespread, and civil war remains a distinct threat.

In Georgia, two separate conflicts are causing the same threat: the conflict between the deposed President Gamsakhurdia and the recently elected President Shevardnadze; and the conflict between the Abkhazian minority and the Government that has abolished their autonomy.

In Azerbaijan, a similar conflict over the autonomy of Nagorno-Karabakh has rendered tens of thousands of Armenians and Azeris homeless. It is causing continuing death and destruction, not least by the daily bombing of Stepanakert by Azeri missiles. I must use this opportunity to place on record a tribute to the undoubted courage of our noble friend Baroness Cox, who is setting out tomorrow on her 12th mission to deliver food and medical supplies to Karabakh. Those missions, financed jointly with the European Community and non-governmental organisations, such as Christian Solidarity International and the Tear Fund do so much to relieve and encourage the brave people of Karabakh. I hope that the £0·25 million of aid that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State recently announced will be allowed to get to those people by the Azeri authorities, in the same way as the NGO assistance.

Unless the international community provides effective pressure on Azerbaijan very soon, I fear that its forthcoming offensive this spring will see the end of that historic Armenian Christian community of Karabakh. Those people will undoubtedly be facing genocide, and I appeal to my right hon. Friend to find out what more can be done by the CSCE and the United Nations to avert that potential tragedy.

In four out of five Asian republics of the former Soviet Union there are similar conflicts. There are growing tensions in the Russian Federation between and within many of its autonomous republics. Last month some of us met with President Tcheptynon of the autonomous republic of Gorno-Altay, who told us that if President Yeltsin were replaced by Communists they would declare their independence, many other autonomous republics would do the same and then the blood would flow in the Russian Federation.

In crude figures, more than 1 million Russians and non-Russians have been forceably displaced in the former Soviet Union and tens of thousands of families require immediate aid and resettlement. Of the 25 million Russians living outside Russia, it is estimated that about 10 million will wish to be repatriated, to which must be added a further 1 million Russian army officers and their families. None of those people have homes to go to and that must add daily to the instability facing President Yeltsin.

If we ignore that situation much longer we will not have learnt the lesson of Yugoslavia—which is one of preventive diplomacy and the establishment of assistance programmes in volatile situations that are likely to cause such displacement—and in that case it will be a continent and not a country that is out of control. The consequences for the rest of Europe will be immense for many years to come.

In my early-day motion 336 I noted that all those conflicts are taking place in CSCE member states and I suggested ways forward, which I believe fully complement the excellent ideas of Dr. Boutros-Ghali in his "Agenda for Peace". We need to introduce the use of internationally sponsored referendums to establish precisely the ambitions of national groups in pursuit of their right to self-determination. That is the peaceful alternative to ethnic cleansing, as a solution to nationalism. However, that requires a more flexible and realistic attitude and in accepting that changes in existing frontiers may be necessary to secure lasting peace.

We need to introduce a system of binding arbitration to solve conflicts. That would build on Dr. Boutros-Ghali's proposals to promote the use of an international court of justice and of distinguished statesmen as peacemakers. If their findings are to have any authority, they must as a last resort be enforced by force. That is the nettle that we continue to hesitate to grasp despite all our plans to establish rapid reaction forces in NATO so that the Western European Union can make peace as opposed to keeping the peace.

If we do not face up to decisions such as those to enhance the authority of the United Nations and its regional bodies, such as the CSCE, we shall have failed to seize the opportunities presented by the end of the cold war. We shall have ignored the lessons to be learnt from Yugoslavia. We risk condemning both the United Nations and the CSCE to the same fate as the League of Nations had, and we know what happened then.

7.41 pm

Mr. Stephen Byers (Wallsend): I am pleased to take part in this important debate, which is occurring at such an opportune time. What has been interesting is the disappointment shared by many hon. Members that the end of the cold war and the development of the new world order have not brought the peace and security we all

[Mr. Stephen Byers]

desire. Instead, they have led to a period of instability and insecurity. The debate on international peacekeeping needs to be seen against that backdrop.

Most of my comments will be directed at the Ministry of Defence and will concern our defence capability. The Ministry of Defence needs to review its activities and operations in that context. Recent reports in the press have referred to the fact that the central financial planning and management group in the Ministry of Defence has been considering its future procurement programme. I hope that the debate will give hon. Members an opportunity to express their views, and to inform and assist Ministers in their decisions about the future shape of our armed forces.

As many hon. Members have said, if we are concerned about and committed to international peacekeeping, there will be a direct and real impact on the size and shape of our armed forces. There can be no doubt that now that we no longer have an empire, and now that we have lost much of our former economic strength, we need to decide what proper role there should be for our armed services.

It is clear that we cannot reduce defence expenditure and yet continue to expand our military commitments. We must therefore, as a matter of urgency, identify our priorities. We must then ensure that our military capability reflects those priorities. There is no doubt that that consideration will involve many difficult and painful decisions. We must ensure that the decisions are not led by the Treasury, but are taken in the interests of the defence of this country. The dead hand of the Treasury must not be allowed to dictate totally the shape of our armed forces for the foreseeable future.

There is no doubt that, in deciding our priorities, as we must, the security of our country must always come first. A second priority will be the role of international peacekeeping. There is no doubt that that would command the support of members of the public. However, I urge some caution. We must ensure that priorities in international peacekeeping are not determined by news editors on the "Six O'Clock News". All too often, public support and sympathy follow appearances, often with graphic and disturbing shots, on the news. Many other conflicts throughout the world are not as accessible to the news media, so members of the public do not see them. However, a peacekeeping role may be appropriate.

Such a role will not be carried out in isolation. It will involve close consultation with other nations within the United Nations. Within the context of a multinational approach, what should be the role of the United Kingdom? I believe that we should play to our strengths, and, as an island nation, our seaborne forces are a particular strength. We need to ensure that we have an amphibious capability and that we make proper and effective use of the Royal Marines. They are in an excellent position to assist in an international peacekeeping role. That approach was confirmed in "Options for Change", which recognised the need for flexible and mobile forces.

The Falkland crisis was a stark illustration of the need for an amphibious capability. In Operation Restore Hope in Somalia, the United States made great use of its amphibious capabilities. Present-day events in the former Yugoslavia reinforce the need for an amphibious capability.

As Member of Parliament representing a Tyneside constituency, it gave me great pride to see the Ark Royal set sail for the Adriatic. The Ark Royal was built and designed eight years ago in my constituency, and it is a great tribute to the workmanship and excellence of Swan Hunter shipbuilders in Wallsend. We must acknowledge that the Ark Royal and the Royal Fleet Auxiliary Argus are not the best vessels for the delicate job that now needs to be undertaken by the task force.

As many hon. Members will know, the Ark Royal and the Argus are not the ships to carry out the role that is now expected of them. Between them, they lack the proper facilities for the accommodation of support helicopters, of artillery and of combat troops. It must be a matter of concern to all hon. Members that men who may be deployed are sleeping tonight on the hangar deck of the Ark Royal.

We need to upgrade and enhance our amphibious capability. It is vital to international peacekeeping, and it has political value. It is flexible and versatile. It can be maintained in a state of readiness, and it has considerable deterrent value. It can go covertly or in a blaze of publicity. It can be stationed either close to or at some distance from a potential area of conflict.

Amphibious capability has a strategic significance. As Sir Basil Liddell Hart said:

> "A self-contained and sea-based force is the best kind of fire extinguisher because of its flexibility, reliability, logistic simplicity and relative economy."

The case for an amphibious capability, especially in the international peacekeeping context, is overwhelming. However, we must recognise that it will have consequences for our defence procurement programme.

It will mean that the order for the landing platform helicopter vessel must be proceeded with. It will mean that Intrepid and Fearless, which are now both more than 25 years old, will have to be replaced by a new generation of assault ships. We need to be clear that, if those developments do not happen, real doubt will be cast on the future of the Royal Marines, because there will be no suitable capability and no suitable vessels to deliver the Royal Marines to potential areas of conflict.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Byers: No, because I am under a 10-minute restriction.

The most pressing of the orders must be that for the landing platform helicopter vessel. No other vessel presently in service can provide the same function. It was originally thought that Invincible could cope, but it is now accepted that the role of task force commander and amphibious assault are virtually incompatible.

It is clear that, to fulfil our international peacekeeping obligations, the landing platform helicopter vessel is vital. Its cost is £170 million, compared with a total defence budget of £24 billion. It is a small investment, but it will ensure and greatly enhance our amphibious capability. As the then Minister of State for Defence Procurement said on the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1991", when he spoke strongly in support of the amphibious programme:

> "There is no other means of providing such a variety of operational choices."—[*Official Report*, 15 October 1991; Vol. 196, c. 178.]

At a time of world uncertainty, the order for the helicopter carrier is vital. Not only would it bring renewed hope to shipyard workers in my constituency on Tyneside; it would also ensure that our Government are in a position to discharge their international responsibilities and play their part in keeping peace throughout the world.

7.50 pm

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): I hope that the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) will understand that I do not follow him, because of the 10-minute restriction.

With my colleagues from the House who are, like me, members of the North Atlantic Assembly, I went to Washington and New York and among our discussions we met those who were knowledgeable about the United Nations. We wanted to find out a little more about what was happening. I should like to say a few words about NATO and the lessons that it has for the United Nations and for peacemaking in general.

If the cold war taught us anything, it was the realisation that NATO, which is a regional multilateral collective defence and security system not previously seen in western Europe, has provided and will continue to provide the best chance of keeping the peace. I do not think that the significance of NATO can be exaggerated. Its impact on the world has been profound and has helped to save democracy.

NATO is significant because, first, its members got in the habit of working together; secondly, the system demanded a willingness to pool and share resources; thirdly, a multinational command became acceptable. That is demonstrated in the Rapid Reaction Corps where the ground troops are commanded by a British general and the air force is commanded by a former member of the Luftwaffe, and no one turns over in their grave at such a mixed multinational command.

Fourthly, NATO succeeded because it was more than a military alliance. It had a political dimension which called upon its members to strengthen the democratic ties between them and to reinforce the humanitarian values that they all shared. There is now talk of NATO combining with the Russians and the Americans to advance the Owen-Vance plan in Bosnia.

The willingness of the Russians to co-operate with NATO does not surprise me. The North Atlantic Assembly already has representatives of the Russian and eastern European Parliaments as associate members, and they tell us time and again that they would like their countries to join NATO one day. Be that as it may—I do not mean to be at all hostile to the concept—I think that we are a little way off that.

In July, NATO put its resources at the disposal of the conference on security and co-operation in Europe. As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said earlier, that offer is parallel with a similar offer to the United Nations. Iraq opened our eyes to the fact that the NATO system of co-operation had a new and wider application. NATO was not involved in Iraq as such, but its military command and control structure ensured the vigorous and efficient prosecution of the war. It was NATO's logistical capabilities and planning procedures which made possible the transfer of so many munitions, arms, guns and tanks from Germany through the NATO logistic facilities in Rotterdam to the middle east. When my right hon. Friend commented on NATO's involvement, he was specifically referring to the involvement of the former Yugoslavia when he said:

> "This is not NATO involvement for its own sake but reflects the reality that the alliance has resources which cannot be duplicated elsewhere."

In an article in *The Times* recently, Professor Laurence Freedman pointed out:

> "NATO is not always seen as an impartial and neutral source."

I agree with that. There will be times when nations will look to the United Nations or elsewhere to help with peacekeeping and sometimes the peace enforcement process. The Gulf war opened our eyes to the fact that the UN had a more vigorous part in peace diplomacy and the protection of refugees.

As we have been reminded by hon. Members both sides of the House, the ending of the cold war did not usher in a new world order. Rather, it ushered in a world of disorder or more disorder. It suspended—I do not know for how long—the dreadful paralysis of the inevitable veto which had constrained the United Nations' ability to act during the previous decades.

Not long ago, Major-General Lewis McKenzie, Canadian commander of the United Nations forces in Sarajevo—the first commander and a very able man—was quoted as saying that he found it extremely difficult to contact the United Nations because it seemed to work a five-day week. He found it especially difficult to contact the United Nations on Friday evenings at 5 pm New York eastern standard time. That is probably a little unfair but, be that as it may, we can probably understand the frustrations of the military commander at the time. He was only reflecting those frustrations.

Before we censure the United Nations, I have no doubt that its ability to carry out its functions is seriously inadequate. We have heard that one of the rasons is that the United Nations does not have enough cash. I shall not rehearse those difficulties now, because I have only a few minutes in which to make my other points. While member states fail to meet their financial commitments and peacekeeping operations, it is clear that the credibility of the United Nations will be undermined. I find it especially nauseating that three or four months can lapse between the Security Council's authorisation of a mission and its becoming an operation in the field. As the Secretary-General has pleaded on many occasions, it is essential that he should be provided with a working capital fund for the start of new operations.

I agree that forces should be earmarked by nation states for more rapid reaction. They should learn to train together. The hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) made that point in his vivid description of conditions in Yugoslavia. Training is vital. We have seen the training that our troops undergo for NATO missions and then they must be trained to do police work in Northern Ireland.

I shall never forget having to face a mob of people in an Indian peacekeeping operation. A bombardier turned to me and said, "What happens if they charge?" I said, "They won't; they're a damned sight more frightened of us than we are of them." We were not even allowed to put a bullet up the spout. That was the training that we had to endure. No one had a go at us, because we looked rather fierce and determined. We must therefore have forces earmarked and well trained.

[Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith]

There should also be a reserve of basic stock, including radios and all sorts of bits of equipment which some scratch forces do not have when they come under United Nations command. They will need, as NATO has, a common set of procedures for military communications, shared information systems, and so on. That is NATO's strength.

The military staff committee has long been without a function in the United Nations. It should be given a practical role to ensure that the changes are implemented. That is done with NATO, through the supreme allied commander and his staff.

All in all, there are quite a few lessons which could be learnt, but not only from NATO's experience. Not only military proposals are important. We have heard about the importance of sanctions and having an organisation which can examine sanctions more keenly. Such an organisation needs economic and financial back-up to ensure that peace is sustained once it is kept. Humanitarian as well as social purposes will need to be fulfilled.

The need to strengthen United Nations arms control and verification procedures is important. That is one way of helping to cure the disease of instability, as my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said earlier today. The failure of the safeguards of the United Nations nuclear proliferation treaty to detect Iraq's weapons programme is convincing evidence of the need to strengthen the inspection team. The proposal of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister for the establishment of a United Nations conventional arms register must be welcomed. It would help transparency in the defence capabilities of nations, but it should be extended to weapons stockpiles.

Such measures appeal to me. The proposal which I find the most appealing of all is that we must help the United Nations to reorganise bureaucratically the distinction between its two different but complementary roles of peacekeeping. There is chapter VI, relating to peacekeeping, and chapter VII, by which the United Nations establishes peace enforcement. The United Nations should establish two separate departments—a department which deals with political affairs and conflict resolutions, and an international peace and security department. I would not mix up the two. In that way, the United Nations is much more likely to make the efficient and capable response that we increasingly come to expect from it, but we must help it to achieve that objective.

7.59 pm

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): This time last week, I was with the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) and three other colleagues from the Select Committee on Defence in Vitez in central Bosnia. All of us found the journey to that part of former Yugoslavia an extremely distressing experience. We must have seen thousands of refugees, countless houses that had been torched or bombed and large numbers of heavily armed young men, some of whom may have been disciplined soldiers while others clearly were not. No doubt some had been involved, whether under control or not, in perpetrating atrocities against civilians in that unfortunate country.

It is important to stress in a debate of this nature that by no means all the atrocities that have taken place in former Yugoslavia are the responsibility of the Serbs. They are all at it: I saw plenty of evidence of Croat brutality against Muslims and Muslim brutality against Serbs. On the day we passed through the town of Gorni Vakuf, a British United Nations Warrior crew had to destroy a Croat position which would not stop shooting at them despite the fact that they were flying the United Nations flag and carrying the United Nations colours.

It is bloody chaos, but the abiding image for me must be the children playing in the snow, smiling and waving to United Nations vehicles escorting the aid convoys and bringing a little hope into their God-forsaken country—I suspect, much as the children of Northern Ireland waved to British troops who bought time there 24 years ago. Perhaps there are lessons to be learnt from such parallels.

This is a tragedy that is unfolding on our own doorstep, the doorstep of western Europe, in a country where thousands of our constituents took their holidays until two years ago, in Sarajevo which hosted the winter olympics in 1984. Yet people in that area have not had the benefit of any peace dividend from the end of the cold war. On the contrary, they have been pitched into a vicious hot war, just like many other people around the vortex of what used to be the Soviet Union, in Tadzhikistan, Moldova, Georgia and other areas, not to mention Iraq, Somalia and elsewhere—some peace dividend!

That is the background against which the British Government decided to slash its Army strength by 40,000 soldiers while continuing to build another three Trident submarines purely to be able to destroy Moscow. I do not understand it, but that is what they decided to do. Mercifully, the great British public is, as ever, ahead of the Government in understanding such questions.

People are concerned about what is happening in Yugoslavia, Somalia, Kurdistan and the marshes of southern Iraq—not as far away places of which we know little, as Mr. Neville Chamberlain might have said, because, thanks to Kate Adie and other reporters, we know quite a lot about them. Our people care and they want to help, as they have shown clearly by their generosity in the relief effort and by the pressure that they brought to bear on the Government to deploy British troops with the United Nations to help to resolve the situation in Yugoslavia by taking an active part in the United Nations protection force last summer.

People understand pretty clearly why we could not help in Somalia. A helpful Ministry of Defence official recently told the Select Committee on Defence that we could not help the United Nations sponsored effort on the ground in Somalia because we do not have enough troops to do so.

I confirm what a number of my hon. Friends have said today. The British United Nations soldiers in their blue United Nations helmets in Bosnia are doing a truly magnificent job—partly, it must be said, because they have had the good fortune to be deployed in an area where it has been possible for them to operate effectively; their French counterparts have not been so fortunate in Sarajevo and the Canadians have not even been able to deploy into the area around Banja Luka where they were supposed to be operating. The other reason why the Cheshires have been able to achieve so much is because they are well trained professional soldiers with excellent logistic back-up and a wealth of highly relevant experience from peacekeeping in Northern Ireland.

At the beginning of the operation, when I and my colleagues on the Defence Select Committee listened to evidence from the Minister of State for the Armed Forces on 22 September 1992, I wondered what could be achieved under the terms that he described. He said that the Cheshires could do no more than ride shotgun on convoys, and that, if the going got difficult, they would withdraw. What we saw in Bosnia last week was a much more proactive deployment. The British United Nations troops are opening up roads, rebuilding bridges, patrolling their area, talking to people, using their good offices to minimise the risk of conflict in local areas wherever possible and generally making their presence felt. They are doing all that as well as escorting a large volume of humanitarian aid which is getting through and helping the civilian population—although, sadly, far too much is going to the armies in that part of the world. We should be concerned about that.

The representatives of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees whom we met last week were delighted with the way in which the battalion is operating and it would be good news if the operation could be similarly enhanced in other parts of former Yugoslavia. That is the point which must be put across in this debate: the exercise cannot stand still—either it will have to be stepped up in line with the Vance-Owen plan, or it will have to be abandoned.

The existing United Nations operation is at risk of becoming bogged down in a disillusioned and hostile environment, rather like our forces in Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland 24 years ago, the troops bought time and raised hopes, but when those hopes were not fulfilled, due to the failure of politicians, the troops were left in the quagmire where they remain today. That must not be allowed to happen to the United Nations in former Yugoslavia.

That means that the United Nations operation should be driven forward to make the Vance-Owen plan work. I do not like that plan any more than anyone else does. Such partitioning is unhealthy, but it is the only hope for that part of the world. To do that, the United Nations needs better co-ordination, better command and control and probably substantially more troops. It is also essential that there should be a direct representative of the United Nations General-Secretary in the area to take command of the operation with its political, military and humanitarian aspects. I hope that that will be considered.

American participation in the operation is obviously important, but Bosnia is no place for air power or massive ground forces. The "Stormin' Norman" approach would only degenerate into a sort of European Vietnam; that is a risk which should be understood by all concerned. Yugoslavia requires a combination of diplomacy and force, and the forces should be genuinely multinational. That, presumably, should include an enhanced British presence in UNPROFOR. I sincerely hope that when and if the Americans become involved in the operation they will listen to the people who have been deployed there during the last year and learn from those experiences.

What should Britain's role in all this be? On 13 October the Foreign Secretary said:

> "our commitments"—

military commitments—

> "could well increase—provided, that is, that we wish to maintain our position as a medium-sized power with a developed sense of international responsibility."

We are, after all, still a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.

We have also assumed the leading role in the new post-cold-war NATO ACE rapid reaction corps, which should develop into a highly trained force ideally suited to play a key part in the United Nations peace enforcement role outlined in Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali's document, "An Agenda for Peace", submitted to the Security Council on 17 June 1992.

The Foreign Secretary has had to admit, however, that British forces are overstretched at present. He did so in a speech on 27 January before the Select Committee on Defence published its second report on the matter on 9 February. British defence policy is a shambles as a result of the Treasury's headlong rush to take a cash dividend from the end of the cold war without the benefit of any kind of review of the military risks and commitments facing Britain in the coming years. The Defence Select Committee's second report shows incontrovertibly that the 26 per cent. cut in the strength of the Army in "Options for Change", even after the 2 per cent. add-back on 3 February, still leaves our forces overstretched and, in many cases, treble-hatted, and certainly in no position to increase their commitment to the United Nations peacekeeping operations around the world. They are already unable to fulfil their existing tasks within reasonable constraints for training, intervals between emergency deployments and other important military factors.

The Select Committee unanimously concluded that we should add back a further seven infantry battalions to make it possible for the Army to undertake the tasks and to meet the risks which exist. I am not suggesting an increase in defence expenditure, but an objective review suggests that we should cut Army manpower by 21 per cent.—not the 26 per cent. proposed by the Government in "Options for Change". I would happily suggest substantial alternative economies in other parts of the defence budget. I hope that the Foreign Secretary will bring wiser counsel to bear in the Ministry of Defence.

There is much peacemaking to be done in today's world—whether in Yugoslavia, Kurdistan, southern Iraq, or Somalia—and that is just the start. I urge the Government fully to support the United Nations Secretary-General's efforts to make that possible, and to reconsider the irrational defence cuts initiated by the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) when he was Secretary of State for Defence. We can help to restore hope and life to the suffering people of places such as Bosnia. Peace itself is a far more precious dividend than anything that cash can buy.

8.10 pm

Sir Jim Spicer (Dorset, West): I was relieved to hear my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary say that the United Kingdom will not play any major part in flying supplies into Bosnia or any other part of Yugoslavia. Most right hon. and hon. Members will welcome that statement. Dropping supplies is not easy at any time, as we learned in northern Iraq. It becomes even more difficult under small arms fire or ground-to-air fire in the form of SAM missiles. If the United States wants to take that line and the United Nations countenances it doing so, be it on America's head. I would not want to see British planes taking part in that operation, which might also put at risk everything that we are doing so effectively on the ground.

[Sir Jim Spicer]

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary asked to what extent we should take part in international peacekeeping. We have probably the proudest record in the world in international peacekeeping. It goes back to the Korean war, when admittedly we operated under powers delegated by the United Nations, and followed through to Desert Storm, also under powers delegated by the United Nations. Desert Storm deployed half a million troops from no fewer than 30 countries. However, those two operations were the exceptions to the general rule.

Over the past 30 or 40 years, the scale of United Nations operations has grown year by year. In the Arab-Israeli dispute in 1965, in UNF1, only 4,000 troops from seven countries participated. Although they did a reasonable job, the moment there was any trouble, they were invited to stand to one side—and they did. In Cyprus, United Nations forces numbered 6,238 in 1974, but by 1990 had fallen to 2,108. We may see the need for that force disappear over the next year or two. I am optimistic about the abilities of President Clerides and President Denktash. The two are old friends, and if they cannot work together to produce a future for Cyprus, then God help us.

I regret having to introduce a slightly sour note, but there was talk of 1974 and the Turkish invasion of Cyprus. Mr. Ecevit, then Prime Minister of Turkey, will be visiting London next month, when I hope Opposition Members will meet and discuss with him the events of 1974, when he came to London and begged the then Labour Government to intervene alongside Turkey. It was not convenient for them to do so. Had that Labour Government intervened, as they could and should have as a guarantor power there would be no partition today; Cyprus would be a united island, with a federal state established.

The United Nations will have an increasing role to play in the rest of this decade, and Yugoslavia is only the beginning. I follow the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) in referring to the composition of the United Nations forces there. UNPROFOR 1 in Croatia has a Canadian commander on the ground. Poor chap—I do not envy him this task one little bit. He has 14,000 troops from 31 countries. The hon. Member for Stockton, North described in some detail where those troops came from, how they were picked, and how ill equipped some of them are.

By contrast UNPROFOR 2 in Bosnia, under a French commander, comprises 7,740 troops, one third of whom are British. All come from NATO countries. It is a unified force, virtually working under a NATO command structure. It knows its business, and it is getting on with it. If I were offered the choice of those two commands, I know which I would take.

There will be more United Nations commitments, and all will require quality troops that are well trained, well equipped, well led and disciplined. The hon. Member for Stockton, North made the point that a large number of seconded troops do not exhibit any of those characteristics.

As to being well disciplined, who has the right to ask for troops to be withdrawn once they have been committed to a United Nations operation? Right hon. and hon. Members may have read a report in *The Sunday Times* about the behaviour of the Russian battalion in Croatia. What right does it have to be there if its soldiers are behaving in that fashion, acting in a partisan way, and not doing their job properly? Who has the right to tell them to withdraw from the field?

That is a difficult situation, because a political decision was made to put in troops from all over the world—but if certain troops are not up to the job and of high enough quality, someone must bite the bullet and tell them to get out of the field and get out of the way. Having made that point, my hope is that that report was not correct.

There must also be proper command control—a well trained headquarters staff, and not one cobbled together from outside. That is where NATO becomes so important. There must be commonality of equipment and language, plus a generous allowance of engineers within any force, because they are needed in all such operations. There must be clear and incisive political control alongside military control—and someone of calibre from the political side to work with and enjoy the confidence of the military commander. Only one organisation is capable of providing a proper command structure that will work under fire if necessary, and that is NATO.

Also is the United Nations structure man enough to deal with the problems that will emerge in the course of the next decade—and does it have the resources to do so? The answer is clearly no. We and every other member of the United Nations must be prepared to come forward and to play our part not only in making the United Nations in New York worthy of the name but in ensuring that, when our troops put on the blue beret, they can wear it with pride. All too often, our troops do—but some other contingents that take part in United Nations operations do not.

8.18 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): During the speech by my right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), the Foreign Secretary pointed out that Saddam Hussein went to war and obliterated Kuwait. All right. But the Foreign Secretary then talked about decent people. It is high time that "decent people" remembered the children of Iraq as they are now.

United Nations sanctions are causing the deaths of more than 2,000 people a week in Iraq through lack of medicine, medical services, food and diet supplements, bad water, and a lack of equipment and parts needed for health care, good water, agriculture, and food processing. It is high time that we considered ending sanctions. There can be no doubt about the deaths, or the causal relationship.

UNICEF estimates that between 80,000 and 100,000 children under five will die in 1993 if sanctions remain. Among the reports that establish a high death toll is a special report not in some Arab newspaper, but in *The New England Journal of Medicine* of 24 September 1992. According to that report, the death rate among children under five may be five times as high as the rate before 1991. Doctors estimate that 80 per cent. of child hospital admissions are nutrition-related. As I have said, my figures come from American rather than Arab sources.

Let me address the Minister through those figures. In 1990 there were 485 cases of kwashiorkor; in 1992, there were 13,744 cases. That is an increase of 28 times. Marasmus is a wasting disease, found especially among children as a result of defective feeding. In 1990, there were

5,193 cases; in 1992, there were 111,477—21 times as many. Those figures come from the university of Harvard, and they are not doctored.

In 1990, there were no cases of cholera; in 1991-92, there were 2,100. In 1989, there were 6,229 cases of measles and German measles; in 1992, there were 21,823—three times as many. In 1989, there were 1,812 cases of typhoid fever; in 1992, there were 19,276, 10 times as many. The figures are eloquent enough, but heaven knows what will happen in the possibly hot summer of 1993.

In 1989, there were 6,612 cases of pneumonia; in 1992, there were 17,377, 2·5 times as many. In 1989, there were 19,615 cases of amoebic dysentery; in 1992, there were 61,939—more than three times as many. In 1989, there were 1,816 cases of viral hepatitis; in 1992, there were 13,776, seven times as many.

In 1989, there were 2,816 cases of brucellosis; in 1992, there were 14,546—an increase of 5·9 times. In 1989, there were 73,416 cases of giardiasis, a duodenal intestinal problem; in 1992, there were 596,356—an increase of 8·1 times. There was an increase of 4·3 times in cases of whooping cough, and an increase of 12 times in poliomyelitis. The incidence of other protein, vitamin and calorie-related cases increased 11 times, involving great numbers of people.

I am told that virtually all the child population is affected. The percentage of births under 2·5 kg body weight in 1990 was 4·5; in 1992, it was nearly four times higher, at 17·6. It is climbing, and is the basis for western medical assessment that Iraq will have millions of stunted —yes stunted—children. We are rightly concerned about what has happened in Liverpool, but we should bear in mind—whatever politicians are in power in this country —that there is a possibility of stunted children in the lands of Mesopotamia. We have some locus in that.

Children over five, and adults, have suffered enormously. The most vulnerable—the elderly, and those with physical disabilities and chronic serious illnesses—have died at greatly increased rates, which comprise much of the approximately threefold overall increase in the death rate. Medical laboratory examinations declined by 60 per cent., from 17,928,000 in 1989 to 7,079,000 in 1992; major surgery cases declined by 63 per cent., from 181,000 in 1989 to 65,733 in 1992.

Those statistics do not convey the human suffering involved. Anyone who has visited hospitals in Iraq in 1991, 1992 or 1993 could hardly tolerate the sanctions: they are a cruel form of death for their victims, the families of those victims and all who understand that they are the actual, moral and legal equivalent of taking the lives and the health of infants, and of sick and elderly hostages, for the payment of money or other acts of government.

Sanctions violate humanitarian law, because they are known to deprive a population of food and medical care.

The Government ought to pay close attention to a recent visit to Iraq by Ramsey Clark. He was thought fit to become Attorney-General of the United States—the senior legal officer in Washington. Are we now to say that his figures, and his concerns, should be dismissed?

There is also the evidence of Dr. Eric Hoskins. Doctor Hoskins is Canadian, but he is also the holder of a Lester Pearson medal. He is very concerned about what he calls nuclear toys. He points out:

> "Several months ago, when the medical director of the prestigious Albert Schweitzer Institute arrived in Berlin carrying with him one of these 'mildly' radioactive DU"—

depleted uranium—

> "penetrators retrieved from Iraq, he was immediately arrested by the German authorities and charged with illegally 'releasing ionising radiation'. The DU penetrator he was carrying, its radioactivity confirmed by two independent German laboratories, was quickly sealed in a lead-lined box."

There are no lead-lined boxes in Iraq. We should consider the humanitarian aspects of the matter.

On 22 February, the Prime Minister gave me an answer to unstarred question No. 70, in which I asked

> "pursuant to his oral answer of 4 February, *Official Report*, column 472, how much of the evidence of the key witness"

—in the Matrix Churchill case—

> "was given in response to questions which referred to the disclosed documents."

The Prime Minister replied:

> "As I indicated in my answer of 4 February, I suggest matters relevant to the Matrix Churchill trail should await the outcome of Lord Justice Scott's inquiry."—[*Official Report*, 22 February 1993; Vol. 219, c. *436*.]

As soon as Lord Justice Scott's terms of reference were announced, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and I asked whether questions would be precluded. Hon. Members will recall that we were told that in no way would answers be treated as if they were sub judice.

Now everything is being put into Lord Justice Scott's in-tray. I do not doubt the distinction or fair-mindedness of this judge, but I am very unhappy about this inquiry. I think that I am the only remaining Member of Parliament who appeared before the Franks committee. That committee, which met under the distinguished Lord Franks, is now reckoned not to have reported in a very satisfactory way. Indeed, when I talked to Sir Patrick Nairne some years later, he, like other members of the committee, was rather embarrassed about some of the things that had happened.

Lord Justice Scott should have at his disposal two Clerks of the House of Commons, independent of the civil service, to help him. In answer to written question No. 5 on 18 February, I was told that he would have the help of one assistant solicitor, one press officer, one grade 7 officer, one executive officer, one administrative officer and one personal secretary. This is not sufficient to sort out the wealth of evidence that is now being produced in book form.

During the recess I read the 500 pages of Kenneth Timmerman's book "The Death Lobby: How the West Armed Iraq". Many hon. Members will be familiar with David Leigh's book "Betrayed". Then there is John Sweeney's book "Trading with the Enemy: Britain's Arming of Iraq". If we need any indication of the relationship with Iraq immediately before the war, here it is. But, like a plot twist, says Sweeney, in one of the Reverend Thomas Awdrey's "Thomas the Tank Engine" books, all is not well in the Iraqi shunting yards. When a bright, shiny, brash new engine steamed in, full of puff, its name was David Mellor. That was the discovery of the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley). At a serious level, I have to say that this is the relationship that occurred between Britain and pre-Gulf war Iraq.

I end by repeating something that I said in an intervention during the speech by the Foreign Secretary —that he must explain a number of matters arising out of the books to which I have referred. They cannot go unchallenged. The House of Commons will be brought into disrepute unless some serious answers are given, especially by the Foreign Secretary with regard to what

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

exactly happened on 19 July—a fortnight before the start of the hostilities—when he chaired a Cabinet meeting with the object of removing restrictions on the export of military equipment to Iraq.

When I make speeches urging the lifting of sanctions and contact with the authorities in Baghdad, let us all remember what the relationship between the British Government and Baghdad was. That puts into context a request that sanctions be lifted. I wish that the Foreign Secretary were present, for, with regard to the question that I put to him during his speech and Geoffrey Robertson's brilliant performance in the Old Bailey, I have to say with sadness that, for the first time, I do not believe him.

8.34 pm

Sir Michael Marshall (Arundel): The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) will understand if I do not folllow him down his line of inquiry. I wish to take up some of the main themes that I detect emerging from the debate. I have heard almost all the speeches and apologise for having to slip out briefly to meet a constituent.

The document "An Agenda for Peace", which was produced last year by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, defines peacekeeping as

> "the deployment of the United Nations presence in the field, hitherto with the consent of all parties concerned, normally involving United Nations military and/or police personnel and possibly civilians as well".

The document says:

> "Peacekeeping is a technique which expands the possibilities of both the prevention of conflict and the making of peace."

Things have moved on since that definition was given in the middle of last year. The definition has been sharpened by the way in which the civil war has pointed up some of the difficult questions that the House faces today.

I shall wish to cite the situations in Somalia, northern Iraq and the former Yugoslavia, including Bosnia. These are three examples of the way in which we have had to look again, with some precision, at the problems that face us. I refer in particular to problems arising from the military and civil authorities' coming together under the umbrella of the United Nations. As has been said by several hon. Members, the wider definition of peacekeeping could certainly take in the question, for example, of the organisation of elections, as happened in the post-civil-war situation in Angola. We certainly see this operating in preventive diplomacy. Reflecting my IPU responsibilities, I have to say that it is in the area of parliamentary diplomacy that many people can play a part in this process.

With regard to the specific problems arising from civil war, one thinks of the safeguarding of food supplies and the prevention of human rights abuses. In every respect we have to reflect that the peacekeeping process with which we are principally concerned is disaster relief. If one thinks of the situation in those terms, one begins to see who the principal players are and how we should seek to support them.

I have long supported the use of the military in disaster relief. I know that there was a certain initial reluctance. That applied even in the case of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, which was understandable, given the situation at the time. However, events have moved on, and, as has been said, NATO has proved itself as perhaps the only coherent regional force that can be deployed under United Nations auspices. But NATO cannot take on everything. There will be situations in which we have to evolve a better structure to deal with the problems confronting us. Very often this has to be done against the problems—in some cases, the resistance—of some of the organisations involved in disaster relief.

I am thinking of the views expressed by the International Committee of the Red Cross and some of the religious aid organisations. I respect their views, but my attitude is simply that, when a disaster of this kind strikes, there is no option to turning to the military. It is the only organisation that can produce the rapid response that is needed for humanitarian purposes. It alone has the spread of communications, medicines, transport and, above all, command and control to secure the necessary direction of the operation.

But we ought to welcome the wider opportunity in what is happening in a difficult and dangerous world. I refer to the area of international co-operation. NATO and Warsaw pact forces are coming together. That is a welcome development. The idea of east and west and, in the case of the Warsaw pact, the former military being involved has much to commend it. Most right hon. and hon. Members would agree that, in the scheme of things in the world, there must be a place for such people, who, within their lights, gave service to their countries. Co-operation of that type is of the highest importance.

It is also very important in these debates that we should not forget the vast number of countries that are not privy to what goes on in the Security Council, the inner sanctum of the G7 and the "G77"—all those countries in the developing world that suffer in a way far beyond our experience. They too must be taken into account, and their sensitivities respected, when we make our plans. In all our work we should try to draw on the lessons that we have learnt in recent times.

Let me return to my three examples. In northern Iraq, the protection of Kurds has shown clearly what NATO can do in this regard. That action was undertaken directly in response to United Nations resolutions. The matter of Somalia raises some very serious questions. I pay tribute to what the United States has done in responding to United Nations resolutions, but the United States has said that it is there for a finite period, and the question that arises is what is to happen at the end of that period. While we all hope that diplomacy may be brought to bear to help resolve the problems, it would be a sanguine observer who felt that there were not still deep dangers with the war lords in that country. I see that there are already suggestions that forces from other members of the United Nations may be asked to take over this responsibility. Australia has been mentioned, and I have no doubt that we will receive the call.

I come, as most other hon. Members have, finally, to the situation in Bosnia. I was pleased to find such clarity of view from both Front Benches in saying that we cannot impose a military solution by force, nor can we end the fighting by attack from the air.

Sticking within the ten-minute philosophy as far as I can, I will advance just three principles that I hope that we will regard as relevant in our planning for existing and perhaps future commitments. First, if the military is to be employed it is essential that it has a clear objective. There must be some understanding of its purpose, of the period in which it is to be deployed and of its relationship with the civil disaster relief agencies and with the United Nations —and that is an area where co-ordination is not particularly good at present.

Secondly, we cannot impose these responsibilities on the military if those who command them feel that they are going to be denuded of their traditional role, which is the defence of the free world and not a matter that can be pushed aside as no longer relevant. There are still severe anxieties in the world at large, and there is still a potential nuclear threat. Therefore, if we look at "Options for Change", as we have been doing, and at the wider role of the military, that is fine, but when specific exercises are postulated, we must calculate carefully, their effect on those traditional roles.

Finally, the military must be given full support through the United Nations. It is in this area that I have some anxieties. If we look at the way in which the non-governmental organisations, the disaster relief community, the representatives of the United Nations and the military have sought to work together in the field, we see an uncertainty in the United Nations' own direction of these affairs.

I would particularly urge my right hon. and learned Friend, when he winds up, to reflect on the role of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs which has been set up to co-ordinate all these matters in the United Nations and, in particular, in some senses, to take over the previous activities of UNRO and other agencies. I believe that the Department of Humanitarian Affairs has not really been given the proper backing and encouragement that it should have. If it is allowed to pursue its work, it can begin to bring together all these agencies, all this relief and all the work of the military in a meaningful way. That is why I very much hope that we may give the United Nations strong support in this task while it is going through a period of difficult and international change.

In all the speeches that we have heard tonight, many of them moving and well informed, there is a clear desire that peaceful resolution should be the prime objective of the House as it is of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I understand that the wind-ups are to begin at about 9.20 pm. Five hon. Members are still waiting to catch my eye, and most of them have sat here all through the debate. If we have a bit of co-operation in the length of speeches, I may be able to call them all.

8.43 pm

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): Like many hon. Members, I want to concentrate on the situation in former Yugoslavia. Events there in the past few years have been rather depressing to observe. I am afraid that the conclusions that they may have for us are also depressing.

Before the crisis in Yugoslavia broke, there was some reason for believing that we were in the process of putting into place, through primarily the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, a set of principles which would regulate relations in Europe and deal with the sort of problems that later emerged. The principles involved such fundamental matters as recognition of existing boundaries, provision for minority rights through concern for the human rights of members of minorities and the principle that changes should come only by way of agreement. These principles were the bedrock on which the CSCE process was supposed to operate.

When we see that that process has not operated effectively in Yugoslavia and consider the present position, we see something that is in conflict with the principles. The Owen-Vance plan for Bosnia has been described as the only show in town, but it is a most unsatisfactory show. It proposes to recognise as administrative units the ethnic divisions and ethnic units in former Yugoslavia. We are going to create a series of Serb states, Croat states and Bosnian Muslim states. This plan can operate only as a prelude to the break-up of Bosnia.

I know that under the plan there is a suggestion that there will still be some vague central authority, but the logic of events will point towards the break-up of Bosnia as presently constituted into those ethnic units because Owen-Vance recognises the ethnic units. As a corollary, the present ethnic sorting out that has started within that area will be accelerated. There may be proposals to deploy peacekeeping forces to police the operation of the Owen-Vance plan, but I suggest that it is only likely to slow down the process of break-up.

The implications of that for other areas will be considerable. If Bosnia breaks up on the ethnic lines for which Owen-Vance is laying the groundwork, inevitably the Bosnian Serbs will want to develop their relationship with the rest of Bosnia and with the Serbs in Krajina. That has implications for the territorial integrity of Croatia. It also has implications further south. The Albanians of Kosovo and the Albanians of Macedonia will ask, if the ethnic minorities are going to be recognised in Bosnia, why they cannot be recognised too.

We may feel that we can keep those areas in separate compartments mentally and try to apply to Kosovo the principles that we set out in CSCE agreements, which I understand is the position of the Government, because the Government say that they will continue to recognise the existing Serbian state and to tell the Albanian population in Kosovo that they should rely on autonomy and provide for human rights in that way, but they will not necessarily see it that way.

I attended a briefing on the subject the other day at which a gentleman who had been in the territory and was familiar with it said that the minute that a major peacekeeping force arrived in Bosnia, Kosovo would erupt, that the Kosovo Albanians realised that this would be their chance and would seize it with both hands. In the light of that, while the Owen-Vance plan may be the only show in town, it is going to be curtains for a number of territories in the way in which it operates. I do not consider that it will be a good plan or a good experience.

Having said that, I recognise that it is impossible to turn the clock back—I wish it were. We may be unable to rectify the mistakes that have been made with regard to Bosnia, but must we just sit and wait for their implications for Kosovo and Macedonia to unfold? If we cannot vindicate all the principles that underlay the CSCE process, can we at least vindicate the principle that change, if inevitable, comes only by way of agreement? At the very least can we not recognise the present state of Macedonia? I feel very concerned about the situation there.

We are told that the Greeks have no territorial ambitions over the present Slav state of Macedonia, but their blockage of recognition is, I fear, opening the way to other territories which do or may have territorial

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ambitions. I refer to Albania, Serbia and Bulgaria. By keeping Macedonia in limbo, we are making it something that is up for grabs, an unstable area, in which other states may be tempted to intervene.

Looking at this rather depressing situation, I think that the overriding lesson is that the CSCE process and the United Nations itself have not worked very well. It may be said that it is working better than it did during the cold war, and that is a fair point, but we must not deceive ourselves. Let us not say that we have a new world order or that we have new international authorities which can be effective. They are not being terribly effective when put to the test. Experience in Yugoslavia and elsewhere shows that they do not have an effective decision-making process. The Yugoslav crisis emphasised that. Their reactions were too late and slow.

Another lesson is that we cannot deal with all the problems that exist in the world: to do so would place too heavy a burden on the few countries willing to bear them. If we cannot deal with all the problems, dealing with only some of them may bring the process into disrepute because selectivity would then arise. There is no difference in principle between the situation in Azerbaijan and Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh and that in the Balkans. For various reasons, we are involved in one but not in the other. Such selectivity will bring the international organs and the international process into disrepute.

The answer is that until we have better and more effective decision-making processes and clearer principles on which to operate we should be cautious in our approach and should confine the use of international organs and intervention to clear and flagrant cases. We need better agreed principles on which to act and greater legitimacy for the way in which we act against states.

There has been a tendency in this debate to concentrate on what could be called the military nuts and bolts. Good and sensible points have been made about military command structures, the need for amphibious forces and so on, but the essential problem is not one of command or forces but political, and until we find more effective international organs and decision-making processes we should not talk up the process. We should move more cautiously and try to work out and achieve the necessary political consensus—if not globally, at least regionally—that can provide a basis for peacekeeping operations.

8.51 pm

Mr. David Faber (Westbury): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak briefly in this important debate. I had planned to follow some of the more general points that have been made about the United Nations, but, mindful of your advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall move straight to the subject of Bosnia.

I have sat through every word of this thoroughly good wide-ranging and extremely interesting debate. Like other hon. Members, I have been fortunate enough to visit Bosnia. I spent some time in Sarajevo just before Christmas, where I had the opportunity to see the peacekeeping operation at first hand.

I should like to consider the four categories of UN peacekeeping into which our role in Bosnia falls. The first is the delivery of humanitarian aid, which the Cheshires are so successfully undertaking in Bosnia and the Americans in Somalia. The second is peace monitoring, in which UNPROFOR 2 in Sarajevo faces the most difficult task. The third is peacekeeping, such as in Iraq or by UNPROFOR 1 in Croatia, to which our Government may be asked to contribute should the Owen-Vance plan succeed. The fourth is peacemaking, which has been dealt with at length: the enforcement of no-fly zones, the imposition of troops on the ground and the removal of the arms embargo on the Muslims, all of which, I am happy to say, have been ruled out by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

The deployment of United Kingdom troops in Bosnia has been an outstanding success, and I join other hon. Members who have paid tribute to their skill and bravery. There can be no doubt that they have saved tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of lives, but the death of Corporal Edwards reminded us of the dangers that they face daily and of the greater dangers that they would face in a peacekeeping or peacemaking role.

One example that is often forgotten is the importance of the co-operation of Belgrade in delivering humanitarian aid. However much we may dislike the Belgrade Administration, we should remember that the majority of aid reaches Bosnia from there. It has a safe two-hour trip from Belgrade to the border at Zvornik, and were we to impose peacemaking or peacekeeping resolutions on Serbia, that route would be cut off, leaving only the more dangerous route that our troops are using from Split and Vitez north to Bosnia.

It is in the peace monitoring role that the United Nations has the greatest difficulty on the ground, as I saw for myself in Sarajevo. When it was first set up, logistically, the operation in Sarajevo left much to be desired. It is the United Nation's job to monitor the clashes that take place, and the firing of heavy weapons. It issues daily press releases describing what it has seen, with a disclaimer about where shelling came from.

The shelling of Sarajevo has been an extremely emotive point throughout. It has barely been reported in the west that a great deal of it has come from Mount Igman overlooking Sarajevo, which is controlled by a rogue Muslim commander, Juka, who is not under the control of the Bosnian presidency and whose actions the United Nations has been unable to assess.

We saw emotive scenes of the shelling of the bread queue in Sarajevo and of a cemetery when a funeral was taking place. The United Nations locally now acknowledges that both may have been carried out by Muslims in an effort to curry favour with the west. That is certainly what we were told by UNPROFOR when we were in Sarajevo. Most recently, General Morillon has ticked off the Bosnians for the murder of a French soldier and the wounding of several French soldiers, the blame for which he laid squarely at their door.

Logistically and politically, there are problems, which the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) summed up very succinctly. How can Egyptians be seen as neutral observers by the Serbs and Croats in a war involving muslims? Similarly, how can Ukrainians be seen as independent observers in a war involving Serbs, when in many parts of Bosnia they openly fraternise with the Serbs and when convoys being taken by Ukrainians rarely come under fire? That is when they are not too busy playing the black market, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, West (Sir J. Spicer) pointed out.

The first paragraph of the article in the *Sunday Times* to which he referred said:

> "Russia's first military force to serve with the United Nations has turned out to be a disgrace, according to angry UN officials. Its men have been accused of black marketeering, defying orders from the UN commander in Croatia skimming UN funds and collaborating with Serbia's most ruthless paramilitary force."

The article, however true or untrue, lists a catalogue of cases in which the Russians have at best turned a blind eye and have at worst been helping the Serbs.

What will happen if the Owen-Vance plan succeeds, as we all hope it will, and achieves a peace settlement, and the UN asks us to contribute some form of peacekeeping force, probably run by the United States? I urge my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to treat such an application with extreme caution. I appreciate that there is a catch 22 here: what is the point of sending troops to enforce a peace if the peace is already thought to be holding? I believe that we should be extremely cautious about joining any peacekeeping force, unless an established and workable peace is already agreed and has proved possible.

UNPROFOR personnel with whom we spoke in Sarajevo acknowledged that they were treading on eggshells. Their perceived neutrality is vital, which is one reason why British troops have been outstandingly successful in Bosnia. I am concerned that, were a peacekeeping force to be sent with United States troops at the head, it would not be perceived as neutral by Serbs, just as Russians playing a role in a peacekeeping force would experience great problems in convincing opponents of the Serbs that they were not closely allied to them.

In the United States, the debate has been much more one-sided than it has in the rest of the west, especially in the press. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary mentioned the worst excesses of *The New York Times*, which has attempted to whip up a fever in the United States throughout this unfortunate and tragic war.

It is clear that the vast majority of atrocities have been carried out by the Serbs, but I believe, for instance, that if we are to look at setting up a war crimes tribunal—I was concerned to hear the United States ambassador to the United Nations last night paying attention only to the Serb atrocities—this has to be handled in a very careful and cautious manner.

To sum up, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the hope that other hon. Members will be able to catch your eye, I urge the Government to be extremely cautious in agreeing to help with any peacekeeping force in what is now Bosnia.

8.59 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I wish to take a different angle on the subject of tonight's debate. The question of which circumstances are right for the use of peacekeeping troops is complicated, and I support the humanitarian efforts of our troops, both in Yugoslavia and elsewhere, and pay a tribute to them. However, I wish to make another fundamental point.

Even if only one British soldier is deployed in a peacekeeping role, I am sure that hon. Members on all sides of the House agree that as much protection as possible should be provided under international law. It is this aspect of international law which leads me to question the Government's stance on the 1981 inhumane weapons convention and the 1977 additional protocols to the Geneva conventions, each of which has great significance for British troops on peacekeeping duties. I will deal with the additional protocols first.

Protocol I relates to the protection of victims of international armed conflicts. This protocol supplements rather than replaces the 1949 Geneva convention, incorporating many important developments—for example, the identification and protection of medical aircraft, and provisions ralating to indiscriminate attacks on civilians. Protocol II relates to the protection of victims of civil war. It would be under this second protocol that any British soldier would have to claim protection, as the war in Bosnia is a civil war.

The former federal state of Yugoslavia ratified both those protocols on 11 June 1979. This ratification should apply to the replacement states, including Serbia and Croatia.

The second protocol includes a prohibition on "outrages upon personal dignity", in particular, humiliating and degrading treatment, rape—which, of course, has happened in the former Yugoslavia—enforced prostitution and any form of indecent assault. Maximum pressure must be brought to bear on those guilty of such offences, because they have broken the Geneva Convention rules.

However, we must not appear hypocritical. This protocol, although signed by the United Kingdom, has not been ratified by us. If we are to put the maximum pressure on those who are carrying out such hideous offences, should we ratify it? Further ghastly offences, such as

> "forced detention of civilians in appalling conditions",

are also in breach of this protocol, as is the "forced movement of civilians".

If we are to make a case to the United Nations or any other international body about abuses of these protocols in the former Yugoslavia, we will risk looking quite foolish. Anyone opposed to such investigations will ask us why, if we are so concerned about these protocols, we have not ratified them.

The same is true of the 1981 inhumane weapons convention, which also has great significance for British troops in the former Yugoslavia. The use of napalm is controlled by this convention, although its use is not banned altogether. Napalm has been used many times in Bosnia, apparently by Serb forces. If British troops on humanitarian or peacekeeping operations are hit by napalm, Her Majesty's Government will have reduced political clout in international circles for any redress, because we have not ratified the convention.

Moreover, in statements, Ministers have questioned protocol 3 to the convention, which restricts the use of incendary devices such as napalm. I believe that this is a mistake, and it severely weakens the position of British forces on the ground. We are not talking about political embarrassments; we are talking about people's skins.

The Minister stated in a letter to me that the inhumane weapons convention cannot be ratified until the additional protocols have been ratified, and he linked this to possible

> "interpretative or operational problems for NATO".

However, the linkage between the ratification of the convention and possible NATO problems with the protocols seems rather strange when one considers that other NATO states, such as Denmark, France, Italy, the Netherlands and Norway, have all ratified it. I think that

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the inhumane weapons convention and the additional protocols could be ratified easily, and I urge the Secretary of State to start the process immediately.

Lord Glenarthur, then a Minister, told the other place in 1987 that he hoped that consultations in NATO about the additional protocols would be completed in 1988, so enabling a decision to be taken on ratification. We are still waiting.

There is a principle in international law that one does not sign a treaty unless one intends to ratify it. Unless Her Majesty's Government are breaking international law, the ratification decision must be a question of when rather than if. The time to ratify is now. Let us not leave the treaty to go the way of protocol 4 to the European convention on human rights, which we signed in 1963 but have not yet ratified.

Peacekeeping will be an important role for the British army. If a British soldier is to be sent to any danger zone, he should have the full protection of international law and be freed from the hypocrisy of the British Government's attitude to international law. I urge the Government to ratify those instruments.

9.5 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): In view of the time, I shall confine my remarks to the Balkans. The Foreign Secretary today detailed the scale, scope and record of British forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We can be proud of them. Their humanitarian work has saved thousands of lives, but for how long can that go on? Are we not treating the symptom and not the disease?

Are we perhaps postponing the inevitable? Are we waiting for an agreement between the combatants which —although we may get one—they would not keep? The long, sorry record of events recently in Bosnia has been of civilian leaders agreeing and military commanders on the ground brazenly disregarding agreements and carrying on with the slaughter.

The sense of futility engendered by the situation was well articulated by Lord Carrington during his briefings to Committees in this House. We must face two brutal alternative realities: either we let the war take its course or, on behalf of the world community, we impose a solution by the world community. The first has attractions, about which we have heard in the debate. We have heard echoes of the old saying about a faraway country of which we know nothing or, to recycle an old quotation, about Bosnia not being worth the bones of one British grenadier.

We could argue that they are all Slavs, let them do battle among themselves and sort it out for themselves. Were we to take that approach, the outcome would see the majority of Bosnia and Herzegovina come under the Serbians, despite the fact that they made up less than one third of the Bosnian population at the beginning of this sorry series of events. Were that to happen, it would be thanks to their access to the Federal Yugoslav armoury. The Croatians would also hold large territorial tracts of Bosnia Herzegovina. But the Muslims would be squeezed, cleansed and exterminated. We would see the sack of Sarajevo, and we would see it night after night on our television screens. The slaugher would be inevitable, and inevitably it would be that of the innocent.

The end result of such a policy would be a greater Croatia. They would settle for that and they would go off the international agenda, like Slovenia before them. The Muslim Slavs would join the fragmentary minorities, such as the Jews, prevalent in central and eastern Europe. Greater Serbia would be the greatest danger of all. We would have proved that force pays, that defiance of the international community pays and that defiance, regardless of the activities of negotiators, even their own, wins. They would have won thanks to enjoying the heritage and armed forces of Federal Yugoslavia.

Let us be absolutely clear that greater Serbia would not stop at Bosnia Herzegovina. It would roll on to Kosovo, Vojvodina and even to Macedonia. Kosovo, the former autonomous province within Serbia, is populated to the extent of 80 per cent. by Albanians. Under Tito, the people had rights of language, education and even to fly the Albanian national flag as the provincial flag of Kosovo. Under Milosevic, the autonomous province and its national assembly have been abolished. The university of Pristina and the Albania schools have been closed. Repression is the order of the day.

Is the next step of Serbian ethnic cleansing to be carried out in Kosovo? The passions of greater Serbia could be fired by the emotions of the ancient battle of Kosovo, so emotive in Serbian folklore. The tolerance of the Albanians in Kosovo could break into violent revolt, which would make what we have seen in Bosnia look like a kindergarten.

Vojvodina, the other autonomous province within Serbia, has also been abolished and it has large minorities —18 per cent. of the people are Hungarians. Macedonia, as yet unrecognised, is 65 per cent. populated by people akin to Bulgarians, and 21 per cent. are Albanians. Events there could provoke Greece and Bulgaria. Events in Vojvodina could provoke Hungary. A trail of minorities, like a powder train, stretches from the Balkans across Europe: Hungarians in Romania and Slovakia, Slovaks in Hungary, Sudetenland exiles in Bavaria looking to the new Czech republic, Silesians in Poland rediscovering their German roots, Poles in Lithuania—so one could go on.

We must do all we can to back up the Vance-Owen plan to find a settlement in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which is the start of the train of powder. It would be quite credible to cantonise Bosnia and Herzegovina. The origins of the Swiss confederation were to find a stable settlement between three communities there with roots in adjacent lands, and the record of Switzerland shows what can be achieved.

If we do not want the powder train across Europe to be ignited, as it was in 1914, we must give every support to a United Nations led and multinationally staffed back-up to a peace settlement in Bosnia-Herzegovina. It should not rely on the United Kingdom alone or even on a United Kingdom lead. We must show off the effectiveness of the foreign affairs pillar of the European Community which has been boasted of lately in the House. We must use the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe and western European countries must put their forces where their mouths are. If, because of their 20th century history, Germany and Italy cannot intervene with us in Bosnia-Herzegovina, they must put up the money—as, indeed, the Germans did in the Gulf. If necessary, we must keep the peace and even make the peace.

9.11 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): In his opening remarks, the Foreign Secretary prompted us with the question, to what extent should we take part in peacekeeping? I believe that we should take part wholeheartedly and without hesitation, not only because it would be a gesture of leadership from a country which should be proud of the professionalism of its armed forces but because we have the finest tradition of leadership. I for one should be disappointed if ever we fell down in that respect.

I appreciate the Foreign Secretary's saying that Great Britain would assist in a United Nations peacekeeping force in the event of a ceasefire and a peace agreement. I also welcome the fact that the Secretary of State for Defence recognised the possibility that Britain would contribute a force to NATO under a United Nations cap.

I must stress that duty begins at home. Whatever commitments we take on overseas, it is important that we do not do so at the expense of our important commitment in Northern Ireland, which must be our priority. It would be a tragedy if the Irish Republican Army misunderstood our determination to ensure that its violence never pays.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallingford (Mr. Forman) rightly mentioned our priorities. After our priorities at home must come those in Europe. I have absolutely no doubt that our moral responsibility lies within the European boundaries, so Bosnia must be top of the list. I place on record my enormous appreciation not only of the Cheshires and their fantastic work with the humanitarian convoys but of the less heralded Royal Irish Regiment. How often do people remember to thank them? There is also a special interest in my constituency, because 150 Crown agents have been sent out by the Overseas Development Administration to help with the convoys.

As we speak today, the bombardment continues in Bosnia. I heard this morning that the heavy artillery attacks on Tesanj, Gorazde, Cazin and Miljanovci continue unstinted. I hope that those dreadful events will be a spur to the peace talks.

As we are now discussing peace talks and something is likely to happen, the time has come to think ahead. I welcome the initiatives by Lord Owen and Cyrus Vance. Their plan for 10 cantons is not perfect, but we should encourage them to fight on to achieve the right mix and the best possible fair deal for everyone.

A peace agreement will lead to peacekeeping, but how will we keep the guns silent? That brings us to peacemaking. Forcing sniping warlords into demilitarisation will call for a considerable United Nations force which must be as broad, wide and deep as possible. It is not simply a United Kingdom responsibility; it is absolutely right that the Government should insist that the burden must be shared, and not simply with those who have already accepted their responsibilities. I welcome the fact that the Americans are now wholeheartedly joining in the planning and will be making a contribution.

It is also significant that we are now discussing the problem with the Russians. A multinational force is essential to gain the confidence of all parties. Many people will not find the Russians acceptable as they are working too closely for comfort with the Serbs; none the less, the balance has to be struck. I particularly welcome the trip by Reg Bartholomew, the United States special envoy to Moscow. Let us consider for a moment the implications of a Russian contribution.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): Will the hon. Lady explain what she means by the term "Russians"? She has now used it twice and it needs some clarification in the context of the debate.

Lady Olga Maitland: When I refer to the Russians, I refer particularly to the state of Russia and not to the Commonwealth of Independent States. I am not trying to embrace all the republics of the former Soviet Union. A contribution from the Russians would be significant, as it would be the first time that that country had co-operated with NATO. It could be attractive to Moscow and it is for the west to make it politically attractive. We must make it abundantly clear to Mr. Yeltsin that he has more to gain from the good will of the west than anything he could achieve by encouraging Milosevic.

We are well aware that there is a natural kinship between the two countries; they are Slavs and they share the same Orthodox Church. However, it is important that we ensure that Milosevic, who is the inspirator of this murderous performance in Bosnia, should be politically isolated and made as uncomfortable as possible. Indeed, sanctions should be brought to bear which will cripple his style and standing in his own country. I was in Belgrade just before Christmas as one of the official observers for the election, and he was defiant to the core.

We must push forward and encourage those within the country of Yugoslavia who support a proper peace process. Next week, the former Yugoslav Prime Minister, Milan Panic, will be in London. We should listen to what he has to say. Meanwhile, it is important to enforce sanctions with the greatest energy. I congratulate the Government on drafting new proposals, suggesting the closure of all rail and road links and the enforcement of no-fly zones. In those matters, Russia would have to back the United Nations resolutions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Westbury (Mr. Faber) drew attention to concerns about bringing Russians into a peacekeeping force. They are not experienced. We have plenty of evidence, as shown in *The Sunday Times*, that their behaviour has been militarily atrocious. Therefore, we need to consider carefully what role they should have. Where is the practical place to put them? Under whom should they serve? Should they work on the ground or in the air? Should they work alongside the Serbs whom they have been encouraging?

I should like to continue my comments, but it is time to finish. Britain has a duty to show real leadership. We are proud of our record and of the fact that we have had successful humanitarian convoys. I hope that they will continue undaunted.

9.20 pm

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): It is traditional to say in one's reply that the debate has been interesting and wide-ranging, but indeed this debate has been. It has also gone beyond that. There has been common concern throughout the House about the problems that face our continent and the world. Perhaps the debate has been a small but troubled oasis in the normal frenzy of political

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activity which characterises our rumbustious but perhaps enriching political debate. Certainly it makes a change after last night.

The unity on deep troubles and serious problems shows the willingness of hon. Members in all parts of the House to try to come to terms not just with describing the problems but with finding solutions. We have to consider peacekeeping in its widest sense and not just in the clinical sense used in the military context. On peacekeeping, we were right to focus most attention on the United Nations. With its belatedly renewed prominence, the United Nations is the last great hope of us all for something better in future.

The Foreign Secretary entitled his talk recently at Chatham house "The new disorder". That description is unfortunately all too true of events in the world today. Despite that description, and despite the eloquent emphasis by many hon. Members in the debate, the United Nations is the only hope we have. My hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) spoke with considerable passion about the new role which the United Nations could and must have.

If the United Nations is to fulfil all the hopes and expectations of so many hon. Members and people outside the House, it will need the money, the physical resources and the personnel to put behind its policies. It will require the political will of all who participate in it. All those are preconditions for a renewed United Nations which might give hope to us all.

At the end of his speech, the Foreign Secretary referred to preventive diplomacy. Perhaps there was a hint of self-interest in his flying the flag for the Foreign Office, in what is probably a bitter and animated debate taking place inside Government as we talk—the traditional battle between Ministries and the Treasury. The Foreign Secretary has our strong support in the fight that he may be putting up—if that comes as any reassurance. If he wants to tell me that an attack would be better, I will be happy to write to the Chancellor. I will do anything to ensure that the message gets through.

The Foreign Secretary said that it is much cheaper to pay for an ambassador than for an infantry battalion, much cheaper to pay for ambassadors for a dozen embassies than for one aeroplane, and he said how much more good it does. His remarks are valuable, and my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson), who was formerly a member of the diplomatic service, also said that preventive diplomacy is important. This is the last time that this or any other country should even dream of cutting back on the people who are engaged in the process that may well prevent conflicts from starting, and who ensure that, when they start, they do not spread beyond the immediate boundaries.

The Foreign Office is facing cuts, and while they will not be severe this year, according to press statements, they will be in the following two years. They will not merely mean dashing the Foreign Office's ambitions to open new embassasies and missions in the new republics of the former Soviet Union and elsewhere, but will probably lead to cuts in British representation abroad, for example in the activities of that eminent organisation, the British Council —I must declare an interest as its vice-chairman—whose role in cultural and educational diplomacy is both considerable and valuable. Such cuts should not be contemplated.

The cuts may well lead to reductions in world radio and television services—by any standards, the best broadcasting on the planet. It would be madness if the Treasury got away with any ambition to do that.

Sir Michael Marshall: The hon. Gentleman may be aware that an Albanian parliamentary delegation is visiting the House today. They have told us that many people have risked 10 years imprisonment and the confiscation of their entire property to listen to BBC radio World Service.

Mr. Robertson: That is a welcome intervention, and I know that those on the Treasury Bench listened with sympathy, but the message must get home to those inside the Treasury. If we do not invest properly in diplomacy, it will be infinitely more expensive to this nation and to the world.

Perhaps I have been the Shadow Front-Bench spokesman on foreign affairs for too long. It has been 11 years, and in my museum of the Foreign Office I have seen two European treaties and four wars with British involvement, and 24 Ministers have come and gone, including five Foreign Secretaries. During that time, I have come to recognise the quality and sheer professionalism of the British foreign service. I have no doubt that its contribution to making the world safer and better has been incalculable but fundamental, and we must bear that in mind.

I must deal with reactiveness. I was recently asked whether we envisaged that British troops would be deployed in a peacekeeping role during the next two or three years in Nagorno-Karabakh, Tadzhikistan, Moldova or Georgia. It seems fanciful this evening for us even to consider that possibility. The majority of people do not know where those places are. The majority of hon. Members, including me, cannot spell the names of most of those countries.

Yet it is always worth remembering that there are now 2,800 British troops, as the Foreign Secretary said this afternoon, bravely engaged in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Eighteen months ago, there was no such country as Bosnia-Herzegovina. We now face a world that is moving so fast that we are deploying troops in a country that only a short time ago had no formal existence. My hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) and the hon. Member for Dorset, West (Sir J. Spicer) rightly paid tribute to the role played by British troops in the area—an invaluable role, given their skill and professionalism.

We, as the politicians in charge of the policy making, must think now precisely whose agenda will dictate where deployments will be made. Will the agenda be fixed by the policy-makers elected by the people or by the television cameras and the possibility of their entering areas? The possibility of facing the threat of pax Americana now that the cold war has finished is replaced by the threat of pax television camera.

The world expects that we can solve the problems easily, and if television pictures appear in somebody's front room and the media say, "Do something," there is an automatic belief that we can send our soldiers, our sailors and our airmen to far corners of the world and relieve the suffering that we have seen on our television screens.

Bosnia is at the front of our minds and at the front of the images that we have. It has rightly dominated many of the powerful contributions this evening. My hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) made a powerful plea on behalf of the ordinary civilian population affected by events in that country today, where the level of bestiality seems to reach worse levels with every day that passes.

Yet we still believe that there is hope for the future. The Vance-Owen plan is not ideal, and it is sometimes not remotely ideal, but it is the only plan there is and the only hope there is. It must therefore have our support. I expressed some reservations last year about Lord Owen being chosen as the European Community's envoy to the former Yugoslavia. I was a close associate of his before he departed to wreak havoc on the British domestic political scene. However, I now believe that he will have made a commendable contribution to achieving peace, if it is eventually achieved in Bosnia. Parliament and the nation should be profoundly grateful to him and to Cyrus Vance for their efforts in the area.

I am glad that the Foreign Secretary announced this evening that the sanctions against Serbia have been toughened up. To break the cross-party consensus for a moment, I think that we should all share guilt about the fact that sanctions were not implemented with vigour, with enthusiasm and with the political will that was demanded when they were introduced last June. Even if only one man will now be responsible for the sanctions, that sounds slightly better than the previous system. The process towards war crimes tribunals must be welcomed. In itself, it may be an inhibition on some of the wilder and nastier excesses that some individuals seem to believe are legitimised by war in the area.

The problems in the world today are very different from the problems faced by previous generations. They are very different from the problems that faced the world only a few years ago. That change demands of us the imagination to see what the different and new solutions to the problems must be.

It is no use to be nostalgic for the time, only a few years ago, when we faced a vast, but almost completely predictable, military force on the other side of our continent. That force could be measured and analysed indefinitely, and it largely acted in a way that was manageable, even if it was dangerous.

We live in a world in which the problems are severe and complex. They do not involve a military challenge, but they involve refugees in increasingly larger numbers. There is the problem of migrations of whole populations across national boundaries with the huge problems that result for those countries which must then act as hosts. Problems come from minorities in the countries of our continent and beyond, and from the environmental disasters which have been stored up for many years.

Those problems demand new institutions when necessary. They will involve new training institutions, as well as military and security institutions, because trade will be one of the ways in which we will institute stability in many of the troubled parts of the world.

If we want to talk about peacekeeping, we should remember that economic deprivation is at the root of so many of the problems and troubles which are occuring in countries. Therefore, economic security is one way in which we can route the democracy of those countries and ensure our security in the rest of the continent.

Peacekeeping means newly reinforcing old institutions. It means giving life to the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe and making it work well. It means seeing what new role NATO can play. NATO exists, so it has a value beyond the simple institutions which it represents today. Therefore, its new role must be developed to encompass its wider responsibilities beyond the military role which it had previously.

Peacekeeping involves adopting new techniques, as the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) said. It involves examining sanctions as an instrument which might be implemented quickly, effectively and toughly, so that perhaps we can stop some of the conflicts before they get out of control.

It involves using techniques of conflict resolution. Many people who live in Northern Ireland have experience of conflict resolution and containment which might usefully be exported to other parts of the continent. It involves informal links and new informal diplomacies, which might produce results. As my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) and the president of the Inter-Parliamentary Union said, peacekeeping means using our parliamentary experience perhaps to export some of our specific pluralistic strengths.

All the time, peacekeeping means new priorities for the world in curbing arms sales. The sale of arms is part of the problem which we face today. In my post this afternoon, I received a copy of the *Defence News*. It is a worldwide weekly which is sent to many of us and which is extremely interesting. The chilling headline on the front page is: "Iran seeks to join arms export club". What sort of lunatic world are we engaged in when that becomes the headline?

In our search for new priorities, we must re-examine nuclear proliferation and how the rules on that might be toughened up. We must establish, police and move forward on new environmental standards for the world, so that individual countries will never again be allowed to store up their problems in a world in which airborne pollution means that no country can be sovereign in protecting its environmental space.

In the new world order, the development of human rights must not be simply a slogan for one country against another, or one blow-up against another. It must be something rooted in international law, so that we can no longer say that another country's problems and the people in those countries are not our problems. We are all part of this planet. If we have the opportunity to escape from the freeze box of the past, the monitoring of human rights and an active human rights policy must be at the heart of it.

This debate, all too brief and all too rare, has highlighted a wide range of serious problems that face us today in Europe and way beyond our continent as well, and the concern that is felt by so many hon. Members about all that is happening. I believe passionately that the changes of 1989 and 1990, the collapse of communism and the end of a wasteful, divisive and dangerous cold war, were genuinely welcome developments. They may have thrown up new evils and new uncertainties, but I for one have absolutely no nostalgia for the so-called certainties which, in turn, enslaved millions of human beings so close to our own country in this continent.

We now have to rise to the challenges and to the questions posed by the world today, just as those in the communist world will eventually rise to the challenges that face them in their countries. If we do, and if we have the will to deploy sufficient resources, imagination and

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political will, the new world disorder that we see at the moment will be a mere temporary phase in the long course of world history.

9.40 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Douglas Hogg): As is right and as was to be expected, the debate has covered a great deal of ground. Some 27 or 28 hon. Members have spoken and a score or so issues have been addressed and, as the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) said, there has been general agreement on many of them.

I recognise as I start that I shall not be able to respond to all the individual points that have been made and I apologise for that in advance. I should like to identify the three main themes that have been spoken to in the debate and to deliver my response within that framework. Those themes should be and are the United Nations, the events in what was Yugoslavia and the middle east.

The United Nations has been the subject of perhaps the greatest discussion in the debate. The role of the United Nations, as has been emphasised by almost every hon. Member who has spoken to the issue, has developed enormously during the past five years, and for that there are three or four reasons.

Those reasons include the collapse of the former Soviet Union; the fact that the Russian Government are willing to play a constructive role within the Security Council; the success of the Security Council in the context of the Gulf war; and the fact that there is a virtually universal recognition that only the United Nations—though sometimes regional organisations as appropriate—can tackle the crises and wars that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) properly remarked, are beamed into our homes by television and radio.

I agree with the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) on the importance of underpinning action with a moral basis. Force which is disengaged from a moral basis is unsustainable and wrong. By that he means, and by that I mean, that, when the members of the United Nations act in a forcible manner, either they should do so within and under the authority of the United Nations or that which they do should be authorised by the principles of international law.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Hogg: No, I am afraid that I will not at this stage.

I come first to the question of peacekeeping. It is clear that peacekeeping will now play an important part in the career of a typical British soldier. That is inevitable, although it was not true a few years ago. But we need to be cautious about it and there are a number of principles to which we should adhere.

The first and perhaps the most important point is that the British Government's responsibility for the safety and security of British service men serving in a peacekeeping role is as great when they serve under the authority of the United Nations as it is when they serve under the direct authority of the British Government or the generals who command. Because of that, when we talk about peacekeeping we must hold to certain principles that were touched on by a number of right hon. and hon. Members —including the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook), my right hon. Friends the Members for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) and for Chertsey and Walton (Sir G. Pattie), and my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel (Sir M. Marshall).

First, one cannot make peace by force. To use the phrase of my hon. Friend the Member for Ghertsey and Walton, one cannot insert oneself between warring factions. I entirely agree with that. Moreover, there must be a sustainable ceasefire to keep, and clearly definable political objectives. Those will usually be identified by the existence of an agreement to which parties are genuinely adhering.

Secondly, there must be an effective control and command mechanism. The quality of troops deployed alongside British peacekeepers must be of high quality. I take to heart the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell)—that humanitarian missions can often lead to something more substantial.

For those reasons, in many cases it would be right for peacekeeping forces to be deployed by regional defensive organisations acting under the authority of the United Nations. There may be many circumstances in which it would be right for control and command to be vested in NATO. That may be so, for example, in the former Yugoslavia. I can conceive of circumstances in the former Soviet Union in which that role should be performed by CIS forces.

Incidentally, I agree very much with my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington that one cannot expect to participate in each and every peacekeeping force. We are the second largest contributor, but we must not suppose that we are under an obligation to participate in every peacekeeping force that may be mounted.

There has been much discussion, rightly, about the virtues of preventive diplomacy. Clearly, that approach will be built on steadily. We see examples of that already —such as the deployment of United Nations troops in Macedonia, and the increasingly important work of regional organisations. I have in mind the work undertaken by the conference on security and co-operation in Europe—a regional organisation. The CSCE is already heavily engaged in the former Yugoslavia, with observer teams in Kosovo to be reinforced and teams in Sandjak and Vojvodina, then Georgia and Estonia. There is also the work being done by the CSCE to promote peace talks in Nagorno-Karabakh.

In passing, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) for the commitment that he has given in Nagorno-Karabakh, along with my noble Friend, Lady Cox. I strongly support the proposition that my hon. Friend brought forward in the Council of Europe.

There has been much discussion, again rightly, abut the reform of the Security Council. If my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington will forgive me, I do not agree with his basic proposition—which he admitted was heretical—to the effect that the United Kingdom should cede its permanency.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made the point that we do not want in any sense to stand in the way of debate, nor could we. He reminded the House—and others through the House, I hope—that a number of principles must be observed. First, it would be perverse to damage the functioning of the Security Council at a moment when, for the very first time, it is beginning to operate in the way that those who created it hoped that it would.

Any reform must surely take account of a number of principles. First, the Security Council's size must be manageable. Its present size is manageable—but if it were greatly expanded, it would not be manageable. Secondly, one cannot have as permanent Security Council members countries whose constitutions preclude them performing the essential functions of membership. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford drew attention to the difficulties faced by Japan and Germany.

Nor could one expand the Security Council's membership by those two countries and expect that discussion to come to an end, because that is not realistic. Countries should proceed slowly and cautiously, and ensure that all member nations that are part of the Security Council's permanent composition are able to perform the essential functions that are expected of permanent membership.

Mr. Wells: Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Hogg: I do not think that my hon. Friend has been present for the debate. If he will forgive me, I will not give way.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale mentioned sanctions. He is entirely right to say that they are an important element in the arsenal the United Nations—one that I hope we shall develop further. Let me say in passing that we are learning more about the implementation of sanctions, and about how to make them effective, as we use the policy more and more.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will forgive me if I say that I do not entirely agree with his criticisms of the way in which sanctions have operated in what was Yugoslavia. It is true—my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made the point—that, fairly recently, oil supplies got through to Serbia, and that is deeply regrettable; but it is also true that, if the oil part of the Serbian economy is excluded, considerable damage has been done to that economy by the policy of sanctions.

If we proceed no further in our talks in Geneva and New York, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) rightly observed, there will be a policy of tightening sanctions yet further—if necessary, by a further resolution, which could have the effect of sealing the frontiers of Serbia-Montenegro and preventing all traffic from passing up and down the Danube.

We need to keep two points in mind. First, sanctions will not work unless the states involved implement them, and the riparian states must be told that they have a moral, legal and international duty to implement them. Secondly, there may be a cost. The rest of us must be constructive and imaginative in considering how we can best help, for example, riparian states that are genuinely implementing sanctions. Sometimes, as in the case of the Gulf war, it may be appropriate to establish a particular fund; on other occasions, it may be appropriate to tell the international financial institutions that it is important to take account of that loss when formulating programme assistance.

Mr. Dalyell: What is the Minister's comment on the hard statistics that I gave about the effect of sanctions on the health of children in Iraq?

Mr. Hogg: If time permits, I shall deal with that point, because it is a fair point and needs to be answered. First, however, I wish to discuss Yugoslavia.

There has been considerable agreement this evening. It has been agreed, for instance, that we must face the grim fact that there are no wholly innocent victims among those responsible for policy in the former Yugoslavia. That innocent victims exist can be seen only too clearly, but those on all sides who are driving policy forward have a responsibility. True, the Serbs are primarily responsible; but, as has been pointed out by my hon. Friend the Member for Westbury (Mr. Faber), the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) and others, the Croats and Muslims have also committed crimes.

We are almost all agreed that the conflict in Bosnia bears all the hallmarks of a civil war. It is primarily a civil war, although it is aided and abetted by participants from outside, mainly Serbia. There is general acceptance, too, that it is impossible to enforce by external force a settlement of a civil war; that must be done by agreement. That is why there has been general support for the main pillars of our policy—the attempt to provide humanitarian supplies, using military force in a way that is known to the House; the lending of strong support to the Vance-Owen plan; and the application of pressure through sanctions.

As many hon. Members have said, it is terribly important that when we pursue that policy—particularly when we talk about the use of military force in any way —we are careful not to prejudice or imperil the humanitarian efforts that are saving tens of thousands of people. It would be perverse in the extreme if any military or quasi-military action destroyed that humanitarian effort: we must guard strongly against such an eventuality.

My hon. Friend the Member for Westbury and many other hon. Members have asked what will happen if Lord Owen or Cyrus Vance comes forward and says, "An agreement has been struck by all the parties, and we want to have it underpinned by a peacekeeping force.". That question may very well be put to Her Majesty's Government. As it is hypothetical, I cannot answer it in a clear way. However, from the reservations that have been expressed during this debate and on previous occasions, I know that the Government will be subjected to very searching questions.

Those questions are likely to include the following. Is there a genuine agreement to which the parties are genuinely committed? Is there a sustainable ceasefire that will hold? Who is participating? Will the United States contribute substantial ground forces? Will the Russians commit quality troops? Who will be responsible for command and control? Will it be NATO? If it is NATO, will there be a substantial contribution by other member states? I feel certain that questions of that type will be asked and that, if we cannot respond satisfactorily to them, there will be no political support for participation by British troops in a peacekeeping role.

If there is sufficient time I shall deal with the matter of Macedonia and Albania, but I should like to come now to the question of the middle east. I shall begin by saying something about the peace process. The most urgent objective of us all must be to get the peace process under way again. Therefore, the visit of Secretary Christopher is

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of extreme importance, and I hope that he will be able to persuade all the participants of the need to get down to talks.

The right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) emphasised, and I accept, that the Israeli Government's decision to deport the 415 people into south Lebanon is a serious obstacle to the peace process. We supported Security Council resolution 799, and we have made repeated representations to the Israeli Government that they should comply with it. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made the point that what has been done is a useful first step, but he said also that it is but a first step, that we seek compliance.

I go further. The Israeli Government say that they hope that the absence of full compliance will not stand in the way of further talks. I hope that there will be further talks, but I say to the Israeli Government that, even if there are further talks, lack of compliance with Security Council resolution 799 will result in their being conducted in such a frigid atmosphere as to make progress difficult. Therefore, I hope very much that Prime Minister Rabin will feel able to comply fully with that resolution.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) mentioned Iraq. First, we must be clear about the fact that the Government of Iraq under Saddam Hussein have failed, in a number of very important respects, to comply with the resolutions of the Security Council or with their mandatory elements. For a start, he has not returned the Kuwaiti detainees. Secondly, he has not co-operated fully in the identification and destruction of his weapons of mass destruction. Thirdly, he is abusing his own population in a number of disgraceful and lamentable ways. This is non-compliance on a very large scale. The policy of Her Majesty's Government and of the Security Council is to hold to the sanctions until there has been full compliance.

I understand the point made by the hon. Member for Linlithgow about the suffering in Iraq, but perhaps the hon. Gentleman does not present the full picture. I hope he will forgive me for reminding him of several elements. The sanctions regime now in place does not cover food, it does not cover medicines, nor does it cover those goods that are certified humanitarian.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow will come back and ask me about money. Here is my rejoinder. Security Council resolutions 706 and 712 enable Saddam Hussein to sell oil for the purposes of raising money for precisely the needs that the hon. Gentleman has identified. Saddam Hussein has chosen not to do it, and that is the problem which he and we face. For that reason I must tell the hon. Gentleman that the policy of adhering to sanctions until there has been full compliance will be maintained.

It being Ten o'clock the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Hospitals (Armagh)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

10 pm

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh) *rose*——

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In tonight's *Belfast Telegraph* there is a comment concerning the decision of the electoral court in which there is this statement:

> "If everyone guilty of electoral malpractice were to be disqualified, there might be quite a few vacancies declared".

I seek your guidance on whether this should be referred to a committee or whether you can guide us as to what we should do about what I believe is a serious accusation. There are legal procedures, as people are aware, for malpractice, and they ought to follow them through.

Madam Speaker: May I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that he writes to me without delay and lets me have the evidence so that I may see it in full?

Mr. Mallon: I very much welcome the opportunity to raise this matter on the Adjournment. Almost by definition, Adjournment debates are parochial. They are confined to one's own constituency and, as of right, I think, they express concerns within our constituencies. But in this instance, while I want to deal with a localised issue in relation to two hospitals in Armagh that most hon. Members have never seen and never will—although, Madam Speaker, I hope that at some time in your arduous duties you will find the opportunity to visit Northern Ireland and especially my constituency and these two hospitals, where you would be more than welcome—there is a much wider and general point to be made. In relation to these two hospitals, the issue encapsulates one of the core tensions within the entire debate about health care provision.

There are three of those tensions. The first is quite simple, and it is the one that the debate centres on: the survival of the small, local, community hospital as against the large, centralised unit, based on the erroneous assumption that large equals better and more cost-effective. I believe that to be wrong and, in this specific case, I believe it to be very wrong. Not only that, but it is contrary to the Prime Minister's own charter, which we all received with great anticipation; contrary to the Northern Ireland Office charter; and contrary to the board charter that we received through the post only three days ago. That is the first false assumption underlying the type of approach that we anticipate in relation to these hospitals.

The second core tension is that of quality of care as opposed to cost-effectiveness. As we progress through the debate, I hope to show that that is another erroneous assumption. The third crucial element, again relating to the citizens charter, is sensitivity to the needs of the community as opposed to bureaucratic requirements, bureaucratic requirements in this instance being those imposed by the Government and, in a very supine fashion, adopted by the boards. The boards have shown clearly that they evaluate and know the price of everything, but the value of nothing. The difficulty is that, once a decision is made on that basis, it is impossible to reverse.

I believe that we have a valid case about the community hospital in Armagh and Mollinure hospital. Mollinure hospital was opened 18 months ago by Lord Arran, who described it as

"unique in Northern Ireland",

the first of its kind in Northern Ireland and

"among the best in Europe."

Would not it be a remarkable irony if, 18 or 24 months hence, the same Minister were to close the new purpose-built unit that he described in such glowing terms? The danger is that that may happen.

No doubt the Minister will tell me that I am jumping to conclusions and that we are debating only options. No doubt he will have the booklet that has been issued by the board, "Making Choices", which presents six options, four of which contain the presumption of closure of the hospital that Lord Arran rightly praised so generously. Those options must be questioned. The debate will allow the Department of Health and Social Services to focus its attention on those choices.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that those four choices threaten not only his two hospitals but the hospitals in the constituency of the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady), two of the three hospitals in my constituency and perhaps one hospital in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis). There is a wider dimension.

Mr. Mallon: I thank the hon. Gentleman. That is indeed why I tried to make the broader point that this is not just a parochial constituency matter. It affects Banbridge hospital, Lurgan hospital, Loane house and the whole caring service in the north of Ireland.

"Making Choices" is cleverly written. Four of the options contain an underlying presumption in favour of the closure of the two hospitals that I have mentioned. I am not opposed to the development of three acute units at South Tyrone hospital, Craigavon and Daisy Hill in Newry, but they must not be developed at the expense of the smaller unit that caters for a vast area in our community and that is doing an immensely good job.

I referred to the praise that the Minister heaped on Mollinure. It is unique, because it is not just a geriatric hospital: it has a day care unit that allows elderly people to be assessed for perhaps two days a week and to return to their homes in the community to recuperate. That is crucial.

One of the main purposes of the Department is to get people back into the community. Mollinure hospital achieves that. Its assessment unit is unique, because it allows people to be assessed properly, not merely by one doctor but under the multi-disciplinary services it offers. Many people come in whose GPs have decided that they should be in continuous care, but this assessment allows them, after an examination and a period of rest, to go back into the community.

The third crucial point concerns the respite that this allows for carers. How often is lip service paid to carers in our community? Carers are a crucial part of the whole health care service, and a growing part, with the cut that we are experiencing. If elderly people can go into this type of unit while carers enjoy a respite for one or two days, or for a holiday period of a week or two weeks, that caring service will improve substantially. That is what is under threat, and that is what I am concerned about.

Armagh community hospital is a small, effective unit. It covers a vast rural hinterland, as well as the city of Armagh. It stretches to the border areas, upwards of 40 miles. For many people, it is their nearest point of contact, and this hospital serves the area exceptionally well. In the past year, it has served 38,000 patients out of a population in the region of 60,000. Not only that, but of that figure, 14,000 attended the casualty unit.

I have not doubt that we shall be told that the hospital is not cost-effective; it is small, it is good, but we shall be told that its work should be done in one of the acute units, because it is not cost-effective. Lest that be given any credence, I will give two examples.

In 1992, the out-patient cost in Armagh community hospital was £9·22 per attendance. In one of the bigger hospital acute units, in the same unit of management—the South Tyrone hospital—the cost was £17·99. I cast no aspersions on the South Tyrone hospital, nor would I ever do so. I am simply making the point that, if we are to talk about costs, as I have no doubt the Minister will, we should bear that in mind.

My second point relates to the casualty element, and this applies only to staffing. The cost per attendance of those 14,000 people who attended casualty was £12 per head. I believe that that could not be equalled in any of the acute units, or probably in any of the other units available to us.

My next point is that the hospital serves a huge hinterland. The board has told us in its own little booklet—I view the booklet with more suspicion every time I read it:

> "If service charges reduce accessibility, compelling reasons must be shown."

There is almost no such thing as public transport in that area; it is almost totally rural. The only way for people to get to any hospital is by car, if they own one. If they do not own a car, they are dependent on the good will of their neighbours.

We are forgetting the basis of the charter again if changes are made and we bring health care to the people rather than people to the health care. I make that point in a very substantive way, because, when it comes to the health care of people, time means lives. The longer people have to travel, the further the distance, the greater the risk to them.

I make a last general point about the loss of jobs that will be involved. It might be said that one should not do that in this type of debate, in which we are talking about a health service issue, but it is crucial, because the people of whom I speak have given an enormous amount to the sick and elderly in the Armagh area. It is only right that I should refer to their position, because I do not want more jobs to leave Armagh. I do not want to see any more young people with expert ability to care for the disadvantaged having to leave the area to seek work.

In his last contribution to the United States Congress, Senator Hubert Humphrey made a comment that was apt to the situation to which I refer tonight and to many others:

> "The moral test of government is how it treats those who are in the dawn of life—the children; those who are in the twilight of life—the aged; and those who are in the shadows of life—the sick, the needy and the handicapped."

We are dealing with all those categories. I urge the Minister to ensure that whatever decision is made meets the moral test laid down by Senator Humphrey.

10.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): I must at the outset congratulate the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) on his assiduousness in applying for the debate and his tenacity and perseverance in securing it.

There can be no doubt that the issues that he raises are of concern in his constituency, and he is right to raise them in the House. He will not be surprised when I tell him, in the time available to me, that there is still a considerable time left in which to consider the future of the two hospitals in question, and I am sure that he will take part, as will other hon. Members, in that process.

The hospitals in question, Mullinure geriatric hospital and Armagh community hospital, are two of the eight general and acute hospitals currently under review by the Southern health and social services board. In March of last year, following the publication of the Department of Health and Social Services regional strategy and its own area strategy, the Southern health and social services board decided that the time was opportune to review the provision of acute and general hospital services in its area.

A hospital planning liaison group was set up and immediately commissioned each unit of management providing those hospital services to undertake a review of current provision. From the reports received from the units concerned, the planning liaison group prepared a consultative paper, to which the hon. Gentleman referred, entitled "Making Choices". That was issued to a wide range of groups and individuals early in December 1992 inviting responses by 28 February 1993. I understand that, following complaints about the length of time allowed for consultation, the board agreed to extend the period to 31 March.

It is important that the status and purpose of "Making Choices" is fully understood. It reaches no conclusions about the overall pattern of hospital provisions, about the future role of any hospital in the area or about the size of any hospitals or specialties they might offer. The paper is intended to provide the background to a consultation process which will assist the health board, in the first instance, to reach a broad view about the future pattern of hospital care; that process should be completed by about June this year. Thereafter, it will be necessary to undertake much more detailed planning to test and quantify any proposed changes before they can be implemented.

The objective of the present exercise is to reach that broad view on future services. It should be borne in mind that in the detailed planning of any changes, there will be a further opportunity for people in the community or hon. Members to examine the available data more critically. Where the closure of any facility is contemplated, there will be a further public consultation exercise.

As the hon. Gentleman said, "Making Cioices" presents us with six options describing possible patterns of future hospital services. The board has made it clear that they are not recommendations but subjects for discussion to stimulate debate on the future pattern of hospital care. It is easy to say that if an item is suggested as a subject for discussion we are somehow steering the public towards a particular course. That is not so—we hope that the people will take the six choices as an opportunity for general and genuine debate.

As I said, "Making Choices" is not intended to come to a conclusion on the future of Mullinure or any other hospital. I shall concentrate on Mullinure because the hon. Gentleman made a particular point of saying that it has been opened recently. Although it was recently opened officially, it was planned some years ago, based on the best information available and in response to a pressing need to find suitable alternative accommodation for people who were housed in what I think the hon. Gentleman would agree were wholly unacceptable conditions at Tower Hill. The full impact of the community care policy had not become evident and was not anticipated at that stage. The extent of the growth in the private and voluntary sectors could not have been envisaged.

The capital cost of Mullinure was approximately £2·3 million. It is accepted that that is a considerable sum, but it is small in terms of the overall capital expenditure to bring hospital services into the next century, let alone the next millenium. More significant is the revenue cost, which was £1·85 million for Mullinure in 1991-92.

The board will of course seek an alternative use for any buildings which might become redundant. The pattern of service provision has to change in the light of new developments, new treatment techniques and advances in medical science. Paragraph 7.33 of "Making choices" states that there might be other options for the development of geriatric hospital services. Although it is beneficial to have assessment and rehabilitation services on an acute hospital site, it does not apply to continuing care beds. A strong case can be made for their being as local as possible for the sake of convenience and to maintain links with the community. However, as I said, nothing has been decided.

We must consider the fact that we now have a different system of health care. We have come into the modern world. There is an increased emphasis on promoting health and preventing disease, in addition to providing care and treatment for those who need it. There is a continued development of acute hospital services to allow them to develop the role of providing specialised care. There are further shifts from institutional care to care at home or in the community, paralleled by a strengthening of the role of primary care. There is also improved targeting of health and social need to ensure that the most disadvantaged people in the community receive an adequate share of services. Changes in acute hospital services must be viewed in the context of improving the community's health and wellbeing alongside changes in other services, with the overall objective of making better use of existing resources.

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh and the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) referred to the six options which have been tested against the board's core values for service provision. The core values are as follows: appropriateness, as services should meet the needs of individuals and the population as a whole; equity, as there should be no administrative, social or geographical barrier to services and there should be a fair share of the services available to the whole population in accordance with need; accessibility, because as far as possible services should be available locally, as the hon. Gentleman stressed; acceptability, as services should satisfy the reasonable expectations of the population; efficiency, as services should use resources to their best effect; and lastly, effectiveness, as services should achieve the intended benefit.

The board's options reflect the Department's strategy for the provision of acute hospital services, which has two main elements: the concentration of specialised services on a smaller number of sites, using markedly fewer beds overall, accompanied where necessary by supporting services locally; and a substantial shift from in-patient to day and out-patient investigation and treatment. The strategy's aims reflect the public demand for increasingly sophisticated and technically advanced services which lead to more effective treatment, shorter stays in hospital and, more importantly, better results for patients.

I have often said in the Chamber, and repeated during the 16 months that I was Minister responsible for health in Northern Ireland, that the health service in Northern Ireland should be to treat patients and that the social services in Northern Ireland should treat the clients as well as possible. We are not a furniture warehouse, or a job protection scheme, but we must consider the available facilities to make sure that there are sufficient beds for the necessary operations and sufficient people to provide that care.

Mr. Trimble: In his latter comments the Minister set out the criteria that the board has set for itself. He seemed to be concentrating more in its application concerning acute services. Does he appreciate that one has to give more weight to certain considerations when dealing with different aspects of medicine, and that in providing continuing care for the elderly particular emphasis should be placed on accessibility? The carers are usually also elderly and not particularly mobile; consequently, there is a greater need for local provision. That adds weight to the argument of the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh about Mullinure and other hospitals which are providing continuing care for the elderly.

Mr. Hanley: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. However, Northern Ireland is better suited than almost anywhere else in the United Kingdom to providing the right care, as we have health and social services boards which combine two aspects of provision within one area of responsibility. The boards are therefore able to plan both the acute services and the social services for the area: instead of what has happened in the past in other parts of the United Kingdom where the service has not always been matched, in Northern Ireland we can plan for the right balance.

Turning to the strategies for elderly people, the options to which the hon. Gentleman referred also reflect the Department's strategy for services for elderly people, which aim to increase the proportion of people aged 75 and over who are cared for in their own homes to 88 per cent. by 1997. It is a well established fact that the vast majority of elderly people prefer to be cared for in their own homes. Of course, people should not be cared for in their own homes if they are not suited to or do not want to be cared for in their own homes, but the basic principle that the vast majority want that, and that it is the best treatment for them, underpins the Government's community care policy.

The three major principles of that within the document "People First" were, first, to help elderly and other vulnerable people to lead as far as possible full and independent lives; secondly, to respond flexibly and sensibly to the needs and wishes of invidual people and the relatives and friends who care for them; thirdly, to concentrate professional skills and public resources on those who need them most.

I repeat what I said at the beginning of my speech. We are in a consultation exercise: absolutely nothing has been decided yet. General direction has been given because of the needs of people in Northern Ireland and the best use of resources. The hon. Gentleman said in an aside, "If it's not broke, don't fix it," but life does not stand still, and that also applies to medical treatment. If there are new ways of treating people better, if people can stay in hospital a shorter time, and if elderly people can be treated in their own homes in the way that they want, we should aim for that. We should be treating people as flexibly, professionally and in as modern a way as possible, making the best use of resources.

I stress again, as I often have, that any money saved by the process, if there are savings to be made, will go straight back into patient care; it is not a cost-cutting exercise. Hon. Members may treat that comment cynically, but it is an honest pledge that we shall put any money saved by these exercises into improved patient care in the areas where the money is saved.

I am grateful that the hon. Gentleman has raised the subject today. I hope that I have helped to stimulate more responses to the document than might have been forthcoming otherwise, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will continue to make contributions to this particular procedure, and that ultimately we shall be able to serve the people of Northern Ireland better than in the past.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 24 February 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT

Contaminated Land Register

2. **Mr. Hawksley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the setting up of a contaminated land register.

The Minister for the Environment and Countryside (Mr. David Maclean): I want to end the uncertainty as soon as possible. I intend to make a statement shortly on our proposals for registers of land that may be contaminated.

Mr. Hawksley: May I thank my hon. Friend for his answer? It is disappointing that he has not been able to give us a statement today. However, I thank him for the way in which he received courteously the all-party delegation of black country Members who made representations for the register to be abandoned. May I make my hon. Friend aware that the banks, especially in the west midlands, which is an area covered by contaminated land that would all be on the register if it were set up, are now starting to tell people that they will reduce the value of their security if action is not taken quickly to get rid of the threat of a register? Will my hon. Friend come quickly to the House to make a statement?

Mr. Maclean: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. I was grateful to him, to other hon. Members from all parties who attended and to other all-party delegations that came to see me to make this point. As my hon. Friend is aware from our discussions, this is a complex matter. There are some fundamental flaws in the present proposals, but finding the right solution, which will not cause unnecessary blight, which will allow sensible development to take place, which will ensure that actively contaminated land is cleaned up and which will ensure that all people who have the right to know get to know, is not easy.

I am conscious of the need to act rather quickly and I hope that not too long a time will elapse before we can announce our firm proposals. I am absolutely convinced of one thing: I must get it right rather than give a rushed and speedy response.

Mr. Chris Smith: Is it not clear, however, that on the issue of contaminated land, the Government are trying desperately to scrabble out of a mess of their own making? Is it not the case that at present, the Government's proposals provide no incentive for the decontamination and treatment of land that is contaminated? Any register, any system and any amendments to the planning system that the Government produce must provide precisely such an incentive.

Mr. Maclean: It is unfortunate that the hon. Gentleman has his facts slightly wrong on this important issue. Incentives are available for cleaning up contaminated land. Although the Government make generous funds available, it is a tripartite exercise. We need funds from the Government, we need the response of the local authority and, of prime importance, we need the money from private enterprise, from the banks and from the building societies.

We shall shortly bring forward proposals on how we see the way ahead. We have done the correct and honourable thing. We brought forward proposals for consultation and the consultation process has revealed some flaws in the proposals. We intend to ensure that when we bring forward our final proposals, we have taken on board all the views we have heard from all sides—I stress all sides—so that we can have proper industrial development and the regeneration of city areas that much need it.

Mr. Pickles: Does my hon. Friend accept that although there are plenty of inducements for taking care of contaminated land, there is a danger that the proposals as currently drafted might prevent that land from being used? Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be a great shame if the proposals caused areas within our inner cities to be abandoned? Does he accept that quite a lot of work has been done on getting rid of contaminated land? Will he give a commitment that when the register comes, it will be used as an incentive in terms of recognising that good work can be done and that land can be brought back into commercial use for people in inner cities?

Mr. Maclean: One of the most instructive visits that I have made recently was to the black country. There I was shown areas of land that had been cleaned up and were now perfectly suitable for their current use. District councils there gave me the message loud and clear that the present proposals would involve the danger of causing unnecessary blight. All hon. Members agree that we must deal with land that is a problem and which needs cleaning up and not just compile blacklists of land that might possibly have been contaminated some time since the Romans arrived. That is what I am addressing my mind to, and I am looking at the liability question. I want the land in our cities to be used. I do not want 600,000 acres of contaminated or potentially derelict land left idle and the countryside used instead.

Mr. Simon Hughes: If the Government are to make a U-turn and scrap section 143 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, will the Minister at least give us two assurances? The first is that there will be a requirement that contamination be cleared before planning permission is given. The second is that every portion of land is given a statement on its contamination level before it is developed.

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Gentleman is trying to jump too many hurdles at once—he is trying to look too far ahead. As I have said, I hope to make a statement shortly on how we see progress on this matter. My aims are simple and straightforward: to ensure that those interested in knowing the state of the land have their rights protected—the right to know is terribly important; and actively to encourage the use and cleaning up of contaminated land —cleaned up not to some absolute standard but so as to be fit and suitable for the purpose for which it is intended.

Mr. Ashby: If a builder has spent millions of pounds decontaminating land and has built houses there, he should not then be faced with a solicitor telling him that a potential purchaser will not buy a property there because the land is on the register of contaminated land. That must not be allowed to prevail. There must be a system for taking land off the register once it has reached a standard of decontamination that is considered correct.

Mr. Maclean: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This is one of the fundamental problems with the earlier statute. Once land has appeared on any published register, no matter how much it has been cleaned up it cannot come off the register. That is unacceptable. Opposition Members have also made the point to me that this is a problem which we should not put up with.

We are giving our attention to this problem and I want to look at every possible measure to get around it.

Urban Programme

3. **Ms. Corston:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a further statement on the effects of the abolition of the urban programme on his inner city strategy.

9. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a further statement on the effects of the abolition of the urban programme on his inner city strategy.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Michael Howard): The urban programme has not been abolished. We have made available £176 million for the urban programme in 1993-94, which will enable us to honour in full all existing commitments and provide £20 million for urban partnership fund projects as part of the new capital partnership programme. Planned resources for my Department's urban group of programmes for 1993-94 will increase by over £90 million, taking total spending to over £1 billion.

Ms. Corston: Is the Secretary of State aware that the effect of the cuts in the Bristol urban programme means that Bristol, which receives £1·7 million this year will receive £1 million next year, £500,000 the year after that, and after that, nothing? The cuts mean that jobs will be lost in areas such as Barton Hill in my constituency, where male unemployment is 43 per cent. They could also mean a threat to projects such as the provision of hostels for homeless women—and this in a city which, after London, has the highest number of homeless people.

What excuses will the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities offer when he goes to Bristol on Friday to explain why Bristol is to be treated in such a shabby fashion? What excuses does he have for the failure of his inner city policy?

Mr. Howard: When my hon. Friend goes to Bristol on Friday he will seek to ensure that the thoroughly misleading impression given by the hon. Lady is corrected. He will tell the people of Bristol about the £500,000 that will be made available to them through the urban partnership fund next year. He will tell them about the £9·3 million to be made available to Bristol development corporation next year. He will express the hope that the hon. Lady and her party will at last support the activities of that corporation. He will tell the people of Bristol that the 57 urban priority areas are expected to be able to spend between them £0·5 billion in capital receipts in the current year, and what tremendous opportunities there are if only their local authorities were prepared to play their full part in taking advantage of them.

Mr. Grocott: First, perhaps the Secretary of State will apologise to the House and to me for not following the normal parliamentary courtesy of letting us know when questions are linked. Will he get off his high horse and apologise?

Secondly, does the right hon. and learned Gentleman acknowledge that the loss of urban funding is a bitter blow to us in The Wrekin because many of our schemes, such as home security and street lighting schemes, were designed to deal with vandalism and crime problems? Is it not a pretty absurd Government who have the Home Secretary telling us one day that law and order is a crucial issue when, the next day, the Secretary of State for the Environment instructs splendid local authorities, such as The Wrekin, to cut essential crime prevention measures?

Mr. Howard: The Wrekin will benefit from the urban programme to the extent of nearly £1 million this year and more than £500,000 next year. So far as crime is concerned, my Department will make available £130 million in the current year from estate action, crime prevention and security measures, and more than £23 million from our urban block of programmes on crime prevention. In all, 31 city challenge area partnerships have been formed with existing agencies to tackle crime in co-ordination with other urban regeneration measures. We are taking extremely seriously our responsibilities on measures to tackle crime effectively in inner cities.

Mr. Ward: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that as Opposition Members seem to know so little and are so unappreciative of what is being done to help the inner cities, the money would be well diverted to authorities that would put it to good and proper use?

Mr. Howard: I understand the feelings that make my hon. Friend say that, but at least Conservative Members recognise our responsibility to the people who live in the inner cities and we are determined to discharge those responsibilities, despite the misinformation and lack of co-operation from the Labour party.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that his inner city strategy depends in part for its success on efficiency and honesty in local government? Lambeth, Liverpool, Sheffield and Hackney—that roll of dishonour is a cause of great shame to this country. Do we not need a wide-ranging inquiry into local government corruption?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend makes a telling point. In the light of his remarks it is hardly surprising that the Labour party do not even dare to hold their local government conference this year. It has been cancelled.

Mr. Vaz: For the Secretary of State's information, we have just had the local government conference. Why does not the Secretary of State have the courage to admit that his inner city policy is in a state of utter chaos? Will he assure the House that if the 57 urban programme authorities fail to raise the £500 million which he says that they will raise—and which the Chancellor told me that they would raise—the Government will be prepared to make up that shortfall for the local authorities concerned? Does he not understand that continual cutting of urban aid will lead to greater social deprivation and the destruction of local communities and will further increase the already high level of crime in our inner cities? What is he going to do about that?

Mr. Howard: Of course, I shall not give the hon. Gentleman the absurd assurance that he requests. If the Government automatically underwrite any shortfall, what incentive will local authorities have to make use of their ability to spend their capital receipts? What the hon. Gentleman and his party must understand is that local authorities have an important part to play and important responsibilities to discharge. We are making available to them the means to discharge those responsibilities. I hope that local authorities will take full advantage of those opportunities.

Mr. Streeter: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the £1·8 million recently granted to the city of Plymouth under the urban partnership fund is extremely welcome? The money will be used by the local authority, in partnership with the private sector, to breathe new life into inner city districts. Is my right hon. and learned Friend further aware that that is exactly the sort of development to which his policy is leading?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is entirely right. When I visited Plymouth a few weeks ago I was delighted to see for myself the tremendous progress being made there and the potential that exists for further progress. I congratulate my hon. Friend and all those in Plymouth who are co-operating with the Government to make the most of the opportunities that are undoubtedly being made available to them.

Citizens Charter

4. **Mr. Pope:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the progress local authorities are making to meet the service standards objectives set down in the citizens charter.

Mr. Howard: Large numbers of local authorities are now publishing local charters based on the citizens charter's principles of good public service and responsiveness to public needs. Those, together with the chartermark scheme and the Audit Commission's work on local government performance indicators, will greatly help improve quality in the delivery of local services. I shall be writing to the leader of every council very shortly with details of this year's chartermark scheme inviting them to apply.

Mr. Pope: Does the Secretary of State agree that there is little point in issuing citizens charters when local authorities simply do not have the resources to implement them? Is he aware that, even in Tory-controlled authorities such as Ealing, cuts are now biting into core services such as day nurseries, play group, and mobile library services? Even mental health day centres are threatened with closure in Tory-controlled Ealing. What use is the citizens charter to such services?

Mr. Howard: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. The citizens charter is about making public services more efficient and more responsive to the public within existing resources. I fear that it is typical of the hon. Gentleman and his party that they think that the only way to improve services is to spend more money. They do not have faith in local government and do not believe that it is possible for local authorities to improve their efficiency within existing resources—we do.

Sir Anthony Durant: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that many local authorities—many of them Labour controlled—do not provide custodial places for young people? They provide places from which the young people can easily get out and reoffend, but they do have the powers to provide custodial sentences.

Mr. Howard: I agree with my hon. Friend. Our hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health made that point to devastating effect during Question Time yesterday when he spoke of the enormous gulf between the words of the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman on law and order, the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), and the actions of Labour-controlled local authorities.

Local Government Finance

5. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the proportion of local government spending in Greater London provided by central Government in the current year; and what was the figure in 1979-80.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robin Squire): The proportion of estimated local government expenditure in Greater London financed by central Government grant in 1992-93 is 68 per cent., and a further 21 per cent. is financed from redistributed business rates. The earliest year for which broadly comparable figures are available is 1981-82, when central Government met 44 per cent. of local government expenditure.

Mr. Corbyn: Does the Minister accept that London has a number of serious problems that are not sufficiently met by central Government funding? Some 62 per cent. of Britain's homeless people live in London, there are high and rising levels of unemployment in inner city areas and the administration of local services in London is more expensive than in the rest of the country. In addition, London has a capitalwide concessionary fares scheme to enable pensioners to travel free around the city. All those factors are extremely expensive. Will the Minister explain why he did not accept the proposals of the Association of London Authorities and the London Boroughs Association for adequate funding of London's local authority services and has instead encouraged the massive cuts presently taking place?

Mr. Squire: I think that my answer exploded in the hon. Gentleman's face because it demonstrated, first, that in the past 10 years London has done very well out of grant distribution. That is not only my opinion because the list of authorities that receive grant show that the authority that he represents, Islington, has the fifth highest amount of support per head of population of all authorities. The problem is not grant; it is that Islington and one or two other councils do not collect money in the first place. Islington's latest figures for the nine months to 31 December show that only two authorities are worse. If the figures were improved, that is where such authorities would get more money for funding.

Dame Angela Rumbold: In view of my hon. Friend's figures about the funding for London and the fact that transitional relief in London will be relatively high, does my hon. Friend agree that Londoners, and especially my constituents in Labour-controlled Merton, should be able to expect adequate services and relatively low council tax bills in the coming year?

Mr. Squire: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. The system that we are introducing in April in co-operation with local authorities, which have been very helpful, will ensure that in London, as in the rest of the country, people will not face excessively high bills. I am sure that the transitional relief scheme will be welcomed in my right hon. Friend's constituency.

Area Cost Adjustment

6. **Mr. Nigel Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when his review of area cost adjustment will be complete; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. John Redwood): We have begun the review. We aim to complete it before the end of the year. It will be discussed during the debate on the general settlement.

Mr. Jones: I thank the Minister for that reply, which is partially helpful. Is he aware that there is widespread concern in historically low-spending areas that the workings of area cost adjustment combined with the inaccuracies of standard spending assessments are leading to severe cuts in services? For instance, did he see the chief constable of Gloucestershire on BBC "Newsnight" on Monday who said that he had to keep 40 officer posts vacant so as to meet this year's spending round? That shows that the Department's spending limit does not match the establishment required by the Home Office. What has the Minister to say to Conservative councillors in Gloucestershire who two weeks ago decided to set a budget—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. This is a good opportunity to inform the House that I want brisk questions and equally brisk answers.

Mr. Redwood: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman thinks that my answer was partially helpful. I think that it was much more than partially helpful; it was very helpful. The hon. Gentleman should make his representations at the time on the issue that worries him. I say to Gloucestershire, "Go and look at Hampshire." It is setting the lowest council tax of the shire counties so far, recruiting more than 700 additional staff for the new responsibilities and showing that if affairs are well run it is possible to operate within the money available and do a good job for local citizens.

Madam Speaker: I call Mr. Spencer Batiste to set an example.

Mr. Batiste: When my hon. Friend considers the mythology—*[Interruption]*—methodology of the standard spending assessments to what extent will he consider it appropriate to include in the criteria the performance of local authorities compared with the standards being set under the various criteria established by the citizens charter?

Mr. Redwood: That is a very interesting idea and I think that my hon. Friend's slip was quite deliberate. I reassure him that I am no student of myths, but I have had to peregrinate the ways of the standard spending assessments in order to do this job. I agree that we want accountable, good quality local services from accountable, good quality councils and I shall take my hon. Friend's idea on board when we conduct our review.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: Does the Minister accept that some of the questions about local government service depend to a large degree on a level playing field? Does he agree that the area cost adjustment was introduced to get the Government off the hook on which they put themselves with the poll tax and their supporters in the home counties? It is a deliberate distortion of the basis of local government finance and the Minister should take the opportunity to put it right.

Mr. Redwood: I should like to know whether it is official Labour policy to take away the area cost adjustment. Do Labour Members want to take all that money from inner London? If so, let them tell the House and tell me, and we shall regard it as a representation for this review.

Council Tax

7. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authorities have so far set their council tax for 1993-94; at what average level; what is his current estimate of arrears of unpaid community tax; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Press reports of 193 local authorities have been monitored by the Department of the Environment. So far, the average headline tax per dwelling of those authorities before transitional relief and benefit is £450. That compares with an average community charge per household in the current year of £486 before transitional relief and benefit. The Government estimate that at the end of December 1992 authorities were owed £1,400 million of community charge relating to the period from 1990. I hope that they will make due speed in collecting it because that will be good news for their taxpayers and for the services that they provide.

Mr. Greenway: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the level of uncollected community charge is roughly equal to the level of rates that were not collected and that this is particularly true in the borough of Ealing, where people fear the Labour party in local government? Will he tell that to the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth)? The Labour party had better learn its history: it imposed a 65 per cent. rate increase in a single year upon the good people of Ealing and set up a disgraceful administration from which we are still trying to recover. Labour cannot and has never been able to run local government efficiently.

Mr. Redwood: It is certainly true that it is the Labour authorities which are bad at collecting money. Some of them have had to think about job losses and reduced services because they are not collecting the money that they are owed. That is the money which we need for local services.

Mr. Straw: Will the Minister confirm that the figures that he gave of average levels of council tax imply a level of band D across the country of about £550? Will he also confirm that that is £125 above the predictions made by the previous Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), before the election, even allowing for inflation, since he predicted the figure of £400? Contrary to the constant assertions of the Secretary of State, were not these pre-election predictions? Will he confirm that the former Secretary of State said that the figures in the tables represented bills once the council tax had been put in place and that the only qualification given was that the council tax bills this year would be lower than in those predictions? Why is it that, thanks to the incompetence and parsimony of the Government, council tax bills will be at least £125 higher than the Government predicted before the election?

Mr. Redwood: The Government have never made forecasts of the level of council tax for the year of introduction. I have made no forecast and my right hon. and learned Friend has made none. We have always said that we would keep the House informed when councils set their levels of tax and that is what I have done today. The hon. Gentleman does not like it, because it is coming in much lower than he expected. That is good news for people round the country and good news for local government.

Mr. Sumberg: As the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) recently executed a neat U-turn when he told *Tribune* that the underlying principle of the council tax was about right, will my hon. Friend agree that any Labour local authority that cannot set a reasonable level of council tax cannot knock the system and has only itself to blame?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is right. From the figures that we have seen so far, it is noticeable that the highest taxes are set by Labour authorities and the lowest by Conservative, even though Labour councils get far more grant on average than do Conservative councils. Of the county councils, Hampshire is the lowest at £328 and Lancashire, which is Labour controlled, is the highest at £472. Of the shire districts, Derwentside is £212 and Wellingborough, which is Conservative, is minus £174, because it is so good at budgeting, selling assets and controlling costs that it is putting money back into local taxpayers' pockets.

Mr. Skinner: While we are on the subject of paying back taxes and poll tax in particular, why does not the Minister send a message to Her Majesty the Queen reminding her that she never paid any poll tax and asking for it retrospectively? He can add a PS and ask for the 40 years' back payment of income tax that she has never paid either.

Mr. Redwood: As the hon. Gentleman well knows, the House decided that Her Majesty would have no liability for that tax, but she has offered to pay the council tax. I am sure that that will be paid in due time in the way the hon. Gentleman expects.

Mr. Butcher: Does my hon. Friend agree that one possible reason for future variations in council tax will be the major variations in staffing and manning levels and the efficiency of local authorities? There is a grave suspicion that some local authorities are seriously overmanned, while operating identical services to others which are not. May we have clear management information on which people can make judgments on, for example, the number of employees per thousand of population, so that people may be better informed about the efficiency of their councils?

Mr. Redwood: Much of this information is available in local areas and it is a proper matter for local debate in council chambers. I am sure that Conservative councillors in opposition will make clear how inefficient the worst Labour councils are and how much money is being wasted. It will cost about £100 per household more next year to live under a Labour council than under a Conservative one. I am sure that the electorate will take note and do the obvious thing.

Standard Spending Assessment

8. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the standard spending assessment for the city of York.

Mr. Robin Squire: The standard spending assessment for the city of York for 1993-94 is £11·066 million. This represents an increase of 2·1 per cent. on the comparable figure for 1992-93, which is close to the average for all shire districts.

Mr. Bayley: Does the Minister accept that the increase in SSA for York is based on the increase in population, which the census revealed, of 2·1 per cent., leaving 0 per cent.—not even the rate of inflation—for services? Does he accept that if York city council even spent up to the capping limit, it would have to cut its services by £1·9 million? District councils as well as councils in metropolitan areas are being knocked for six by spending cuts, in total defiance of what the Government said in their election manifesto——

Madam Speaker: Order. I have already appealed for brisk questions and brisk answers. I find it very disappointing when my pleas, in order to be helpful to hon. Members, are ignored in this way. Will the hon. Gentleman please put his point directly now?

Mr. Bayley: How does the Minister justify such cuts to my city council?

Mr. Squire: I have already explained that the increase for York council was roughly the same as the average for shire district councils. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman welcomes the fact that the assessment reflects the current population and thus ensures that the council gets more money. Let me be clear. York's expenditure in the current year is some £16·2 million, which is £5·4 million more than the SSA—in other words, it is using reserves. In contrast, last year—1990-91—expenditure was £1·3 million less than the SSA. The hon. Gentleman must look closely to the council to behave more responsibly.

All Ages Social Index

10. **Mr. John Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will pay an official visit to St. Helens metropolitan borough council to discuss the all ages social index.

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. and learned Friend has no immediate plans to visit St. Helens. However, we are aware of, and have carefully considered, all the concerns of St. Helens about the revenue support grant settlement for 1993-94. As the hon. Gentleman knows, I met a delegation from St. Helens on 7 January when these were discussed.

Mr. Evans: Is the Minister aware that most people would condemn the refusal of the Secretary of State to come to St. Helens, probably because he would have difficulty explaining to St. Helens councillors why authorities such as Kensington, Chelsea, Richmond upon Thames and Westminster are more impoverished than St. Helens? Is not it time that the Government accepted that as long as unemployment, particularly long-term employment, is excluded from the register, most fair-minded people will continue to regard the social index as corrupt?

Mr. Squire: I am sorry to hear those comments from the hon. Gentleman. I am particularly sorry that he chose not to mention the London Labour authorities occupying higher positions in the league than those Conservative councils that he mentioned. The truth is that the SSA is applied nationally, as he knows. He is entitled to suggest that a particular element, or more than one element, should be treated differently and we shall be looking at that. In particular, we have made it clear that because of the significant changes that will occur in 1994-95 following the 1991 census figures, we will have a close look at the structure of SSA including unemployment. However, the hon. Gentleman must specify the elements that he would seek to delete in addition to that; otherwise he will simply be reducing grants for mainly Labour areas.

Local Government (Corruption)

11. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent steps he has taken to eradicate fraud and corruption in local authorities.

Mr. Redwood: Prevention of fraud is the responsibility of individual local authorities and a matter for the auditor and, where the system has failed, for the police. The Government have duties and powers to enforce proper procedures for compulsory competitive tendering and my right hon. and learned Friend will not hesitate to use those powers where necessary.

Mr. Bellingham: Why is it that, with one or two exceptions, the overwhelming majority of fraud and corruption in local government is taking place in Labour councils? *[Interruption.]* The Opposition do not like it because I have touched a raw nerve. Does the Minister of State agree that if Labour councillors carry on like this, many of them will lose their seats at the next local elections?

Mr. Redwood: It is certainly true that there is financial difficulty in many Labour authorities and financial difficulty and looseness can lead to worse things. If that occurs, it is important that it is thoroughly investigated and stamped out and, as my hon. Friend said, it is in the interests of the Opposition to make sure that that happens.

Ms. Hoey: Will the Minister condemn the extraordinary antics in Lambeth council last night when Conservative councillors worked with Labour councillors who had been expelled and who are no longer Labour councillors to reject a motion that would have dissolved the direct services organisation? Why are Conservative councillors in Lambeth so complacent about the huge financial irregularities that have been found there? Did the Conservative councillors who voted last night do so on his instructions, or are they out of step with the party line?

Mr. Redwood: Everyone knows that Labour is in control, or is trying to be in control, of Lambeth. That is just a red herring. Of course, Conservative councillors in Lambeth are not under my instructions—I trust that there is free democratic debate in that council—and they do not come to Ministers for any idea of what they should be doing.

Mr. Bowis: Is not it a corrupt practice for elected councillors to set a community charge and then not pay it themselves? Does my hon. Friend agree that one reason for the great sense of outrage in the London borough of Lambeth is that councillors have done precisely that—and none of those councillors is Conservative? Is not it about time that a law was brought before the House to establish that any such non-payment is attached to the over-inflated expenses earnings of those same councillors?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is quite right. It is a scandal if councillors owe money to their council, collect their expenses and then say that they will not pay on principle, just as it was a scandal when some Opposition Members did not think that they should pay those charges. I am glad that that period is passing into our history books and I trust that they will all be paying their council taxes.

Mr. Straw: Will the Minister confirm that in an answer to the hon. Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham) he said that reported fraud in 1991-92 in all 400 local authorities amounted to just £3·5 million? Is he aware that that represents one sixtieth of the £230 million of fraud and serious mismanagement reported in central Government Departments and quangos such as health authorities, which are packed with Conservative party appointees? Do not those figures show that the unelected, quango state which the Tory party has created is also the unaccountable and corruptible state?

Mr. Redwood: A penny of fraud is a penny too much and the sums that the hon. Gentleman mentioned are large by most people's standards. He may find £3 million very little, but I think that it is a lot of money. Perhaps he should see what £3 million looks like; if it were piled up in the Chamber it would take up quite a lot of room. The problem is that much bigger sums are under suspicion or under investigation. The public wants to know what has gone on in those councils and the sooner the air is cleared the better.

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

13. **Mr. Sweeney:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he will take to ensure that all local authorities apply compulsory competitive tendering with equal rigour.

Mr. Robin Squire: The Government have powers to ensure that competitive tendering is rigorously applied by all local authorities. We have not hesitated to use them where necessary. If my hon. Friends—or Opposition Members—know of cases in which English authorities are failing to fulfil the competition requirements of the legislation, I shall certainly follow them up.

Mr. Sweeney: Does my hon. Friend agree that there is widespread public support for the Government's policy on competitive tendering? Will he confirm that he will take all the necessary steps to ensure that backsliding Labour authorities comply with the Government in introducing it?

Mr. Squire: I fully agree with my hon. Friend's comments on the importance and popularity of CCT; indeed, I understand that its popularity has now spread to the Opposition Front Bench.

My hon. Friend may be interested to know that, last year alone, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State issued 53 notices and 22 directions under the legislation, which in each case represents nearly 50 per cent. of the total issued since the legislation was introduced.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: Does the Minister accept that the policy of compulsory competitive tendering is now in a mess and that it has always depended on private companies paying low wages—lower than those previously paid by local authorities? That is illegal, according to the European Community's acquired rights directive. Will the Minister also comment on reports that the Government may be liable to pay hundreds of millions of pounds in compensation to low-paid workers who have been cheated out of their wages over the past 12 years by the illegal policy of compulsory competitive tendering?

Mr. Squire: I entirely reject the suggestion that the success of CCT is in any way based on poor wages and impoverished terms of employment. It is based on the need to ensure that local services are handled efficiently and effectively, whether they are providedin-house—that is, by local authority employees—or by an external contractor.

Mr. Mans: In the light of my hon. Friend's earlier reply, will he look closely at the activities of Labour-controlled Lancashire county council in relation to competitive tendering? Will he also consider the fact that the council's lack of enthusiasm for competitive tendering—indeed, its resistance to it—is one good reason why it will set such a high council tax in the coming financial year?

Mr. Squire: My hon. Friend makes a fair point; high council taxes—and high community charges—are often linked with inefficiencies in the way in which councils deliver their services. I invite my hon. Friend to forward to me any information that may suggest that Lancashire county council is acting in an anti-competitive manner. I promise that we shall investigate any such information very carefully.

Mr. Henderson: Does the Minister accept that one reason why there is such confusion among local authorities about whether the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations should apply is that, although the Secretary of State announced in the most recent environment Question Time that the directive concerned did not apply to local authorities, the Minister has been telling local authority associations that they may wish to insert in their contracts a clause saying that it does apply to them? Is not it time that not only local authorities but the public knew where they stood and that British workers enjoyed the same rights as workers in every other part of Europe?

Mr. Squire: In his new-found enthusiasm for CCT, the hon. Gentleman has rather overlooked what my right hon. and learned Friend and I have actually said. If he is to support CCT, the hon. Gentleman must take on board the important point that each case must be examined on its merits. There is no question of a blanket inclusion or exclusion. Let me say again that if there is any question of local authorities seeking to apply such measures to each and every transaction, we shall investigate the possibility of anti-competitive behaviour.

Litter

15. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the operation of the litter provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The main measure of the effectiveness of the new litter laws is whether Britain is getting any cleaner. A survey by the Tidy Britain Group, one year after the laws were introduced, showed an average 13 per cent. immprovement in cleanliness.

Mr. Burns: Will my hon. Friend join me in congratulating Chelmsford borough council on the way—both proactive and reactive—in which it is pursuing litter louts througout the borough by appointing litter wardens? Does he agree with Mr. Sadler, the council's director of environmental services, who believes that, provided that the laws are fully enforced and the necessary powers are used to the ultimate extent, a deterrent is created and people are prevented from becoming the litter louts that they might otherwise become?

Mr. Maclean: I admire the way in which my hon. Friend speaks up for Chelmsford with a Basildonesque-type passion. Of course, I congratulate Chelmsford on the excellent way in which it has implemented our litter laws and I call on other local authorities to respond in as positive a fashion. My hon. Friend is right to suggest that the people of this country now have greatly enhanced powers to insist that their councils keep their areas clean. We shall look again to make sure that enough people know about their new rights and are prepared to exercise them.

Mr. Hardy: Is not Britain still the scruffiest, most litter-ridden country in Europe? Whatever the Tidy Britain Group may say, and splendid though its work may be, millions of our fellow citizens are ashamed of the state of our land.

Mr. Maclean: No, I reject that entirely. Even if the hon. Gentleman thinks that some parts of the country are not as tidy as they should be, the way in which he expressed his view will do nothing to encourage the millions of people who are keeping the country clean. We need to give those people more positive encouragement, not denigrate their efforts. I happen to have with me a paper issued by the Tidy Britain Group which gives details of the results of a survey that the group conducted last year in capitals throughout Europe. London came second only to Berne in Switzerland for tidiness and cleanliness. I congratulate Londoners on keeping their city tidy. I hope that they will keep up their efforts, but without becoming too boring.

Mr. Oppenheim: Would not the workings of the Act and, indeed, the lot of refuse collectors be facilitated if councils themselves were to refrain from producing rubbish such as Derbyshire county council's notorious and discredited political newspaper, *Insight*, which finds its way instantaneously into hundreds of thousands of bins all over the county? Would not the county council be best advised to stop wasting hundreds of thousands of pounds on such rubbish and instead spend it on reinstating hundreds of teachers whom they are threatening with redundancy—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The points that I made earlier apply to the entire House.

Mr. Maclean: My hon. Friend is right. It is a pity that the paper to which he referred is being chucked in rubbish bins, as it could be properly recycled. However, I should be worried to use paper recycled from anything published by Derbyshire county council. I can think also of a few Sunday newspapers that would be better recycled than read.

Urban Programme

16. **Dr. Berry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a further statement on the effects of the abolition of the urban programme on his inner city strategy.

Mr. Howard: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Bristol, East (Ms. Corston) earlier today.

Dr. Berry: Would the Secretary of State care to reconsider the reply that he gave to my hon. Friend? Can he confirm that urban programme funding for Bristol has been cut drastically in recent years? Does he accept that the Government's continual changing of policy towards inner city areas poses a problem for local authorities, which, like the one in Bristol, are trying to plan urban regeneration?

Mr. Howard: In deference to your rulings, Madam Speaker, I shall avoid repeating what I said earlier to the hon. Member for Bristol, East. On the question of changing the approach, we think that it is part of our responsibility constantly to look at how resources may be made available and may be made to work most effectively in dealing with the problems that arise in the inner cities. That is why we are determined to get away from the old process whereby money was made available to local authorities as a matter of routine, was taken by them as a matter of routine and was spent by them as a matter of routine—a process that did not produce the results that should have been produced.

Housing Market

17. **Sir Fergus Montgomery:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the effect of the housing market package announced in the Chancellor's autumn statement on the housing market.

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Sir George Young): We now expect housing associations to exceed their original target of 16,000 purchases by well more than 1,000. Sixteen thousand six hundred and sixty six purchases have already been approved and more than 5,700 purchases completed, so nearly 6,000 homeless families have already benefited from this initiative. In addition, cash grants will enable 3,500 housing association and local authority tenants to become home owners, freeing their current homes for homeless families. Taken together with the recent substantial fall in interest rates, this package should certainly have a positive impact on the housing market.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: Does my hon. Friend agree that the £580 million allocated to the Housing Corporation to enable housing associations to buy 17,000 properties must, of necessity, help to get the housing market moving again?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend will be pleased to learn that the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors came to the same conclusion: that the steps that we have taken have helped to restore confidence in the housing market and that, to use its words, the fundamentals for recovery are now in place.

Mr. Raynsford: Does the Minister accept that the properties acquired under the housing market package, although welcome, will not be sufficient to keep pace with the increased number of repossessions since the package was announced in the Chancellor's autumn statement? Does he recognise that a far more energetic housing programme is required if we are to meet the needs of the badly housed and the homeless? When will he accept that local authorities should be able to use their accumulated capital receipts for housing purposes, as he himself argued 10 years ago?

Sir George Young: I regret the hon. Gentleman's rather grudging response to the substantial injection of money into the housing market in the autumn statement, which will enable some 17,000 families within a period of four months to move into decent accommodation. As for repossessions, the hon. Gentleman will know that the recent figures for court orders showed a substantial reduction of about 23 per cent. As interest rates fall, the pressure on home owners will, of course, be reduced substantially.

Sir Michael Neubert: While recognising the beneficial effects of the autumn statement measures on the housing market, may I ask my hon. Friend whether there is any encouraging evidence of increased activity in new house building?

Sir George Young: The reduction in base rates from 15 to 6 per cent. dramatically alters the terms of trade for house purchase. That fact, coupled with the reduction in house prices over the past three years, means that home ownership is now a much more practical and attractive proposition and I am sure that builders will take heart from that.

Mr. Battle: It strikes me that the Minister is having difficulty convincing his colleagues of any movement in the housing market. Will he inform the House how many housing associations have bought only semi-developed sites as opposed to complete homes which, in practice, breaks the Government's instructions for the package and will mean that the number of homes that he boldly claims will be available are not yet built? People in desperate need cannot camp on the footings of speculative sites bought with public money. What has happened to the Government's policy of buying empty repossessed houses?

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman is totally misinformed. The housing market package is aimed at houses which will be occupied by the end of March. There is no question of our buying houses that are half-completed.

Mr. Hendry: Does my hon. Friend agree that, taken together, policies such as having housing associations as managing agents, the rough-sleeping initiative, the flats above shops initiative and the Government's task force for providing new uses for empty properties owned by the Government amount to the most concerted effort ever to tackle homelessness and are a clear demonstration of the Government's determination to tackle the problem?

Sir George Young: I congratulate my hon. Friend on summarising a range of attractive and effective housing policies which are bringing decent homes within the reach of more and more people.

Energy Review

18. **Ms. Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to ensure that the Government's energy review will fulfil the environmental commitments made at Rio de Janeiro last year.

Mr. Maclean: The coal review has been the subject of full consultation between my Department and the Department of Trade and Industry. The hon. Lady must await the forthcoming White Paper, but I can confirm that the Government remain fully committed to meeting the United Kingdom's international environmental obligations.

Ms. Lynne: Can the Minister guarantee that everything in the energy White Paper will meet the commitments made by the Government at the Rio summit?

Mr. Maclean: I thought that I just said so, but let me reaffirm it in different words: whatever energy mix the White Paper might recommend or suggest, the United Kingdom remains fully committed to meeting the international obligations to which we signed up in Rio. We shall meet our targets, whatever the fuel mix.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The convention on climate change is designed to stabilise our CO_2 emissions by the year 2000 to the levels that existed in 1990. Will my hon. Friend confirm that, as coal is almost pure carbon, unless there is a satisfactory review of the amount of coal we burn, it will be impossible for us to meet our international obligations?

Mr. Maclean: No, I do not accept that. I accept that coal is high in carbon. It is also high in sulphur dioxide. Nevertheless, I am confident that we shall be able to meet our international obligations, irrespective of the fuel mix that we decide to use. I admit that our targets will not be easy to reach and that things will be rather tough in the next few years. That is why we must make sure that we get them absolutely right. Some fuel mixes are slightly easier than others from the point of view of meeting targets, but, whatever the mix, we are committed to succeeding.

Ms. Short: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that Britain could do much better in reducing global warming? Will he look at Labour's recently produced policy on energy conservation? At present, the energy generators make money by selling more and more energy. If we encouraged them to sell insulation, we would reduce global warming, create jobs and reduce people's bills. As ours is an entirely good policy, will the Government adopt it?

Mr. Maclean: I assure the hon. Lady that I have looked at it closely. I hope that Labour Members will talk more and more about it because it represents a thoroughly uneconomic policy. The costs that they envisage to bring about the small benefits that they perceive are nonsensical, well thought out and well intentioned though it may have been. We are determined to reduce the wastage of energy in this country, and I believe that there are better economic models to follow than Labour's policy of double glazing for all.

Points of Order

Madam Speaker: It being 3.30, I now close the Ballot for Notices of Motions for Friday 12 March 1993.

3.30 pm

Ms. Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I would be grateful for your advice. Yesterday, the hon. Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) sought the leave of the House to present

> "a Bill to prohibit the use of techniques designed to influence the sex of a foetus at conception; to amend the Abortion Act 1967; and for related purposes".—[*Official Report*, 23 February 1993; Vol. 219, c. 769.]

Such leave, on a Division, the House denied. Today's Order Paper reveals that the hon. Gentleman has placed a Bill behind the Chair precisely the same in its wording, apart from the fact that he has dropped the clause to amend the Abortion Act 1967. Does that not contravene what is said in Erskine May, page 468*(d)*? If so, should not the hon. Gentleman be asked to remove the Bill from behind the Chair and, equally, to apologise for attempting to subvert the will of the House?

Madam Speaker: I am always fascinated by the way that we in this House have something new to learn every day. I admit that the presentation of a Bill so similar to the one which the House refused leave to introduce yesterday caused me great surprise this morning.

I have in consequence satisfied myself that no rule has been broken. Our rules prohibit the presentation of a Bill with the identical long title to one already refused leave and the presentation of a Bill which contains substantially the same provisions as one defeated on Second Reading.

Since neither of those considerations applies, the hon. Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) is within his rights in presenting the revised Bill. Naturally, I make no comment on whether his doing so is likely to serve any useful legislative purpose.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. While the Secretary of State for the Environment is still in his place, may I seek your guidance, and perhaps protection, for hon. Members?

You may have noticed that during Question Time, without any notice to me or any other hon. Member, question 3 was linked with question 9, which meant that my question, No. 9, was answered virtually at the start of Question Time instead of at about 3 o'clock, when one would have expected it to be answered.

I appreciate that humility is foreign to the nature of the Secretary of State and that he failed to apologise to the House for imposing the poll tax. May we ask him to give a simple apology, which is all I request, and an undertaking that in future hon. Members will be protected and will be told clearly when questions are to be linked?

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Michael Howard): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for not giving him notice that I proposed to link the two questions. Fortunately, as he was in his place, he does not appear to have suffered any detriment—but I give him the apology for which he has asked.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You have just commented on the practice of introducing behind the Chair a Bill similar in form to one that has been defeated as a ten-minute Bill.

Will you consider the way in which private Members' Bills have been introduced during this Session? One or two hon. Members appear to be trying to take advantage of the proceedings of the House to gain publicity for their Bills without being prepared to accept the consequences of a vote in the House. I suggest that, if an hon. Member presents a Bill under the ten-minute rule and leave is refused, it is illogical for the House to agree to the costs of printing, publishing and, in some cases, distributing many copies of that Bill. If that is not an absolute breach of the rules, it appears to come very close to misuse. I suggest to you that it may be helpful for the Procedure Committee to consider the issue.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has hit the nail on the head with his final comment. The matter is indeed within the terms of reference of the Procedure Committee.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I am astounded that the President of the Board of Trade is not here, and I wonder whether you can assist me. In reply to a question of mine, the President of the Board of Trade informed me in the House that Grimethorpe and Houghton pits were loss makers, yet from the Boyds report published this morning I gather that that is not the case. Has the President of the Board of Trade written to you asking to apologise to the House for the misinformation, and to announce that Grimethorpe will be reopened immediately?

Madam Speaker: I have had no indication that any Minister seeks to make a statement today.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. This concerns the decision already made on the action of the hon. Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess). In introducing his Bill yesterday the hon. Gentleman asked that leave be given

> "to bring in a Bill to prohibit the use of techniques designed to influence the sex of a foetus at conception".

He said that that was the sole intention of his Bill, yet today he has introduced another Bill prohibiting

> "the use of techniques designed to influence the sex of a foetus at conception; and for related purposes."

That seems to be pretty much the self-same Bill.

"Erskine May" says on pages 468 to 469 that a Bill should not be proceeded with

> "if it contains substantially the same provisions".

I know that you have already considered the matter, Madam Speaker, but those of us who have examined the Bill and listened to yesterday's debate, and noticed the title of today's Bill, are drawn to the conclusion that the hon. Member for Basildon, having been defeated yesterday, is trying to introduce a similar Bill through the back door.

Madam Speaker: I have already given my ruling on the issue. I am well aware of pages 468 to 469 of "Erskine May". There has been a change of title and a reference to the Abortion Act has been omitted. It is perfectly in order to present such a Bill today. We must now proceed.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Is it in order for the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) to challenge your ruling?

Madam Speaker: It is perfectly in order for any Member to challenge my ruling. I simply stand by my ruling and we are moving on.

BALLOT FOR NOTICES OF MOTIONS FOR FRIDAY 12 MARCH

Members successful in the ballot were:

Dr. Lynne Jones
Mr. David Lidington
Mr. David Evennett

BILLS PRESENTED

DRUGS ENFORCEMENT

Mr. David Porter, supported by Mr. Simon Burns, presented a Bill to establish a National Drugs Enforcement Agency; to increase awareness of preventative education and counselling in countering misuse of drugs; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 26 March, and to be printed. [Bill 143.]

HUMAN FERTILISATION (CHOICE)

Mr. David Amess, supported by Mr. David Alton, Mr. Michael Ancram, Mrs. Angela Browning, Dame Peggy Fenner, Mr. Harold Elletson, Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman, Lady Olga Maitland, Rev. Martyn Smyth, Dr. Robert Spink, Mrs. Ann Winterton and Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock, presented a Bill to prohibit the use of techniques designed to influence the sex of a foetus at conception; and for related purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 5 March, and to be printed. [Bill 144.]

Energy Conservation

3.39 pm

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require all district and borough councils in the United Kingdom to draw up energy conservation plans for their areas; to require that these plans assess the works needed on residential accommodation in order to achieve energy savings of up to thirty per cent.; to require also that these plans assess the number of jobs that such a programme would create, the savings in fuel bills that different types of households might expect and the decrease in emissions of certain gases that would result; to establish a consultation process in the drawing up of these plans; to set up Regional Energy Boards to monitor and advise on the implementation of the plans; to require the Secretary of State to set a date by which all such plans must be sent to him, to draw up and publish a timetable or timetables for the implementation of the plans and to make funds available for the implementation of the plans; to give the Secretary of State power to impose a levy on fuel prices in order to raise the money; to give the Secretary of State a power to direct electricity and gas suppliers to supply certain information to councils to enable them to prioritise certain premises for energy conservation works; and for related purposes.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to introduce my Energy Conservation Bill.

I open my remarks by referring to the crucial need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The need for such reduction to combat the desperately serious problem of climate change is recognised in several of the Government's publications. The Department of the Environment document "Climate Change", published in December, shows that that Department at least takes the problem seriously. The Government are a signatory to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development climate change convention, with its target—it has to be said, a seriously inadequate one—of reducing emissions to the 1990 level by the end of the century.

The achievement of adequate reductions must entail a drastically reduced dependence on electricity generation from fossil fuels and a shift towards renewables, as the report of the renewable energy advisory group to the Department of Trade and Industry so convincingly argues. It must entail a rethinking of our attitudes to transportation, especially road transport. Increasing demand for fuel for road transport is the main reason for the projected increase in carbon dioxide emissions by the year 2000.

However, an essential and painless starting point must be a programme for enhanced energy efficiency, including in homes. It is worth recalling that 26 per cent. of carbon dioxide, 29 per cent. of sulphur dioxide and 14 per cent. of oxide of nitrogen emissions are produced as a result of activity in the domestic sector.

Several Government initiatives, including the home energy efficiency scheme and the greenhouse programme, have been useful moves in the right direction. We now require a far more comprehensive and on-going process. That is what the activation of my Bill's provisions would bring about. The Bill proposes that district and borough councils, acting as energy conservation authorities and in partnership with regional energy boards, would draw up and implement plans for improving energy efficiency in residential properties in their areas by an average of up to 30 per cent.

[Mr. Cynog Dafis]

The energy conservation authorities would be charged with investigating the means by which energy savings of 10, 20 or 30 per cent. might be achieved. They would be required to assess the cost of the measures, the average savings in fuel bills in various types of residence, and the extent of the resulting reductions of CO_2, SO_2 and NOx, as well as the number of jobs created in the implementation of the plan. Councils would be reimbursed by central Government for drawing up the plans and making arrangements for their implementation. The improvements would be funded by a small levy on gas and electricity bills.

The Government's "Helping the Earth Begins at Home" campaign is a useful way of raising public awareness of the threat of global warming. It concentrates in particular on how each of us has responsibility to minimise damage to the environment. One of society's tasks is to create what could be termed a culture of sustainability, radically different from the throwaway culture in which we have all been encouraged, and are still encouraged, to participate.

The extensive consultation process provided for in my Bill and the drawing up and implementation of the plan would help to raise public awareness and create the new culture of sustainability. I have already referred to the contribution that such a programme would make to reducing emissions of those gases which are the main cause of the greenhouse effect. Sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxide also cause acid rain and significant damage to health. Health gains, important in themselves, would also provide savings for health authorities. Those gains would derive not only from reduced pollution, but from reducing or even eliminating cold and damp in many homes, especially those where incomes are low.

Consumers currently waste £1 billion annually on unnecessarily high fuel bills, yet 2·5 million households are still cold and damp. Hypothermia is a disgracefully and unnecessarily common phenomenon in our society. Health gains and the resultant financial savings are difficult to quantify. However, Newark and Sherwood district council, which has conducted a programme of improving energy conservation works on 7,127 buildings, estimates that a 20-year programme of reducing damp and condensation alone would result in savings to the local health services of about £4·4 million.

The levy on the price of fuel envisaged in the Bill would amount to far less than the money saved by consumers as a result of conservation measures. Families would thus have additional spending power, which would generate economic activity and thus create jobs. Far more jobs would be created by employing people to carry out improvements to homes. A study conducted for the Association for the Conservation of Energy, which I am delighted to say gives its backing to the Bill, shows that a 10-year programme with a gross investment of £15·5 billion would generate 500,000 job-years.

That means either 500,000 jobs lasting one year or 50,000 jobs lasting 10 years. That job creation would reduce costs in unemployment benefits and in social security payments, which would in turn create even more jobs. The Bill would thus set in motion a virtuous cycle and would help the nations of Britain to emerge from the recession in—I emphasise these words—an environmentally sustainable way.

There would also be savings in maintenance costs. Newark and Sherwood district council has assessed the benefits of energy conservation work on 7,127 dwellings to it as landlord at £2·2 million. The Energy Efficiency Office found from a recent study of five local authorities and one housing association that landlords could save £100 to £500 per dwelling per year when all management and maintenance costs were taken into account.

We have too often tended to define an improvement in the quality of our lives solely in terms of increasing our consumption of natural resources. The need for environmental sustainability requires that we increasingly search for such improvements either without increasing our consumption of natural resources or, in the case of wealthier countries and the wealthier sectors of society, by decreasing our consumption. That can be achieved only by the application of what the Business Council for Sustainable Development no less describes as eco-efficency.

The Bill provides one example in the crucial area of energy of eco-efficiency at work. An initial capital investment would lead to the reduced consumption of resources on a long-term basis which would provide an enhanced quality of life for all, especially for the less privileged, in the form of greater comfort, better living conditions and better health. It would also create useful employment and reduce the damaging impact of human activity on the fragile environment that sustains us.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Cynog Dafis, Sir Richard Body, Mr. Anthony Coombs, Mr. Clive Soley, Dr. Tony Wright, Mr. Simon Hughes and Mr. Andrew Welsh.

ENERGY CONSERVATION

Mr. Cynog Dafis accordingly presented a Bill to require all district and borough councils in the United Kingdom to draw up energy conservation plans for their areas; to require that these plans assess the works needed on residential accommodation in order to achieve energy savings of up to thirty per cent.; to require also that these plans assess the number of jobs that such a programme would create, the savings in fuel bills that different types of households might expect and the decrease in emissions of certain gases that would result; to establish a consultation process in the drawing up of these plans; to set up Regional Energy Boards to monitor and advise on the implementation of the plans; to require the Secretary of State to set a date by which all such plans must be sent to him, to draw up and publish a timetable or timetables for the implementation of the plans and to make funds available for the implementation of the plans; to give the Secretary of State power to impose a levy on fuel prices in order to raise the money; to give the Secretary of State a power to direct electricity and gas suppliers to supply certain information to councils to enable them to prioritise certain premises for energy conservation works; and for related purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 19 March and to be printed. [Bill 145.]

The Army

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Robert G. Hughes.]*

[Relevant documents: The Third Report from the Defence Committee on Options for Change: Army-Review of the White Paper, Britain's Army for the 90s, Cm. 1595 HC 45 of Session 1991-92, the First Special Report containing the Government's Reply thereto, HC 175 of Session 1992-93, and the Second Report on Britain's Army for the 90s: Commitments and Resources, HC 306 of Session 1992-93.]

Madam Speaker: Before I call the Minister I must point out that I am not minded to put a 10-minute limit on speeches today although a number of hon. Members are seeking to be called. I simply make a plea for short speeches.

3.50 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Archie Hamilton): I welcome this opportunity to debate the Army, which is deployed in many parts of the world, protecting British interests and keeping peace on behalf of the United Nations. I will dwell, if I may, on the two operational commitments of the Army in Northern Ireland and our recent responsibilities in the former Republic of Yugoslavia.

So first to Northern Ireland, our largest and most important continuing peacetime commitment. The Government's highest priority is the protection of the United Kingdom and the lives and liberties of its citizens. In Northern Ireland it is not possible for that day-to-day protection to be provided by the police alone, as in the rest of the United Kingdom. Both my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary regard the assistance of the Army, the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force as essential, so that progress can be made in achieving normality throughout the Province To this end, the armed forces carry out tasks which the RUC requires them to perform, and to which their military skills are best suited. The position is absolutely clear: the armed forces act in support of the RUC, within the law. That is the proper way to deal with terrorist crime in the United Kingdom.

It is of course the continuing vile attacks of terrorists which create the need for the Army to operate in support of the RUC. In the past year, terrorists from both sides of the community have continued to show themselves ready to murder members of the community as they go about their lawful everyday business. Two incidents clearly illustrate the barbarous nature of terrorism in Northern Ireland. In January last year, republican terrorists murdered eight workmen at Teebane in County Tyrone. The following month, so-called "loyalist" terrorists murdered five people at random in a betting shop in Belfast.

Neither side has furthered its political or other aims to the slightest degree by these or other atrocities which it has committed. Nor will the two sides do so by any further terrorist acts. All they achieve is to strengthen the resolve of all civilised people that terrorism will never succeed, while they merely postpone the day when soldiers will no longer be needed to support the police on the streets of Northern Ireland.

At present we have about 19,000 service men and women deployed in Northern Ireland. They include some 250 Royal Navy, and 1,100 Royal Air Force personnel, who make a vital contribution in operations on sea and in the air. But the main bulk of our forces is provided by the Army, with over 17,500 men and women. The core of the Army's strength is 18 major units of battalion size in the infantry role. These comprise six units on accompanied tours of around two years; six units of unaccompanied tours of six months; and six home service battalions of the Royal Irish Regiment which are permanently deployed on operations in Northern Ireland. Force levels in Northern Ireland are kept continually under review in the light of changing circumstances, and will continue to be adjusted as and when appropriate.

A major development in the last year was the formation on 1 July 1992—Somme day—of the Royal Irish Regiment, with the merger of the Royal Irish Rangers and the Ulster Defence Regiment. The merger has been extremely successful, and the new regiment combines the best traditions of its forebears. I am confident that the regiment will continue to go from strength to strength. I remind the House that the home service element of the Royal Irish Regiment has now been on continuous operations in Northern Ireland for nearly 23 years—a unique record in the history of the British Army, and a mark of the bravery and dedication which the men and women of the regiment have repeatedly demonstrated. Soldiers of the regiment continue to face the threat of terrorist attack every day, whether they are on or off duty.

All our soldiers share this threat. In total, six soldiers were murdered in terrorist attacks in Northern Ireland in 1992, and two have been murdered so far in 1993. Three hundred and twenty soldiers were wounded or injured in 1992; the figure for 1993 to date is twenty-six.

Despite the continual risks they face, soldiers in Northern Ireland have continued to go about their duty bravely and resolutely, and with single-minded dedication. Their patience and hard work have led to many successes in the fight against terrorism. Many lives have been saved because the Army's operations in support of the RUC have deterred terrorist attacks.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I am grateful to the Minister for giving way with his characteristic courtesy. What advice is given to the relatives and next of kin of service men and women who are injured or killed in civilian accidents such as road accidents? Are they given any advice about the possibility of taking court action against the people deemed to be guilty of causing such accidents?

Mr. Hamilton: Notifying the next of kin is done through the chain of command. There is a well-oiled machine to deal with it, and everyone accepts that it is done very well. I shall write to the hon. Gentleman about the question of notifying relatives whether they can sue, because I would not want to misinform him about the information that is given to them. It is possible that they are told that they can take action, but I shall have to look into it.

During 1992, 404 people were arrested and charged with terrorist offences, 243 weapons were recovered, and 29,131 rounds of ammunition. The Army's explosive ordnance disposal teams were called out on 1,544 occasions. They neutralised 149 terrorist explosive devices,

[Mr. Hamilton]

containing more than 6 tonnes of explosive. I am pleased to tell the House that our soldiers' valiant efforts do not go unrecognised. In 1992, our service men and women in Northern Ireland received 356 awards for gallantry and meritorious conduct. I know from my own regular visits and briefings just how richly deserved those awards are.

We all know that the task of providing the military support which the police need in Northern Ireland is enormous. It has continued now for more than 23 years. But I can assure the House that the Army and all the armed forces will continue to provide that support until the day when my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Chief Constable no longer need them, and we will make every effort to make that day sooner rather than later.

I should like now to turn to the former Republic of Yugoslavia. As the House knows, we have had a field ambulance unit of 250 personnel deployed since May last year to provide second line medical support to the United Nations protection force in Croatia, and in November last year we provided an armoured infantry battalion group with a brigade headquarters and Royal Engineer and logistic support totalling 2,500 personnel to help with the expansion of UNPROFOR to provide protective support for humanitarian convoys in Bosnia operating under the auspices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, or the International Committee of the Red Cross in the case of released detainees.

During the six months of the United Kingdom's presidency of the European Communities in July to December last year we also provided some 40 Army personnel to fill headquarters and support posts in the EC's monitor mission in the former Yugoslavia. Army personnel have in addition served as United Nations military observers, undertaking a variety of tasks in Croatia, Bosnia and Macedonia.

Men and women in all three services are performing important and worthwhile tasks in, for example, the airlift to Sarajevo and the current operations in the Adriatic. I am glad to have this opportunity to pay tribute to them all. But it is of course the battalion group in Bosnia which has been most often in the news. Often operating in very severe conditions in central and north-east Bosnia, with its main logistics base at Split and its battalion HQ at Vitez, the battalion group and its Warrior, Scimitar and Scorpion vehicles have had the task of escorting humanitarian convoys, taking supplies from the UNHCR warehouse at Metkovic up country to Vitez and thence to a variety of destinations, including Tuzla and Doboj, Travnik and Zenica. More recently, United Kingdom troops have also escorted convoys from Kiseljak to Sarajevo. Since the operation began in November, the battalion has escorted a total of 279 convoys carrying 20,000 tonnes of aid.

But support to the UNHCR's effort has taken other forms, not just the provision of a close escort for the convoys where necessary, although that is done wherever convoys are operating to hitherto closed areas or close to a front line or with a high degree of danger. Support often takes the form of constant patrolling and negotiation to reduce tension and ease the passage of a convoy, and the provision of general patrolling and better communications.

The composition of the battalion group and its support reflects the many different capabilities and skills which the task and its logistic back-up require. In addition to the armoured infantry and armoured reconnaissance capability of the Cheshire Regiment, the Royal Irish Regiment and the 9th-12th Lancers, the Royal Engineers have had a vital role to play in opening up and keeping open the supply routes in mountainous and muddy terrain and in severe weather conditions, as well as providing infrastructure and accommodation. Transport, communications, ordnance and many other specialist personnel have also been involved; and a casualty evacuation capability is provided by four Royal Navy Sea King helicopters. The battalion group will be relieved in May by the Prince of Wales Regiment and units from Germany.

The importance of the task needs no underlining. Hundreds of thousands are being kept alive by the supplies which the international relief effort is getting to a people suffering from the devastating effects of civil conflict. It is a task that is being done in difficult and dangerous conditions, including a shattered infrastructure and the ever-present dangers of the eruption of violence—risks which were brought all too starkly home by the tragic killing of Lance Corporal Edwards on 13 January.

British troops are fulfilling their United Nations mandate to use all possible means to ensure that humanitarian relief reaches those who need it in Bosnia. They are not there to confront the warring fractions. Nor are they there to fight their way through with aid convoys. They are there to provide a military escort to humanitarin aid convoys whose progress has been negotiated with all sides by the United Nations. If negotiations fail, the convoys do not run.

But worthwhile as the humanitarian operation is, it can treat only the symptoms, not the causes of the conflict. We must accept that some of the aid is inevitably feeding those directly involved in the fighting. Indeed, we have reports of warehouses of the combatants stacked to the roof with United Nations food aid. The horrors of ethnic cleansing continue apace—a matter of great concern to our troops who know that they can do nothing to prevent it. We must, therefore, continue to give our full support to the international conference on the former Yugoslavia in its efforts to help the parties reach a lasting political settlement.

It is natural, against the background of the Army's operational deployments in the Balkans and in Northern Ireland, and of its other emergency tour plot commitments to Belize, the Falkland Islands and Cyprus, that our plans for the size of the British Army should once again come under critical examination, but I should like to consider that in the context of our overall defence policy.

We have seen some dramatic changes in the security of western Europe in general and the United Kingdom in particular. The Warsaw pact no longer exists and the Soviet Union has disintegrated. In addition, the rundown of our garrison in Hong Kong further reduces the commitments of the three services, the Army in particular. Our plans parallel those of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation allies and the countries of the former Warsaw pact. Indeed, some of our allies—Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands, for example—are contemplating manpower reductions of the order of 50 per cent. —very much larger than our own.

As the House knows, Britain spends more than the average of our European partners on defence—4 per cent.

of GDP compared with a NATO average of 2·9 per cent. —and there are good reasons for that. We have excellently equipped armed forces who are all volunteers and demonstrate a professionalism in their job which is the envy of the world. We remain a nuclear power, and our possession of the nuclear deterrent ultimately underwrites the security of both Britain and our European partners. Having said that, I do not see any reason why the United Kingdom should bear an ever-increasing proportion of the financial burden when other European and north American allies are reducing their levels of defence spending.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Before the Minister leaves the nuclear issue, will he say a word about nuclear testing? He will have seen a powerful letter to *The Times* signed by General Beach and other distinguished signatories putting a case against it. Some of us find it a matter of shame that we alone should go on with the so-called necessity of nuclear testing. What is the policy?

Mr. Hamilton: As the hon. Gentleman knows, nuclear testing is carried out at the facilities provided by the United States. If it is not prepared to provide us with those facilities, plainly, we cannot nuclear test. We regard it as important for the future and safety of our deterrent that we should be able to continue to test and maintain the deterrent into the future. That has always been our policy.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): It now appears that the United States is demanding far more for our use of that test site. Does the Minister agree that that has considerable implications for our defence estimates? Would it not be far more logical for us to follow the lead given by all the other nuclear powers and give up testing, save the expense, and make sure that the money is used for more conventional forms of defence?

Mr. Hamilton: I would take the hon. Gentleman's intervention rather more seriously if he had not been totally against all forms of nuclear weapons for as long as I have been in the House and probably for as long as he has been here. The Labour party is bitterly divided on the whole issue of whether we should have a nuclear deterrent. I never quite know how the numbers compare between those who would have no nuclear deterrent and those members of the Labour party, many of whom, including the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), who is on the Front Bench, were former members of CND and have now become converts and believe that we should have a nuclear deterrent.

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): It is important to remember that we are discussing nuclear testing. As the Minister knows, the Americans, the French and the Russians have agreed to a moratorium on nuclear testing. A great deal of information suggests that there is no need for testing. Why do not the Government follow the other countries and accede to a ban on nuclear testing, because it is quite clearly not necessary? That is the position of the Labour party, if the Minister wants to know.

Mr. Hamilton: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for clarifying Labour's position. The Government regard testing as necessary. If we did not, we would not go ahead with it. As other nuclear systems are developed we have to be able to test them and we must be able to test improvements in safety, and so on. If that is not done, the viability of the deterrent deteriorates.

The Select Committee on Defence recommended that all future amalgamations of infantry regiments should be cancelled. Unfortunately, the Committee did not put a cost on that. I shall do so. The Committee's plans would cost an extra £200 million per annum. The Select Committee also failed to tell us how such cancellation should be paid for. Would it be by additional defence expenditure, increasing the already high public sector borrowing requirement, or by reducing the other two services? I must tell the Committee that there is no such thing as a free lunch. We shall have to look hard at our existing commitments.

Mr. Winston Churchill (Davyhulme): It is significant that cancellation of all remaining amalgamations and suspensions of regiments would cost only £200 million a year. Redundancies, let alone unemployment benefits that would be drawn by redundant soldiers over the next two years, amount to no less than £350 million in each year.

Mr. Hamilton: Yes, but my hon. Friend wants to restore the front line of the Army. To do that we would need to continue to recruit heavily, because young men are needed. The current restructuring basically takes into account people who have served rather longer. My hon. Friend should not assume that restoring front-line infantry regiments would cause the redundancies to cease. We are talking not merely about numbers but about a career structure for the Army, and that must be taken into account. Redundancies are a one-off cost, but if we abandoned all the amalgamations that are now planned, we would face a cost of £200 million every year for the indefinite future. That is a considerable cost, and the money would have to be found from the defence budget.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): My right hon. Friend will know that my constituency has one of the Army's manning and record offices. It is at South Wigston, but following my right hon. Friend's decision of 13 January, it is to be closed, with a view to all the records being moved to a central personnel centre in Glasgow. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that no firm decision has yet been taken about the location of the office? Can he give any hope to my constituents that Leicestershire will retain its army records office?

Even though the consultation period runs out at the end of the month, is there any chance still of a split site so that the Army manning and records office can be held on two sites linked with computers, as is now possible? As my right hon. Friend will understand, with nearly 200 jobs going in my constituency as a result of this decision, the redundancies will affect not only the military staff but the civilian staff.

Mr. Hamilton: I can certainly tell my hon. Friend that this is a proposal. It is the subject of consultation at the moment. It is not possible to extend the consultation period, but we will look at the possibility of a split site. No decision has been taken on this, and the rumour that we have already agreed to buy Tay house in Glasgow is not right because no decision has been taken. The consultation will continue, and we hope to be able to make a decision after the end of this month, once the consultation period is at an end.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): Before leaving his comments on the Defence Committee's report and his assessment of the comparative costs, one against the other, will the Minister consider that the costs we ought to bear in mind are not simply the financial ones? Some of the units that we have examined during the rundown, since the end of the cold war, have necessitated service men and women spending 260 nights out of bed in any one year. In terms of whole-time equivalence on a five-day week, 260 nights out of bed is a whole year out of bed in working schedules. When we put young people in positions of stress, where reactions can cause death very suddenly, either their own or that of other people, it is not a subject for facetious reaction but a matter of serious concern. We measure costs not only in millions of pounds but in the security of society.

Mr. Hamilton: I do not think it unreasonable that, if the Select Committee asks for some dramatic change in policy, it should put a cost on it; that is all. Change costs money, and the money must come from somewhere. It is not unreasonable to ask the Committee to suggest where it might come from. I totally accept what the hon. Gentleman says, but my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has already recognised that there is stress in the whole business of the emergency tour plot and the pressure that we are putting on our troops. That is one reason why he made his announcement, which I will come to, to add back 3,000 and move another 2,000 from the support area to relieve that problem.

However, the hon. Gentleman will also recognise, because he has been told so in Committee a number of times, that during the amalgamations the emergency tour plot is becoming much shorter than we would want but that once the whole reorganisation has been completed ——

Dr. David Clark: When?

Mr. Hamilton: I am talking about 1995, which does not seem very long. At that stage we would be in a position to get back to the 24 months' emergency tour plot interval. After the announcement that my right hon. and learned Friend made, it will actually be better than 24 months, on the assumption that we have made about the commitments that we are having to undertake at the moment.

We must recognise that we cannot conceivably afford to enter future commitments on every occasion that a military option presents itself. We need to assess the extent to which our national interest is involved, the likely success of taking military action in the circumstances and the availability of our armed forces. We should not assume that, for example, the increase in United Nations peacekeeping operations over the past year implies a commensurate increase in United Kingdom participation in such operations.

New demands have been placed on our armed forces, but let me put them in perspective. It is simply not true that we are reducing the size of the Army without reducing the tasks that we ask it to undertake. The number of Army personnel based in Germany in peacetime is reducing from more than 50,000 to around 23,000. We shall have to withdraw our three-battalion garrison in Berlin by the end of next year, and our four-battalion garrison in Hong Kong by 1997. We can commit significantly less of our infantry resources to direct defence of the United Kingdom. These commitments have gone or are in the process of going. They far outweigh the increases that we have accepted in their place.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): My right hon. Friend mentioned Germany and the reduction of Army manpower by about half. Does he realise that BAOR still constitutes the third biggest single item of budgetary expenditure under the new management strategy of £1·45 billion, and that at a time when the Russians seem likely to withdraw all their forces from the eastern part of Germany from August next year? Therefore, will he review critically our commitment of Army personnel, and Royal Air Force too, to Germany because it is disproportionate, unbalancing our budget and investing in jobs in Germany rather than in jobs in the British defence industry and British personnel at home?

Mr. Hamilton: It is vital that we make a whole-hearted contribution to NATO. Most of the troops in the ace rapid reaction corps are based in Germany and they are our main contribution to NATO. We are extremely keen that the Americans should remain committed to European defence and should keep troops based in Europe. If we were to withdraw our troops from Germany, it would not be a good signal in view of our hope that the United States should stay here and share generally in the defence of Europe. In those circumstances, it is important that we maintain our commitment to NATO.

Nevertheless the Government have always made clear that the size of our forces would be kept under review and there is no doubt that recent increases in the Army's commitments both in Northern Ireland and the former Republic of Yugoslavia, coinciding as they have with a temporary reduction in the availability of major field army units due to amalgamation and drawdown, has served to reduce emergency tour intervals and placed increasing pressure on individual soldiers and their families.

That is why my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State announced on 3 February an increase in the planned strength of the Army in the mid-1990s by 3,000 to 119,000, the redeployment of a further 2,000 personnel, mainly from the support area, to front-line units of the field Army, and the retention of two further infantry battalions above the number previously planned. This represents a small but sensible adjustment to a changing world situation whcih will ensure that the Army has the flexibility and resilience to meet the challenge of the years ahead.

Restructuring is not limited to the Regular Army. In April last year we announced our plans for the future of the Territorial Army, which will continue to play an important role in the Army's structure—not least in support of the rapid reaction corps. The new organisation of the TA is based on smaller units, to provide the basis for future expansion, and upon locations with good recruiting potential. The need to retain the TA as a territorial force, drawing on its links with the local communities for support and understanding, is reflected in the wide territorial spread of units across the United Kingdom.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): Before we leave the Regular Army and battalion strength, and the question of worldwide commitments, can my right hon. Friend tell us what the future holds for the Gurkhas? That is a worthwhile small unit which will be withdrawn from Hong Kong in due course. Currently the Gurkhas are not used in Northern Ireland, although they gave some of my colleagues and myself a very good demonstration recently of how they might play a useful role in Northern Ireland and communicate well with the local community, something which they will be keen to do. Will my right hon. Friend say what future he sees for the Gurkhas, because they are keen to be active rather than to sit in barracks in the south of England?

Mr. Hamilton: I accept what my hon. Friend says. We envisage that the Gurkhas will continue with, I think, a number of about 2,500 on a two-battalion basis, with a training element as well. We envisage them having a future based in this country once they have been removed finally from Hong Kong.

Work is in hand to examine the employment of Army reserves, both TA and individual reservists, in future operations. In particular, we are studying the changes necessary in force structures and in legislation which might permit the participation of reserves in a wider range of operations than hitherto.

Now is not the time or place to comment in detail on the Defence Select Committee's report on these matters. I welcome the Committee's interest, but I should make it clear that, while we shall, of course, continue to keep the long-term strength of the Army under close review in the light of changing circumstances, we have no current plans to make further changes to the Army's force structure. To cancel all amalgamations or disbandments of United Kingdom infantry battalions currently planned, as recommended by the Committee, would, as I have said, cost some £200 million per annum and it would also distort the balance between the infantry and other teeth arms of the Army. I do not believe that this would offer a sensible use of defence resources.

Notwithstanding the adjustment to our plans to which I have referred, we cannot achieve the size of the Army that we are aiming for by 1995 by natural wastage alone, since it will be necessary to maintain a balanced structure of ages, ranks and skills. Redundancies are also needed, although wherever possible use will be made of volunteers. As, however, there is a need to ensure the proper balance of age, skills and experience, it is regrettably not possible to rely on volunteers alone. A total of 838 officers and 2,500 soldiers are being made redundant in the financial year ending in March under phase 1, although all but 143 officers were volunteers.

As the House is aware, tomorrow morning, those who have been selected for phase 2 redundancy—1993-94—will be individually informed. Of the 1,308 officers and 5,152 soldiers, all but 628 officers are volunteers. No soldiers are being made compulsorily redundant. All are first-class people and will be a sad loss to the Army. While I am not prepared to discuss the detail of where they may currently be serving, I do want to point out that, while there have been calls in this House for personnel serving in specific operational theatres to be excluded from the redundancy programme, the Army has made it quite clear—and I agree —that we do not want any special cases.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): If I can interpret those words, will the Minister now confirm that there is a possibility that, tomorrow, serving officers under fire in Bosnia may be handed a compulsory redundancy notice?

Mr. Hamilton: There is a possibility that a small number of serving officers in Bosnia may be made compulsorily redundant. There is also a possibility that serving officers in Northern Ireland will be made compulsorily redundant. But if we were to change the system—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Hamilton: If we were to change the system for announcing redundancies, we would not be telling those people who had volunteered for redundancy and who are extremely anxious to know whether their application for redundancy has been accepted, and in many cases if the decision were delayed they would lose money.

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): I note carefully what my right hon. Friend has said. Of course, cuts in the services and compulsory redundancies are not new in British history. Is it not new, however, that when we have forces actively engaged in various theatres in the world, soldiers should still receive redundancy notices? There is widespread public concern about that.

Mr. Hamilton: We are talking about soldiers both in Northern Ireland—a number of soldiers in Northern Ireland were part of the phase 1 redundancies—and elsewhere, who are part of the emergency tour programme and who spend six months in a posting. If we exempt certain members of the Army from being told about redundancy, it will be very difficult to plan redundancies in the Army as a whole. As I have emphasised, most of those who have been made redundant have volunteered for redundancy.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hamilton: No; I must get on.

It is quite wrong not to tell people who have applied voluntarily for redundancy whether they are to be made redundant. It is therefore very difficult to take out of those numbers the relatively small number of compulsory redundancies without snarling up the entire programme. Regrettably, as I have already said, we have a large number of soldiers serving in Northern Ireland. I find it difficult to differentiate between those who are risking their lives in Northern Ireland and those who are risking their lives in Bosnia. If we exempted them, the whole programme would be very difficult to implement.

The next step will be phase 3 of the redundancy programme. Although the precise figures are unlikely to be available for several months, the signs are that the number involved will be similar to that involved in phase 2. All compulsory "redundees" receive one year's notice, and volunteers receive eight months' notice. All those leaving the Army spend their last six months in the Army serving in the United Kingdom, if that is what they wish. The services' redundancy terms provide for an immediate pension for those with 12 years' service or more, together with a capital payment of up to 18 months' tax-free pay in addition to the normal pension benefits. Those with less then 12 years' service receive a similar capital payment and a preserved pension.

Much has been achieved in improving the support that we offer to those leaving. During 1993-94, we are making allowance for each "redundee" to attend special job search and financial briefings. Taken wth the briefings available for all service leavers, 70 different types of career,

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specialist, job-finding and financial briefings will be available. The Tri-Service Resettlement Organisation will be able to process up to 90,000 applications.

At the same time, all those leaving with more than five years' service, and hence all "redundees", are entitled to 28 days of training for resettlement purposes. The service centres at Aldershot, Catterick and Portsmouth will provide training on 72 different courses, giving an annual capacity of 6,800 places. In addition, 105 MoD-sponsored courses will be available at academic civilian training organisations, with an overall throughout of 9,200 places.

The courses cover a range of subjects such as personnel management, how to run a hotel, electrical and engineering and many others. We also arrange courses for people who wish to set up their own businesses. Additionally, we offer people the opportunity—again, on full pay—to spend time with a civilian employer to gain experience of what it is like in a new organisation. Often, that arrangement will lead directly to employment for a soldier, sailor or airman with the company once he has left the services.

Our "redundees", together with others leaving at the end of their engagements, constitute a flexible, highly trained group of personnel who will be an asset to industry. Last year, we took the major initiative in promoting the launch of the corporate marketing campaign to promote the value of service personnel to civilian employers. Our theme has been "access to excellence", and the product "The best-trained work force in Britain". The campaign is being developed through further advertising, and cascading through service channels and business forums throughout the country.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to pay tribute to the work that the Royal British Legion is doing in Liverpool—and is about to do in Tidworth—in setting up resettlement bases for training not only demobilised service personnel but their families? That work is effective because it is linked with the local training and enterprise councils. Perhaps TECs elsewhere in the country could co-operate with local MoD establishments in setting up similar courses.

Mr. Hamilton: I echo my hon. Friend's sentiments, and compliment him on the role that he has played in helping the process. A number of service men's wives are being given secretarial courses and other instruction, which has also proved extremely valuable.

In addition, the job-matching activities of the three services have now been reorganised into a single streamlined organisation, the services employment network, which is free to employers.

In short, we are very optimistic about the effectiveness of what we are doing to prepare the personnel who leave us every year to move to civilian life. It is our belief that their excellent personal qualities, combined with the experience and training that the armed forces have given them, will always be in demand. Time and again, we find that ex-service men and women obtain good jobs in civilian life. That has been our experience in phase 1: we understand that over 70 per cent. of those who left on redundancy have now found jobs or have moved overseas.

A few tangible examples will illustrate that success. A former lieutenant colonel is now an information technology consultant in a leading European IT management consultancy; a former major is a manager of a water company; an ex-colour sergeant has a carpet and curtain cleaning franchise; two ex-staff sergeants are working as assistant supermarket managers; and a former corporal is a financial services consultant. I could go on, but those examples serve to show the House that our service men are leaving with relevant skills that are well recognised and appreciated by employers.

In conclusion, I wish to pay tribute to all those who serve in our regular and reserve forces, and particularly today to those who serve in the various arms and services of the Army. They are dedicated, loyal and unselfish men and women, and I have the utmost admiration for the professionalism that they display in going about their duties. Indeed, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State announced this afternoon that Her Majesty the Queen has graciously approved the award of battle honours to ships, regiments and squadrons of the three services that took part in the campaign to liberate Kuwait. For the Army, this entails the theatre honour "Gulf 1991" and the battle honours "Wadi Al Batin" and "Western Iraq".

These days, one can hardly move without seeing one opinion poll or another reporting that things are not what they were and that the British public do not hold some of our institutions in as high esteem as they used to. This is not true, however, of our armed forces, who are still held in great respect and who are a source of great pride for the British people—and rightly so.

4.30 pm

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): The right of the Queen's Own Highlanders to have the battle honours of the Gulf on their flags and emblems will be greatly appreciated. The regiment may have time to put them on just before it is disbanded.

I welcome today's debate. For obvious reasons, it has taken a long time to come. However, having obtained it, we may have some prospect of debating the defence estimates for last year before next year's estimates are issued in six weeks' time. The delay is an indication of the Government's reluctance to discuss the issues, although, of course, they welcome our point of view and the reports of the Select Committee.

I begin where the Minister ended—by paying tribute to the women and men of the British Army, who, since the last Army debate, in July 1991, have taken on new and demanding tasks and, as the Minister has said, have carried them out in a dedicated and thoroughly professional manner. I have had an opportunity to meet many of them since the last debate and I do not need to tell the House that, night after night in the streets of the Province of Northern Ireland, and day after day in the cauldron that is Bosnia, they carry out their task in a manner that has become a tradition of the British Army. On behalf of the Opposition, I acknowledge the debt that we owe to those who have given their lives in the service of their country. In discussing defence, we should always remain aware of the human cost.

The Minister dealt with two operational areas—Northern Ireland and Bosnia. I shall not refer to them in detail. I shall say only that of course we support the

Government's position in respect of the Army presence in both places—in Northern Ireland, as a necessary but insufficient condition for the resolution of the problems of that Province; in Bosnia, for the specific, limited and clearly defined mandate of the protection of humanitarian convoys. I was glad to hear the Minister say that the objectives remain the same. Despite the diplomatic moves and the events that are taking place on the military front elsewhere, our objectives remain limited and unchanged.

Perhaps, in the spirit of unity that normally pervades these debates, I should start by congratulating the Minister and his colleagues. In the past year and a half, they have achieved what all of us thought was impossible: they have brought together all three services, the Opposition parties, the Select Committee, their own Back Benchers, academic specialists, the press and almost anyone else who has cared to examine the defence issue over the past two years. The fact that the Government have reconciled the seemingly irreconcilable is testimony to the genius with which they have approached presiding over our defence. The fact that the reason for this unprecedented meeting of minds has been universal condemnation of their own policies does not in any way detract from the enormity of their achievement in this field.

Mr. Rod Richards (Clwyd, North-West): What, in the hon. Gentleman's view, what would be the effect of cuts in the defence budget along the lines recommended by the Labour party conference of, I understand, about £6 billion, specifically on the Army and the current missions and tasks of the armed forces?

Dr. Reid: The hon. Gentleman approaches the subject with the freshness and vigour of a new boy. He will be glad to know that I intend to deal with that precise point at some considerable length. The cut demanded by the Labour party conference, to which members of the Labour Front Bench always pay attention, was about 29 per cent. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman holds that figure in his head as I elaborate at greater length. Having mentioned the ingenuity shown by the Government on the question of "Options for Change"—*[Interruption.]* I assure hon. Members that I shall deal with it fully, and they will find some surprising facts in what I have to say.

The Secretary of State's statement about the regiments on 3 February was only the latest, but not the final, instalment in one of the most bizarre policy-making exercises that the House and the country have ever seen. Let us recall the events that led up to it, so that we can elucidate exactly where the Government think that they are going.

In February 1990, the then Secretary of State for Defence, who graces us with his presence today, told the House that a reassessment of British defence policy was being conducted under the curious title "Options for Change". I say "curious" because at no time have right hon. and hon. Members been offered any options on the future of the country's security or, indeed, choices of any description. Nevertheless, the Secretary of State for Defence proceeded in February 1990.

Four months later, in July, following what must have been the fastest defence policy re-evaluation of any country in history, the Government announced the main conclusions of that process by stating that our armed forces would be reduced to about 255,000 regular personnel. No indication was given of the strategic thinking behind that proposal.

A year later, presumably following an exhaustive mental effort, the then Secretary of State made almost exactly the same announcement again. This time, the armed forces were to be reduced to 246,000 regular personnel, so the combined impact of the events of the previous 12 months—the collapse of the Warsaw pact, the break-up of the Soviet Union, the disintegration of Leninism, the unification of Germany, the treaty on conventional forces in Europe, and the Gulf war—was apparently equal to 9,000 soldiers.

The Government had worked that out after a year. Still nothing was said about Britain's place in the post-cold war world, about the threats that we would face or the new missions and roles that our armed forces would be asked to perform, despite the fact that two and a half to three years ago, the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats, without several hundred thousand civil servants, were clearly identifying the type of new risks that would replace the old threat from the Soviet Union and redefining the type of threat that we would face. We argued that the new threats should be the basis for the structuring of our forces, but the Government apparently found it difficult to do that. Instead of a coherent strategic assessment, we were offered bland generalisations about how the world was less threatening but more unpredictable.

In November 1991, four months after the Secretary of State's announcement, the NATO Heads of State agreed the alliance's new strategic concept. Apparently by some happy coincidence, the Government had got it just right and the United Kingdom force structures, announced four months before the NATO strategic document was outlined, fitted exactly into the new NATO strategy. No changes were needed, although NATO had changed its strategy.

Having seen the intellectual and incoherent mess that his predecessor had bequeathed him, the new Secretary of State attempted in July 1992 to paper over the credibility gaps by redefining Britain's defence roles: out go direct defence of the United Kingdom, a commitment to the European mainland, protection of the eastern Atlantic and the maintenance of a nuclear deterrent, and in come the protection of United Kingdom independent territories, insurance against external threats and the promotion of international peace and stability.

The Secretary of State seemed to operate according to some inverse logic. Whereas conventional wisdom would have us believe that the armed forces should be structured according to the requirements of strategy, we had a new doctrine from the right hon. and learned Gentleman. Apparently he believed that the strategy should be formulated according to the requirements of the existing force structure, which had been decided in advance. What else could possibly explain the chronology of events, other than a decision to base strategy on existing force structures, which, in turn, were being shaped purely by the Treasury? The other way about is the normal way of doing things when operating the relationship between strategy, tactics and structures.

But even that attempt at strategic justification of the Government's policy does not suffice, because, after all, the new roles defined in the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1992" are only a new way of saying the old thing. For two and a half years, my hon. Friends and

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almost every defence expert in Britain have been asking the Government to conduct a full defence review. Match resources to commitments, but do not continue to cut resources while extending commitments. But there is still no indication that the Government are prepared to undertake the sort of qualitative review of Britain's military role that we desperately need.

Instead, the armed forces of the decade ahead will be exactly the same as those of the decades of the past, only smaller. It has been shown by the autumn statement that the new Secretary of State intends to follow his predecessor's example of dancing to the Treasury tune and making the rest up as he goes along.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman because he is often shoulder to shoulder with me whenever jobs are being lost throughout the country in the Royal Navy and the Army, but he will know that many of the cuts will take perhaps five years to implement. He and his party may be in power in five years' time. He is clearly demonstrating his resistance to being forced by the Treasury into taking action.

Will the hon. Gentleman give an assurance that the Labour party is committed to applying the full resources necessary—whatever the Foreign Secretary says may be necessary for the requirements of defence in the world—that they would not be Treasury-driven and that Labour would maintain the spend to which the current Secretary of State for Defence is committed?

Dr. Reid: Before answering the hon. Gentleman's question, I will explain why Ministers are exclusively Treasury-driven. I am not saying that the Treasury never has an effect on any Department—*[Interruption.]* We know that it does; none of us lives in an unreal world, with the exception of some Ministers. They are exclusively Treasury-driven for the simple reason that present Ministers have no strategic analysis to combat Treasury pressure. If they had conducted, as a Labour Government will, a full defence review, they would be in a position to act when the bargaining starts.

If I have any responsibility at that stage, I hope that the Ministers presiding over defence in the then Labour Government would be in a position to argue against Treasury pressure if it affected the security interests of the nation. But if there has not been an analysis in the first place, when the man from the Treasury arrives and puts a gun at one's head, there is nothing one can say. Conservative Back Benchers know that what I say is correct. Indeed, the ex-Minister, who has now left the House, the redundant armed forces Minister who has now become something of a statesman and an arms dealer, also knew that.

Mr. Richards: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that he would argue the case for defence expenditure as against health service expenditure?

Dr. Reid: I shall deal—*[Interruption.]* I assure the House that I will answer that question to the hon. Gentleman's satisfaction. I shall also deal with the question of resources. I can answer in a nutshell by saying that nobody in Britain, and certainly none of my hon. Friends, is saying that we should increase defence expenditure—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members will have all revealed to them. They are apparently incapable of understanding, although I have explained the position several times.

We are saying that when defence expenditure is being cut—as it has been, is being and will be—it is more vital than ever to make sure that the distribution of resources goes to shape forces that meet the modern threat. But nobody can do that unless they have analysed the risks and the threats—and that cannot be achieved without a full defence review. That is why the whole Government process has been flawed from the start. I shall elaborate shortly on the implications of that for internal distribution and in relation to the figures for which the Secretary of State has been asked.

"Options for Change" was flawed in its conception and the climbdown announced by the Secretary of State on 3 February, though welcome, does nothing to tackle the underlying problems inherent in the Government's approach. The reprieving of four regiments was a necessary step, but, as the Select Committee reported earlier this month, it will not resolve the mounting problems of overstretch in the British Army. There is a mismatch between resources and commitment. Since "Options for Change" was originally announced, the Government have added three extra tours to the British Army's emergency tour plot, two more in Northern Ireland and one in Bosnia. Sadly, there seems little prospect of those commitments disappearing in the near future, especially Bosnia, where the number of troops may even increase.

According to the Select Committee, five battalions are needed to cover each tour plot to achieve the Government's intended interval of 24 months. That means that the Government have increased the British Army's tasks by the equivalent of 15 battalions, while increasing the planned number of battalions by only two. Those are the stark figures from which Ministers cannot escape. They have increased the tasks by the equivalent of 15 battalions and have increased the number of battalions by two.

In view of that simple equation, it is clear that we are further away than ever from realising the goal of a 24-month interval for battalions carrying out emergency tours. The result will be continued overstretch, an increasing burden on the Army and the demoralisation of the soldiers. There will be an increased drop-out rate as a consequence and, therefore, increased cost.

In discussing the issue of overstretch, it is vital to recognise the human as well as the strategic consequences of the policies being implemented by the Government. The soldiers who serve in the British Army risk their lives on our behalf. We owe them, and we continually say that we owe them, a great debt of gratitude. So there is an obligation on us to ensure that their conditions of service are acceptable. Overstretch is not a theoretical or just a strategic problem. It imposes an intolerable strain on our soldiers and their families, it disrupts their lives and it saps their morale.

I fear that in the scramble for savings, the human element has been lost. When a soldier has shorter intervals between tours to Northern Ireland, when he does not have time for training or adventure training and when he has guard duty imposed on him continually—the activity which most normal soldiers hate—the morale of the Army is disrupted, and morale is the foundation on which fighting capability is based.

The Government's U-turn was inadequate because it was prompted by a sense of political embarrassment rather than by a coherent vision of the security challenges facing the country and the appropriate responses required. It was a process, as it were, of salami slicing in reverse—the alter ego of "Options for Change". It failed the credibility test because it was a sticking plaster when radical surgery was needed.

There is in the Government an unwillingness to face realities and make hard decisions. That has been the hallmark of their defence policies, a tendency accompanied by mounting crises in the defence budget. "Options for Change" was only the ultimate manifestation of that tragedy. By cutting resources without any corresponding structural reprioritisation of commitments, the Government ducked their responsibility to our soldiers and their responsibility to provide firm leadership. By seeking to maintain existing force structures while maintaining incremental savings across the board, the Government have ended up with an unhappy compromise that is the worst of all possible worlds. So far, the Conservatives have proved themselves adept at the old Goebbels principle that people are more likely to believe a bigger than a smaller one.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): I admire the hon. Gentleman's skill in making it difficult for us to attack his argument. The logical corollary of what he is saying is that either we should reduce our commitments or increase our spending on the armed services. Of which is he in favour?

Dr. Reid: That is partly a corollary of what I am saying. A full defence review would ensure, first, that our resources met our commitments and, secondly, that the structure of our forces met the perceived risk.

I must explain to the hon. Gentleman that the threat used to be defined as having two parts—intention and capability. When the Soviet Union existed it was easy to define the threat. The Soviet Union certainly had the capability and people assumed that the motivation was there, too. That was a big cumbersome threat, which was easy to assess.

The Government were not prepared to listen two and a half to three years ago, when some of us said that that big threat was giving way to what were called smaller risks —flashpoints around the world, such as ethnic tensions and rivalries, border disputes and the birth of new nations. The type of force structure needed to deal with such risks is different from what was needed to deal with the big Soviet threat.

The problem is that the Government embarked on the cuts without a full defence review to analyse the changes, so they ended up by making incremental cuts. I hope that I have given a full answer to the hon. Gentleman's question.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) *rose*——

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby) *rose*——

Dr. Reid: I shall give way in a while. I know that there is a group of vigorous new Members there, and they have already asked me to answer two questions, which I have yet to reach. Once I have reached those answers I promise that I shall give way again.

I was talking about the big lie. We know about the lies that we have heard before, such as that the Conservative party is the party of low taxation—that one sticks in the mind. Until recently, another of the big lies was that the Conservative party was the party of sound financial management—we all remember that one. Another two were the claims that the Conservative party was the party of law and order, and that the Conservative party did not devalue. We could spend all day on those big lies, but the one on which I shall concentrate today is the idea that the Conservative party is the party of strong defence.

Let us look at the statistics for which Conservative Members have asked me. We must remember that the important statistic that I mentioned was that the Labour party conference had asked for a cut of about 29 to 30 per cent. Conservative Members must keep that figure in mind, and I shall deal with it. [HON. MEMBERS: "Six billion pounds."] No, there is no absolute figure of £6 billion. That may be Conservative Members' interpretation, but if they want to attack us they should use the figure that I am giving them. Keep it in mind.

Let us look at defence expenditure under the Conservatives.

Mr. Nigel Evans *rose*——

Mr. Devlin *rose*——

Dr. Reid: No, I shall not give way, because I am courteous enough to try to reply to the questions that I have already been asked before replying to subsequent questions. I shall now deal with the very figures that the Conservatives have been demanding for two years.

Between 1979-80 and 1984-85—the first five years of the Conservative Government—defence expenditure did increase by 22 per cent. in real terms. That is why Baroness Thatcher used to glory in being called the iron lady. That sustained increase during the first half of the 1980s is constantly used as the basis of the Conservatives' claim to be the party of strong defence. Unfortunately for them, they cannot rewrite history. In reality, that increase of 22 per cent.—*[Interruption.]* Let me tell the young hon. Gentlemen, because I know that they are keen to learn.

The 22 per cent. increase was nothing to do with the resolute nature of the Conservative Government or their leader. The real source of the increase was the commitment given to NATO by James Callaghan and the Labour Government in 1977 to increase our commitment by 3 per cent. per annum in real terms. That commitment was honoured and was approved by the House before the Tory Government were elected in 1979. That was the source of the 1980-85 figure, and the 22 per cent. increase.

Mr. Robathan *rose*——

Dr. Reid: There is more, I am afraid. I am giving a full answer to the question, and then I shall give way.

Let us examine defence expenditure since 1985. That is the expenditure of which the Conservatives can genuinely claim authorship, and it will take us from 1985 until about 1997 or even 2000—the Conservatives keep telling us that they will still be in government then. Under current plans, by 1995-96 defence expenditure will have dropped by 20 per cent. in real terms over the preceding decade—a 20 per cent. cut since the Labour increase stopped.

Revealing though that figure is, if we project that trend forward into the second half of the 1990s—given the Government's intentions and their appalling fiscal ineptitude, that is a modest assumption—the defence budget will have been cut by a further 9 per cent. by the

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year 2000. I have said 20 per cent., now I am going to tax the intellectuals on the Conservative Benches by asking them to add together 20 per cent. and 9 per cent.—*[Interruption.]* I can hear their minds working; I can hear them stirring.

Mr. Iain Duncan-Smith (Chingford) *rose*——

Dr. Reid: I should prefer the hon. Members who asked me the question to answer mine; there would be a certain satisfaction in that. I believe that when they have thrown some pieces of paper into the basket, and have got the abacus out, they will discover that the figure for the Government's cuts in defence from 1985 to the end of the century will be 29 per cent. in real terms—exactly the figure asked for by the Labour party conference. Although we were not in power, the Conservatives were good enough to carry out the Labour party conferences resolution, and I congratulate them.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Does the hon. Gentleman not admit that we are talking not about 1984-85 but about a Labour party conference decision made last year? It is no good the hon. Gentleman talking about reductions in defence expenditure since 1984-85, because the resolution said that defence expenditure should be reduced to the European average from last year—a cut of 27·5 per cent. from the present level. So we are still talking about a dramatic cut of £6 billion to £8 billion in the defence budget.

Dr. Reid: It really takes the biscuit for a Tory Minister to complain that the Labour party was five years too late in calling for the defence cuts that the Conservatives had started five years earlier.

I have dealt in some detail with the figures. We criticise not the fact that there has been a reduction in defence expenditure but the sheer hypocrisy of a Government who cut defence in practice while accusing other parties of wishing to cut defence in theory.

Mr. Robathan *rose*——

Dr. Reid: I have already given way several times, and I shall allow the hon. Gentleman to return to the subject.

As I have already proved, under the Conservative Government defence expenditure has been cut, is being cut and will continue to be cut. Only the political posturing of a Government who have come to believe their own propaganda prevents them from admitting it openly. The three Ministers sit there—the three wise ministerial monkeys: "See no cuts, hear no cuts, speak no cuts." They have talked themselves into believing the propaganda that they have pushed out.

No one denies that it was valid to expect a significant redistribution of resources following the end of the cold war, even if the rosy assumptions of 1990 look distinctly tarnished in 1993. The search for savings was necessary and the Opposition would readily have welcomed it were it not for the following facts.

First, on black Wednesday whatever peace dividend there may have been was frittered away in a matter of hours in a display of the most breathtaking financial incompetence. Secondly, the Government's policies lamentably failed to take account of the fact that, when resources are dwindling, it is more important than ever to prioritise commitments and target spending where it is most needed.

That is why the Opposition are prepared to support programmes such as Challenger 2 or the add-back of the infantry. Those programmes enhance the mobility and flexibility of our armed forces in dealing with the security threats that this country is likely to face. But—this refers to the second question which I have still to answer—we shall not support spending up to £3,000 million on a new sub-strategic, tactical air-to-surface nuclear weapon for which there is no clear military need and which serves no useful purpose. It is a disgrace and a disservice to our soldiers that we are spending £3,000 million on a new nuclear weapon which is not needed—while we are putting them on the dole, giving them compulsory redundancy and disbanding infantry regiments which are needed to deal with the very threats that we now face.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that we need a flexible response? Does he accept that, with the defeat of the Soviet Union —it surely has been defeated—the nuclear weapons of the former Soviet Union are still in place in Russia, Byelorussia, Uzbekistan and other parts of the former USSR? Does he further accept that there is an increasingly strong relationship between Iran and the southern states of the former Soviet Union, that there is the gravest danger that nuclear weapons will spread out of the Commonwealth of Independent States and that we need to keep not only Trident—to which the hon. Gentleman has not yet referred—but a flexible response to counter——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. That is a long intervention. I call Dr. Reid.

Dr. Reid: I am trying to think of something courteous to say. I admire the sincerity with which the hon. Gentleman puts his view.

We make our position plain. We believe that it is a criminal disservice to our soldiers who have been sacked to spend £3,000 million on a new nuclear weapon for which there is no military need. We cannot put it more simply.

Mr. Nigel Evans: I am rather perplexed by what the hon. Gentleman has had to say to the House. Are we listening to a rescinding of the Labour party manifesto commitment of 1992? The Labour party went into that campaign saying that it would cut defence expenditure in Britain to the average of the other European countries. In my constituency I have many thousands of people working at British Aerospace on the European fighter aircraft and the Tornado. Is the hon. Gentleman telling them that their jobs would go if a Labour Government were re-elected?

Dr. Reid: The only thing that was wrong with the hon. Gentleman's question was that its premise was false. I assure him that there was no such statement in Labour's manifesto. I will accompany him to the Library after my speech and get the manifesto. He will find that it contains two commitments on defence. One is to conduct a full defence review. The other is to pay whatever is necessary to defend Britain. He must not believe the propaganda that he was sent from Conservative central office during the election campaign. If the hon. Gentleman can find the phrase that he used or a pledge of cuts anywhere in Labour's manifesto, I will treat him to a dinner in the House.

Mr. Duncan-Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Reid: I am sorry, but I want other hon. Members to be able to speak. I have given way liberally.

In refusing to make the choices that I have described, the Government are producing not a redistribution of resources but a maldistribution of reduced resources.

I was giving the reasons why we cannot take "Options for Change" seriously. The third reason is that the reductions have not been carried out in any coherent or systematic fashion. The House does not have to take my word for it. The Tory-dominated Defence Select Committee said:

> "'Options for Change' regrettably fails to . . . provide a coherent strategic overview."

It takes an ingenuity beyond belief on the part of Ministers in a Tory Government to unite the whole Defence Select Committee against them. In an unprecedented move, the Committee has tabled an early-day motion which criticises the Government's cuts under "Options for Change". So Conservative Members need not believe me if they do not wish to, but they should at least have some respect for some of the points which have been made by their honourable colleagues in the Conservative party.

Fourthly, in some cases it is by no means certain that the proposed changes will save money or increase efficiency. I merely give one example of that. As hon. Members will know, until now recruits have done preliminary training over 21 weeks. There has been a high drop-out rate. The Government have decided to split the period of training into 11 weeks and 10 weeks at different bases. I predict now that there will be an even higher drop-out rate. The reason is one of personnel rather than theory.

Most of the drop-out among young recruits who enter the Army is a result of the shell shock of suddenly being told by some large, well-trained sergeant-major that he is their mother now. It is only with some difficulty that many young people attune themselves to that. Previously, once they had attuned themselves, they had the same sergeant-major or corporal for 21 weeks. Now, after 11 weeks they will meet an even burlier sergeant-major who will deny the earlier parentage and demand that they accept that he is their mother for the next 10 weeks.

I predict to Ministers that the scheme, presumably thought up by cosy civil servants sitting in Whitehall who have not been on a parade ground for years, will result in further and greater dropping out. It will result not in efficiency and cost saving but in further expenditure.

The Government are putting through a massive reduction in Army resources, but they are constantly adding to its tasks. First, the British Army has been charged with leading the new NATO rapid reaction corps, which came into existence in the autumn. Secondly, several of the regular battalions assigned to the rapid reaction corps will be expected simultaneously to carry out an increased number of roulement tours in Northern Ireland. That was never mentioned when we bid for the leadership of the rapid reaction corps in central Europe. Did we tell the Germans that our soldiers would be in Northern Ireland? Did we tell them that the relief of central Europe would be launched from the Falls road? I am sure that the Germans did not understand that. Ministers told us only after they had bid for the rapid reaction corps.

Thirdly, the Secretary of State pledged in May that Britain would assign additional units to carry out missions on behalf of an enhanced Western European Union. Fourthly, in October, not to be outdone—there is a certain rivalry between Defence and Foreign Affairs—the Foreign Secretary went one better in a game of "Anything you can stretch I can stretch further." He promised greater British participation and involvement in United Nations peacekeeping operations.

So, not content with double-hatting or even triple-hatting the British Army, the Government want to quadruple-hat them. The British Army is the only army in the world in which recruits are expected to have four heads. It is not possible to operate an army on that basis. Our service men and women deserve better. They are at the sharp end. They cannot and should not be asked to take the strain of increasing demands imposed upon them.

If the treatment of Army personnel who are to be made redundant, which was mentioned earlier, is any indication of the Government's approach, all of us in the House have a problem, but our service men and women have an even greater problem. The Minister apparently thinks that 28 days training is sufficient for someone who has served the country and risked his life and is then told that he is being made redundant. Is it not an irony that, if an officer is battered over the head by a soldier, the soldier is sent to Colchester and receives a dishonourable discharge but, while he is there, he receives three months training in a trade; but if a soldier acts in an honourable fashion and conducts himself properly throughout his service career, he receives one month's training and a redundancy slip and is sent down the road?

Has no one in the Ministry of Defence thought that there is an anomaly there? A person who is given a dishonourable discharge receives three times more training than a person who has been made compulsorily redundant but has conducted himself in an admirable fashion before discharge.

"Options for Change" revealed that at the heart of the Government's policy is a deep insensitivity to, and ignorance of, the needs of ordinary service personnel. But what else could we expect? They are the Government who, in response to calls for compensation on behalf of nuclear test veterans, said last week that it was no concern of theirs because—I quote the Minister—

> "people who get older are more likely to contract cancer."—[*Official Report*, 9 February 1993; Vol. 218, c. 817.]

That was a breathtakingly complacent and deeply insulting remark.

The Government reject the death penalty for terrorists, but went to the trouble of coming back to the Floor of the House to reinstate the death penalty for British soldiers. So the terrorists who attack the soldiers suffer no execution, but the soldier who, under threat of losing his life, perhaps cracks for a minute, could face the death penalty. They are the Government who axe entire regiments while arrogantly refusing to justify their decision. They then reprieve some of them and refuse to apologise for getting it wrong. They are the Government who, to save money, cut short the careers of soldiers who are desperately needed, while being prepared to waste up to £3 billion on such a militarily useless project as the tactical air-to-surface nuclear missile.

If anything was needed to illustrate the Government's insensitivity, it came in their comments this afternoon on redundancies. Tomorrow, the Government will notify the soldiers who are to be made compulsorily redundant under "Options for Change". That is regrettable. What makes it

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disgusting is the fact that Ministers have refused to give an assurance that no soldier will receive a redundancy notice while on active service and under fire in Bosnia or in Northern Ireland.

This is not a partisan point. All hon. Members should protest vigorously to the Government. The prospect of a soldier in Bosnia or a soldier in Northern Ireland dying with a redundancy notice in his hand is not a prospect which any decent Member should contemplate.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): The hon. Gentleman is making a serious charge. Does he not appreciate that the Army believes that it would be grossly invidious for the choice of soldiers for redundancy to depend on whether a soldier happened to be serving in Northern Ireland, Bosnia, in the United Kingdom or elsewhere? Does the hon. Gentleman not also realise that soldiers are constantly moving from one theatre to another? There would be enormous resentment throughout the armed forces if it was believed that the choice of redundancy depended not on personal merit or record, but on whether a soldier happened at a given moment to be in one part of the world rather than another?

Dr. Reid: I am glad that the Secretary of State intervened rather than sitting sneering as he did earlier. How many soldiers has he asked? When he talks about the Army, he means the brass hats who are sitting in Whitehall. The Secretary of State should ask a soldier in Bosnia or Northern Ireland how he would feel if he was made compulsorily redundant while he was there.

Irrespective of what the brass hats say, in this country politicians run defence. We make moral decisions and the instruments of those decisions are the boys and girls whom we put on to the streets, into the valleys or into the cauldron of Bosnia. It is our obligation, not the obligation of any serving soldier, however high ranking, to ensure that we meet those obligations to our soldiers.

There will be horror among the public at the prospect that people who are risking their lives for us could be made compulsorily redundant while on active service. The Secretary of State may shake his head. Time will tell whether this is another insensitive bloomer.

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman, like me, was astounded to hear the Secretary of State suggest that those who were being made redundant were being made redundant on the ground of merit. Are we telling those soldiers' future employers that we are getting rid of second-rate soldiers? That would be a disgraceful innuendo by the Secretary of State in the circumstances.

Dr. Reid: The hon. Gentleman has put the point as well as I could have done.

We have become heated because this is an important issue. It is also a disgraceful issue. I do not regard it as a partisan point, but as a matter of honour for all hon. Members. It is also a matter of honour that we who make the political decisions that may send soldiers to their deaths have an obligation to ensure that they have the numbers, the resources and the morale to undertake the tasks assigned to them. That is an obligation which the Government have, once again, signally failed to undertake.

5.13 pm

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): It is a pretty severe test of parliamentary courtesy to have to sit and listen to the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) lecturing Conservative Members on hypocrisy when his own party manifesto, which he took some pleasure in trying to develop, said as little about defence as possible. The hon. Gentleman was right carefully to avoid the conference pledge passed by an overwhelming two-thirds majority of his party. I imagine that he was there when the conference pledged a cut of 28 per cent. The hon. Gentleman then attempted to insult the intelligence of Conservative Members with the closest thing to a parliamentary three-card trick that I have ever seen. He tried to fake the date from which the reductions were being made.

I normally enjoy the hon. Gentleman's speeches, but I profoundly disagreed with his last comments. There is a difficult challenge. The gravamen of what my right hon. Friend the Minister said is that the issue of redundancy is difficult and sad. I entirely support what my right hon. Friend said because I am in no doubt that that is the advice of the Army. It is no good talking about brass hats. They are people who have the responsibility of commanding men. If advice were asked throughout the Army, we would be told that we should be concerned not only about the people who are in Bosnia.

What about the chap who finds that he is now re-eligible because he has just come back from Bosnia? What about the chap who has been serving in Northern Ireland and who thinks that he is exempt, but who comes back, perhaps injured, and finds that he is now eligible again? In such difficult circumstances, I do not believe in political intervention. I believe profoundly—I am sure that this was the Army's advice—that the matter should be dealt with as my right hon. and learned Friend has suggested.

Another nauseous point about the speech by the hon. Member for Motherwell, North was that I had to listen, while best containing my annoyance, to his comment that he and his hon. Friends were the only people who understood what was happening in the world some time back. It is lucky that I have brought with me the introduction that I wrote for "Britain's Army for the 90s" in July 1991, to which the hon. Gentleman referred. He said that Labour understood that, although the cold war was ending, there were likely to be other risks in the future.

We said:

> "with the end of rigid 'cold war' structures, risks may arise from nationalist tensions and local conflicts which could spill over and engage other countries."

We also said:

> "our forces were previously structured primarily to cope with the threat of a massive surprise attack in Europe. Now they need to be designed to respond to a wider spread of risks".

Was not that precisely the point of which the hon. Gentleman sought to claim ownership? Was not that the point of which, he claimed, we were totally ignorant?

I care very much about the responsibility that I held at a difficult time in terms of the unhappy and unpleasant decisions that had to be taken in the "Options for Change" review. I shall deal straight away with the canard that the hon. Member for Motherwell, North tried to deploy. He said that the decisions were the result of no proper strategic analysis. That is a gross insult to the Chief of the Defence Staff and to all those involved in the most detailed analysis, which was built on the most thorough initial analysis of intelligence assessments. A huge mass of work was done to try to assess the information fully as we went through the review.

The hon. Gentleman had the decency to mention the endless work done in the NATO strategic concept. That was the base work that sought to prepare us for what we thought was the sensible level of the "Options for Change" review. I am proud of the work that was done, of its thoroughness and of the way in which it has stood the test of time.

When the hon. Member for Motherwell, North talked about "Options for Change", he dealt entirely with the issue of infantry regiments. He knows perfectly well that "Options for Change" covered the whole range of our armed forces, the whole range of our civilian establishments and the whole range of the structure of the defence estate. It set up the reorganisation of our armed services and the need to make them relevant to the future and to ensure that they were appropriate for the defence needs of our country.

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. King: No, because I want to be brief.

The one thing about which I cared passionately was that if there was to be change that would affect many people who had been prepared to commit themselves to the service of their country, those people had to have the best possible arrangements thereafter if they were made redundant.

I pay tribute to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State and to my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces. I know the very personal interest that they are taking in carrying through the programme. I trust that my next comment will not be challenged. I am proud to say that the arrangements made for resettlement, for retraining, for redundancy pay, for notice, for housing and for help with future careers are the best that have ever been put in place in this country.

Those arrangements have invited real admiration and respect and I should be surprised if they were matched by any other NATO country having to face these challenges. I hope that I take my hon. Friends with me when I say that money spent in this way is money well spent. We owe it to our service men who have been prepared to serve our country and who, for reasons beyond their control, are no longer necessary.

Mr. Frank Cook *rose*——

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman has already intervened once and I wish to be brief.

This debate takes place in the midst of the reorganisation. The fact that that reorganisation is going so well is a tribute to the Army and the Ministry of Defence—whose personnel the hon. Member for Motherwell, North described as just some civil servants in Whitehall. Those civil servants are carrying through this massive reorganisation with, in the main, remarkably little outside comment.

It is not just a question of infantry regiments; it involves the combat arms, the support services, engineering services, the Army estate, its training organisation—and of the grouping into two main support corps. There is also the Adjutant General corps. The reorganisation also involves setting up new headquarters and structures in this country and the massive withdrawal from Germany, where numbers will fall from 55,000 to 25,000. Bases are to be closed—it is a massive undertaking, and I commend the way in which it is being done. It will continue for several years.

That change is not taking place in an atmosphere of peace and tranquillity. While it goes on, to their great credit, our service men and civil servants are carrying out their tasks with their traditional and admirable courage and dedication in Northern Ireland. I have reason to know that as well as anyone. Now there are new commitments in Bosnia, too.

Mr. McWilliam: Does the right hon. Gentleman still think it a good idea that an artillery man should be away from his gun, not having fired it for two years; or that a cavalry man should be away from his tank, not having been in it for a year—just to pad out the emergency tour plot in Northern Ireland, which is still to be reduced to 15 months?

Mr. King: I shall deal with that later. First, I wish to put this debate in context.

My right hon. Friend focused on the task facing the Army, which it is fulfilling with great courage, in Northern Ireland and Bosnia. The hon. Member for Motherwell, North dwelt on one particular but important part of the options programme, a part which also attracted the attention of the Select Committee. But I want to draw attention to everything the Army is facing and to the impact on its procurement programme.

In its earlier report the Select Committee was kind enough to say that whatever one thought about manpower numbers, the plans that we had made on the procurement side would ensure that we had an outstandingly well-equipped Army. I hope that those plans will be maintained, covering as they do the Challenger tank, the Warrior armoured personnel carrier, the AS90, the multiple-launch rocket system and the light attack support helicopter. All those components will be needed for the Army of the future.

What we put in place was a fully costed programme for fully manned units. That is the end towards which the "Options for Change" programme has been working. It is a clear programme and it allows for adaptation, change and integration, running through to 1995-97. In that respect, I strongly supported my right hon. Friends, and when I have spoken on this subject, I have always said that we would keep it under review. Despite that, the only significant change in a programme involving a decline in numbers from 320,000 to 250,000 ended up as a matter of some 3,000 men at the margins of the infantry—a sensible move.

What has changed since the original programme was announced? There have of course been more deployments, with considerable consequences for the units that have to undergo training, recuperation thereafter and reasonable tour intervals between visits to Northern Ireland. There are to be two extra battalions for Northern Ireland besides the major unit for Bosnia. Under the latest public expenditure survey round, defence will receive £1 billion less over three years than we had thought would be available when we announced the programme. We need to examine what impact that will have.

I have already said that I support the idea of the additional infantry regiments. My right hon. Friend spoke

[Mr. King]

of £80 million a year as the cost of those two regiments —money that will have to come from the existing budget. Receiving £1 billion less will have implications not only for the Army but for the Navy and the RAF, too. I am glad to learn from its Chairman that the Select Committee is to look into "Options for Change" for the Navy and Air Force.

Despite the difficulties of Bosnia, I wish to talk about Northern Ireland today. It is the cause of "stretch" for our forces. We have 12 battalions in Northern Ireland, six permanent and accompanied and six unaccompanied. It is the unaccompanied tours that cause the "stretch" for the Army as it carries out its tasks also in Bosnia, Belize and the Falklands. The unaccompanied tours interval represents the real challenge.

As part of the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland must have its security needs met—the people of Northern Ireland are entitled to no less—but at this stage we need to examine carefully how that security can be achieved. Infantry are not the only means of achieving it. The hills of South Armagh are not friendly territory for members of the RUC, with their tradition of policing, but alternatives might be possible in other areas, where highly skilled infantry should not necessarily be deployed and where it may be possible to make better use of manpower.

All this will involve arguments between Departments and about PES allocations. For the RUC and the Royal Irish Regiment, it will raise issues that could affect both the home battalions and the regular and the reserve members of the RUC. Unless we deal with these issues sensibly, the pressures will grow. Members of the Select Committee will know what I mean when I say that the pressures will grown because of the "stretch" involved in our Northern Ireland commitment. Flexibility in these matters is what needs to be studied by the Departments concerned.

There is common agreement that the world has changed. The threat has fractured, but not disappeared. We need a clear plan to work to; we need to ensure that it keeps pace with our new requirements in changing circumstances, including financial circumstances. We should not try to patch and mend as we go along. We must ensure that fully manned, fully costed and properly structured units are established. I hope that I have the support of the whole House when I say that I take the same stand as I took in the foreword that I wrote to "Britain's Army for the 90s":

> "Our commitment remains clear; an Army for the 90s and beyond, smaller and better-equipped and supported, fuly manned and well able both to meet its commitments at home and abroad, and to provide for our security in the future as it has done so well in the past."

5.29 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): As the debate has demonstrated, no one in the House can escape the irony of the date on which it takes place. As we have heard, notification of redundancies will go out tomorrow, and to some of the men whom members of the Defence Select Committee, including myself, met last week in Split and Zagreb.

It is fair to say that Ministers' approach to the issue may well have reason on its side, but there are occasions when decency, humanity and other considerations ought to overrule reason. I do not find it particularly compelling to suggest that there could not be some scheme which allowed those who were volunteering for redundancy to take it, while preventing, as far as possible, those forces serving in Northern Ireland or in the former Yugoslavia from receiving redundancy notices at times when their lives are undoubtedly in danger.

In the light of recent events, it is inevitable that the debate so far has concentrated on the role of the infantry. Government insouciance over recent decisions can hardly be properly justified, because for many months Ministers claimed, both in the House and elsewhere, that there was no need to alter the proposals for our infantry batallions contained in "Options for Change". Now they would have us believe that a reconsideration was taking place all the time.

Contemporary evidence is often more revealing and compelling than that which is by way of ex-post facto justification. I direct the attention of hon. Members to the evidence given to the Select Committee on Defence, which they will find repays careful re-examination. I can say without equivocation that no one told us an untruth, but I am left with the unshakeable conviction that we were subject to deception by omission and concealment. The next time that some of the people who gave evidence appear before us, we shall certainly make a point of counting the spoons after they leave the Committee Room.

The Secretary of State's reversal had an air of inevitability about it. In spite of the campaigns fought on behalf of certain regiments, it was not an emotional argument about tradition and history, but an argument in which the cold logic of numbers was ultimately bound to prevail. In my judgment, that logic is unaffected by the Secretary of State's decision. The conclusions of the Select Committee report were not in any sense affected either.

I do not intend to dwell on the terms of the report because I observe that the distinguished Chairman of the Committee, the hon. Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) is seeking to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In the order of things, I fancy that he has a reasonable chance to do so and will no doubt take the opportunity to detail on behalf of the Committee those issues that seem to him to be appropriate.

The theme so far has been the obligation to match tasks with resources. After the end of the cold war there was a public perception that defence expenditure could safely be reduced. However, one can rationally reduce expenditure only by reducing commitments, and one can sensibly reduce those only when one has determined what are essential and what may be discarded. There is no particular intellectual challenge involved in any of that —it constitutes a defence review—nor is there any shame or admission of weakness on the part of a Government who set themselves that task.

The right hon. Member for Bridgewater (Mr. King) argued that precisely such an analysis had taken place, citing the authority of the Chief of the Defence Staff and others. If such an analysis has taken place, neither he nor his distinguished successor have been able to persuade successive Defence Select Committees that a proper rational basis existed for their decisions and proposals.

Mr. Gyles Brandreth (City of Chester): Does the hon. and learned Gentleman confirm that it was his party's view that a 50 per cent. reduction in defence expenditure was called for before the end of the century? That would have meant about 73,000 service men in the Army, as opposed to 119,000. So he is being a bit holier-than-thou—or perhaps he will explain that the 50 per cent. reduction was not his policy.

Mr. Campbell: When it comes to being holier-than-thou in the House I think that I could learn a few lessons from the hon. Gentleman. I had a small bet on which Conservative Member would be the first to mention that, and although the hon. Gentleman's name was not in the top three, it was certainly in the top 10.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Answer the question.

Mr. Campbell: If the hon. Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth) had been in the House as long as some other hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier), who is making a somewhat noisy intervention from a sedentary position, he would know that I have never argued in the House in favour of a mandatory reduction in defence expenditure and nor has my party.

In the aftermath of the cold war, my party suggested that it might be possible to achieve a reduction of as much as 50 per cent. in defence expenditure by the end of the century, subject to two important considerations: first, that there should be a full-scale defence review; secondly, that there should be far greater integration between the defence policies of European Community countries. I hope to return to that topic and to advance the cause for a degree of specialisation, which has not so far been obvious in the nature of the defence provision made by those countries.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Campbell: I must give way to the hon. Member for Canterbury, lest I should cause him to suffer some apoplectic convulsion by not doing so.

Mr. Brazier: I am only trying to shout through my cold. The hon. and learned Gentleman and the Opposition spokesman set out the case for overstretch. Surely he must realise that he cannot argue consistently that there is overstretch and that his party would like something to be done about it, unless he is willing to turn his back on his party's commitment to cut defence spending, or to say which commitments he would be in favour of removing.

Mr. Campbell: If the hon. Gentleman had been in the House a fortnight ago he would have heard the Chief Secretary to the Treasury upbraid Opposition Members who were unwilling to think the unthinkable. If we were supposed to think the unthinkable of the great Departments of State, such as the Home and Foreign Offices, why should the Ministry of Defence be exempt from such critical analysis?

We should re-examine several of our overseas commitments. I do not shrink from saying that our continuing commitment in the Falklands should be re-examined, and that we should ask ourselves whether it is in our interests to have forces in Belize. Is it still in our interests to continue to contribute towards the United Nations efforts in Cyprus? We still meet a range of obligations which deserve intellectually rigorous analysis so that we can decide whether they are in the interests of the United Kingdom and I am prepared to embark on that.

What I find so surprising is that the hon. Member for Canterbury is not prepared to allow that that might be a way to bridge the difficult gap between the public perception that less needs to be spent on defence and the public perception which urges us to try to meet what is possibly an increasing number of commitments, under the aegis of the United Nations.

Mr. McWilliam: Does the hon. and learned Gentleman recall that, only a couple of weeks ago, we were given evidence that there are British forces in 50 locations around the world at present?

Mr. Campbell: I certainly do recall that evidence. Those who have studied the report of the Select Committee on Defence will doubtless have formed their own conclusions about it.

The intervention of the hon. Member for Canterbury allows me to pick up the point made by the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid). The Government still argue the case for a replacement for the WE177 free-fall bomb. Despite the guarded responses given at Defence Question Time about a week ago, that replacement still includes the possibility of tactical air-to-surface missiles.

The notion of TASM, and its requirement, comes from those days when flexible response was the central thesis of the nuclear doctrine of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. Since then, flexible response has been replaced by minimum deterrence and, now, by a doctrine of use in the last resort. The purpose of a tactical air-to-surface missile was to break up the massed tank formations of the Warsaw pact countries as they streamed across the central German border. That threat is no longer before us.

Therefore, what is the rationale for the tactical air-to-surface missile, especially when, if we wanted to have a sub-strategic capability, we could put a single warhead on a single missile on Trident? There is absolutely no justification for spending up to £3 billion on a weapon conceived in circumstances that have long since been overtaken by events, in respect of which we can have a capability as part of existing expenditure.

Mr. Brazier: At present, we have a variety of independent sources, not least *Jane's Defence Weekly*, that suggest that nuclear technology—and possibly even nuclear weaponry—are proliferating around the middle east and a number of other countries. Without such a visible sub-strategic capability that can sit on the edge of a radar screen, we could, before the turn of the century, face a threat to our homeland with which we could not cope.

Mr. Campbell: The hon. Gentleman seems to be operating in a vacuum in which Great Britain has to provide for its own defence at every level and in respect of every capability. Hon. Members have been debating NATO, and hardly anyone has not subscribed to NATO's objectives.

Mr. Richards: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Campbell: No, I shall not give way.

Everyone accepts that there is a need for NATO to change its role and that the concept of crisis management should be part of the raison d'etre of NATO in the period after the cold war. Why does the United Kingdom have to possess a specific nuclear capability at every level? Is it being suggested that all NATO's nuclear capability—both

[Mr. Campbell]

strategic and sub-strategic—will be inadequate and insufficient to protect us against the threat of nuclear proliferation in the middle east? One has only to put the proposition in those terms to see how absurd it is.

Dr. Reid: Otherwise we would need 8,000 horses to face the Cossacks.

Mr. Campbell: The Cossacks were a little before my time. The hon. Gentleman may know more about them than I do.

It is self-evident that if one maintains the widest range of capabilities against a decreasing budget, everything will eventually be performed inadequately. Flexibility may be achieved only at the expense of expertise. If we have to send gunners to Northern Ireland to perform infantry duties, their value in their primary role will inevitably be degraded.

The Maastricht treaty—with which I believe you have more than a passing acquaintance, Mr. Deputy Speaker—envisages a much more integrated defence policy among European Community members. Why are the Government giving no thought to specialisation in specific sectors? Surely, in that way, NATO or the European Community could maintain a range of capabilities within the financial constraints created by the public's post-cold war perceptions.

Yesterday's debate about United Nations peacekeeping inevitably provides a context for today's debate. The *Official Report* shows that no one argued that we should avoid or abandon United Nations peacekeeping obligations. The Foreign Secretary said that we should try to adopt a position somewhere between the saloon bar and Mr. Gladstone. If reports of Mr. Gladstone's nocturnal activities were correct, the position between the saloon bar and Mr. Gladstone might not be too salubrious.

During the debate there was an implicit acceptance of the fact that, as a permanent member of the Security Council, we shall continue to have obligations to provide troops to meet United Nations commitments. There is an additional reason beyond our permanent membership of the Security Council: our forces are good at such tasks. They are professional, well trained and well led and, compared to some of those from other countries—of which we heard when we visited Croatia last week—they are extremely well equipped. The Secretary of State's announcement, welcome though it is, would effectively be nullified if we received a request from the United Nations to expand our existing force in Bosnia to brigade size, as that would necessarily involve the commitment of two more battalions.

The effectiveness of our contribution to United Nations peacekeeping will depend on the quality not only of the forces that we deploy, but of the equipment with which we send them to do the task. Some of the contingents in Croatia—for example, the contingent from Nigeria, which has to rely on the United Nations to provide all its vehicles—have been less effective than other contingents such as ours and that from Canada. The Canadian contingent brought vehicles in excess of the number requested by the United Nations.

We have a moral obligation not to place our forces, on behalf of the United Nations, in circumstances where they are liable to be outgunned or their equipment outperformed. One of the benefits of specialisation may be to reduce the range of equipment that we have to procure. It may not always be necessary to provide state of the art equipment, but it must surely be right that those whom we ask to perform difficult and dangerous tasks should be well equipped to do the task for which they are deployed.

We should also recognise that, while peacekeeping may well require different skills from those asked of the average infantry man, it may also require different equipment. Therefore, embarking on a commitment towards peacekeeping has a series of implications and possible consequences to which serious regard must be given.

The right hon. Member for Bridgwater mentioned Northern Ireland, and I associate myself with some of the sentiments he expressed. I hope that the recent formation of the Royal Irish Regiment is proceeding successfully, and that the hopes and aspirations that accompanied our debates in the House are being realised. Many hon. Members clearly found the notion of a regiment drawing from both traditions in the community of Northern Ireland an attractive one.

However, we must never forget that the battalions are there to support the civil power. As soon as it is feasible to transfer responsibility away from the military power to the civil power, surely it will be right to do that. Therefore, I hope that the Government will take careful heed of what the right hon. Member for Bridgwater said and will keep under proper and consistent review the extent to which the transfer of function back from the military to the civilian power can be achieved.

Croatia was one of the places that the Select Committee on Defence visited last week. As some hon. Members may be aware, British forces operating in Croatia do so under the command and control system of the United Nations, whereas those in Bosnia operate differently. As the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) said yesterday, some of us were astonished to be told by a senior commander in the British force that his interpretation of the rules of engagement was that if, in order to avoid bloodshed, it was necessary for someone to hand over his own equipment or personal weapon, such action was required.

That came as something of a surprise, and I suspect that it has not been generally discussed or understood in the House. I refer to that so that hon. Members can appreciate that when, not lightly but perhaps without necessarily thinking of all the consequences, we assign British forces to the United Nations, we may be putting them in a situation in which, for example, the rules of engagement are rather less robust than those that we would regard as essential in other circumstances.

Nuclear testing has featured briefly in the debate. I cannot understand why the Government do not take the political opportunity offered by the moratorium, because the practicality is that we cannot test at Nevada, as the Americans are engaged in a moratorium. The United States, France and Russia all believe that their nuclear capabilities are not being eroded by a moratorium. Why do the British Government not accept that they have a practical moratorium and seek to gain for themselves the political advantage that arises from being associated with a gesture? I freely accept that it is a gesture, but it is an important one in our efforts to try to persuade other countries, especially in the middle east, that they should not seek to acquire and deploy nuclear weapons.

Mr. Dalyell: Does the hon. and learned Gentleman accept that, at least according to Lord Zuckerman's article in "Nature", the Americans now think that on technical grounds there is no need for testing? Even if the hon. and learned Gentleman gives me or other hon. Members who have intervened a frivolous answer, can he explain how Sir Hugh Beach, a distinguished general, could sign a letter to *The Times* suggesting that? We need an answer from the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Campbell: I know better than to give the hon. Gentleman a frivolous answer to any intervention, and especially the one that he has just made. Not only the distinguished scientist to whom the hon. Gentleman referred but the former head of the Los Altos laboratory is on record as saying that it is not necessary to engage in a regular programme of testing to be satisfied that nuclear weapons are functioning.

It is customary on these occasions to pay tribute to the courage and professionalism of our armed forces and, in this debate, to the courage and professionalism of the Army. I do so with conviction borne of recent experience. During the visit by the Select Committee on Defence to Split and Zagreb it became abundantly clear that everyone in the House and in the country could be proud of the remarkable contribution in extremely difficult circumstances of our armed forces in the two United Nations efforts.

I found some resentment because there was a sense that the public perception in Britain was that the British effort as part of the UN effort rested only on the activities of the Cheshires. There is a great deal of pride in the activities of the Cheshires, but some people were anxious to point out that the logistical, engineering, transport and medical support was extremely high. The conditions in which that support was being given were frequently difficult and made substantial demands on those who provided it.

To those of us who visited Zagreb it seemed that the calm, almost matter of fact way in which substantial responsibility was being accepted and discharged could only be regarded as being in the finest traditions of British forces. It is conventional on these occasions to say how much we value them, but 24 hours a day, in Northern Ireland and especially in the former Yugoslavia, the qualities that we admire are being put to the test. It is right and proper for the House to acknowledge that.

5.54 pm

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): I am pleased to take part in the debate, and I am rather surprised at being called at this time. My interest is primarily a constituency one and my comments may be a little more parochial than those of some of my hon. Friends, because the heart of my constituency contains Catterick garrison, one of the largest Army bases in the country. It also has other military installations. It is a great tribute to those who serve or who have served in Catterick that their presence is viewed positively by the population of Richmond and the surrounding areas. We have a particularly strong and proud association with the Green Howards.

A succession of garrison commanders has built up an impressive track record of good community relations. Even more important is the obvious professionalism and dedication of locally stationed units to their training and other tasks. Two weeks ago, I visited 521 company of the Explosive Ordnance Division, effectively the bomb disposal team for the north of England. It is stationed at Catterick and I cannot speak too highly of the commitment and excellence of its men.

"Options for Change" means an upheaval for Catterick garrison as much as for the rest of the Army. The long-established presence for the training regiment and other units of the Royal Corps of Signals is to end and that is viewed locally with some sadness. I was pleased to hear from the Minister that infantry recruit training is to be concentrated at Catterick and that the 19th mechanised brigade and other units yet to be determined are to move in. I think that that will mean an increase of about 2,000 in the number of military personnel and their dependants associated with the garrison.

The Army has gone to some lengths to keep local civic leaders and planners fully informed of the changes, and the continued use and further expansion of the garrison has been strongly welcomed. I add to that welcome, having long believed that more of the Army should be stationed in the north of England in any case. Much of the Army is recruited there and it makes sense to concentrate infantry recruit training at Catterick.

I should like to make two points about the huge movements of people and material in and out of Catterick. First, a decision has yet to be announced about the use that the Army will make of the facilities currently occupied by the Royal Air Force Regiment a short distance from the garrison. The future of that base has major implications for local education provision and possibly for the design of roads giving access to the A1. The sooner a decision can be announced on this matter, the better.

Secondly, the reorganisation of Catterick camp will involve the departure of thousands of people and the arrival of thousands more with accompanying vehicles, tanks and so on. Much of it will require the redevelopment of areas of the camp, and it adds to an investment of over £100 million. It is a vast management undertaking. The commander of the garrison and his chief of staff and their assistants are able people who have provided an intricate master plan for how the whole exercise will be managed.

My concern is that the personnel in these positions seem to change so frequently that continuity of management and decision taking become extremely difficult to maintain. We are considering a four or five-year project, operating on a huge scale with rigorous management of infrastructure development, housing stock and all the movement itself required. A bit of stability is called for in the team of people given the task of carrying it all out.

Catterick garrison will continue to be a welcome feature of north Yorkshire, and the local civilian population look forward to continuing to have the Army as neighbours. We shall all work together to ensure that the garrison is an attractive, well ordered and peaceful place for a large, and now a larger, part of our Army to live. I make no apology for speaking at length about Catterick, which is the largest centre of population in my constituency. I shall now deal with the crucial role of many of the Army's support services which are also stationed at Catterick garrison.

About 1,200 civilian jobs at the garrison are to be market tested. I strongly support the principle of market testing across as wide a range as possible of the Government's activities. It is a valuable spur to greater efficiency and can give well deserved opportunities to the private sector.

I notice from the Secretary of State's statement earlier this month that it is believed that the savings flowing from

[Mr. William Hague]

the market-testing process in the Ministry of Defence will fund up to 2,000 additional places in front-line units of the field Army. That alone is sufficient justification for the process. However, my constituents who work at the garrison would welcome assurances that the market testing process will be open and fair and will give the opportunity for efficient in-house bids to succeed.

A few weeks ago, I visited the REME workshops at Catterick. The excellence of the work carried out there to keep Army units functioning and on the road is beyond dispute. Many of the 180 people who work there have been there all their working lives and started there as apprentices. They know every piece of Army equipment inside out, and they have often been called upon to work round the clock to prepare units to move—most notably in recent weeks with the preparation of vehicles to go to Bosnia. In my view, an in-house bid put together by these people would take some beating, but a categoric assurance from the Minister that they will have every chance to make such a bid successful would do much to dispel what I believe are unjustified fears in the vicinity of the garrison.

The House will have gathered from what I have said that my constituents show a keen interest in the future of the Army and that many have a direct stake in it. Like me, most of them believe that the overall reduction in the size of the Army is a painful necessity rather than something to be welcomed. The end of the cold war justifies a reduction in our military effort and expenditure. On the other hand, it makes it more difficult to know just what sort of Army we should have.

The speed and complexity of modern warfare suggests that our forces should, in the main, be highly mobile and heavily equipped, yet the most frequent demands on them are to serve in Northern Ireland or in roles such as we see in Bosnia, where they are required to perform a more conventional infantry function. Such contrasting duties make flexibility very important, and mean that a decent interval between emergency tours, as identified in the Select Committee report, is essential for training and retraining. The decision a few weeks ago to retain an additional two regiments will undoubtedly help.

With that modification, I believe that Ministers have made the right judgment about the overall size of the Army that Britain should sustain. If the Army, at its new size and in its new configuration, becomes overstretched, we must be more careful about taking on commitments rather than think that we must have a larger Army or go back to one of the size that we had during the cold war. I would not like to see further adjustments to "Options for Change" which would be at the expense of the Navy and Air Force, which it is all too easy to forget when unexpected demands are made on our armed forces in Northern Ireland and Bosnia, are in the absolute front line of our national defence.

Here I must refer to some of the remarks of the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid), who spoke for the Opposition. He seemed to hold various contradictory positions about total defence expenditure and about the resources given to the Army. He attacked the possible overstretch of the Army and we listened with care to what he said about that, but he also said that a Labour Government would not have any greater defence expenditure than we have at the moment. The question whether expenditure would be lower or different in some way was left open, but if there is no commitment to greater expenditure and if the Army is overstretched, I think that what he wanted to say was that he would like to have a larger Army at the expense of some other parts of the armed forces, and that may be a perfectly coherent and respectable argument.

Mr. McWilliam: Perhaps it would have been easier if we had had a statement on defence estimates debate last year, but we did not have one. This is an Army debate, and that is what we are dealing with. I caution the hon. Gentleman to read the Select Committee report very carefully. The Green Howards, who are doing their stint in Northern Ireland, and are doing it extremely well, are one of the units that we were referring to which spent excessive nights out of bed and suffered from serious overstretch.

Mr. Hague: I entirely accept the point made by the hon. Gentleman. I have read the Select Committee report. I am talking at the moment about the remarks of the hon. Member for Motherwell, North. The announcement that the 29 per cent. reduction in defence expenditure voted for by the Labour party conference was partly retrospective and was to be backdated to 1984-85 was a startling revelation. I hope that the hon. Member will be going to the Labour party conference this year to explain that the huge reduction that it voted for has mainly taken place already and that it need not vote for such proposals in the future.

The hon. Member attacked the Government for an "unwillingness to face hard decisions", but I thought that he rather ran away from some hard decisions too, particularly on the question of the redundancies to be announced tomorrow. It is easy to whip up an emotional argument about redundancy notices being sent to officers who are serving and who may be under fire in Bosnia or Northern Ireland now, but would it be any fairer to say that a redundancy notice can be served on someone who is about to go to Bosnia or who has just come back from Bosnia? It would be a ludicrous way to decide who should be made redundant from the Army. So before the Opposition accuse the Government of being unwilling to make hard decisions, they need to reconsider how they have run away from hard decisions themselves today.

I support the stance and the policies of the Government, but I ask them to bear in mind the points that I have made about the future of Catterick garrison.

6.6 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I want to deal with five areas, and I will try to be as brief as possible, but I should like to press the Minister a little on nuclear tests. I realise that it is almost impossible for the Government to make a statement in the House today if the Prime Minister is negotiating in Washington at this very moment on this matter, but I hope that we can at least have an assurance that, when the Prime Minister returns, we will have a clear statement of the position.

As I understand it, the Americans have now made it clear that they do not consider that a regular testing programme is essential to maintain the credibility of their deterrent. It is very unlikely that they will be willing for Britain to go on testing in Nevada without paying very much larger sums of money to do the testing and, if they decide to give up, they will probably be totally unwilling to allow us to carry out tests. So I hope that, when the Prime Minister comes back, he will make a statement to the House making clear what new arrangements we have made with the Americans about testing.

I would argue that, if we want to press for non-proliferation in the world, we must give up testing when it is quite clear that many experts are now satisfied that even if we wish to maintain a nuclear deterrent we do not need to test anyway. I would also argue that we must try to reduce our nuclear capacity again if we want to have any credibility in pressing for non-proliferation. It is absolutely outrageous to me, therefore, that we should consider the expenditure on tactical air-to-surface missiles when it would be an escalation of our nuclear capability. It would be difficult to persuade others that it was perfectly all right for Britain to expand its nuclear capacity but that they should not do so.

I therefore hope that we shall have a speedy review of the whole of this area and will build up a credible case from this country for non-proliferation.

Turning to the Cheshires, I was pressed very hard by many of my constituents when the decision to merge was announced, and I made it clear to them that it would have been totally illogical for me to plead with Ministers for a change in Government policy when I have always argued in favour of defence cuts; so I did not do that and some of my constituents were not too pleased. On their behalf, however, I must say that they are very pleased that the Government have announced the reprieve of the Cheshires. I also pay tribute to the service which they are performing in the former Yugoslavia.

Some of their relatives have told me that they find it difficult to understand that their sons are out there trying to prevent people from dying of starvation but are not trying to prevent those same people from dying from bullets. They find that difficult to cope with when, throughout history, warfare has always involved attempts to starve populations, sieges and so on. I make a strong plea that it is not enough to have troops there providing humanitarian aid. We should use all possible power to establish peace and persuade people to live peacefully together. It is difficult to go on providing humanitarian aid in the current circumstances.

Conservative Members do not seem to understand the sensitivity surrounding redundancy notices. Recently, in an engineering firm in my constituency, the personnel officer made people redundant. He called them into the office, told them about the redundancies and sent them home immediately. I suggested that that was insensitive because they might want the opportunity to discuss with other workers what action they might take. He justified sending them home on two grounds: first, when a person's world was almost coming to an end because of redundancy, that person wanted the opportunity immediately to discuss it with his family; secondly, when people had that shock, their efficiency was not as good, and it was easy for accidents to occur.

Although it may be important in the management of the whole Army to inform people at the same time about redundancy, it does not ensure the most efficient action of individual soldiers for them to be told when they are on active service. When it involves the safety not simply of the individual soldier but of other soldiers serving with him, it is insensitive to serve the redundancy notice on him at that time. It will be difficult for the soldier to discuss the redundancy with his family; therefore, it will increase his anxiety. In addition, when a person who believed that his future within the Army was secure receives the shock of redundancy, it may affect his military capability, however well trained he is.

On a totally different issue, the Army pay office is to be moved. The Minister will be aware that part of the pay office is in Ashton. Although it is in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon), many of the people who work there live in my constituency, and it is a substantial employer in Tameside. There is much concern at the decision to move the pay office from Ashton, probably to Glasgow, although the Minister said that a final decision had not been made. There is great disappointment in Tameside that the Government did not think of it as a site. I still hope that they will reconsider it.

At Ashton there is the pay office and the audit section which has been civilianised over the last three years, with the recruitment of new staff. Many were attracted to work for the Army in the audit office in the belief that they would have long-term job security. Now they will not have that security because, if the pay office moves to Glasgow, policy has been agreed that the last in will be the first out. Therefore, there is a danger that many of the people who were recruited to work in the audit section in Ashton will be made redundant and people working in the pay office will move to the audit section.

That is not efficient. In addition, it is grossly unfair to people who in some cases gave up reasonably secure jobs, perhaps not as well paid. I hope that the Minister will examine the position and will consider the unfairness of making redundant people who were recruited to the audit section within the past three years.

I am disappointed that, in their development of "Options for Change", the Government have not taken account of the whole picture in regard to defence lands. If they wanted to improve the efficiency of the Army and the other services, they should have examined more carefully the use of defence lands. The position on defence lands has been a mess almost since the first world war. Most were acquired during the first and second world wars. There was very little logic about acquisition. It was done in the emergency of war, and lands were taken over on the basis of the quickest and easiest solution at the time.

The Ministry of Defence has been reluctant to give up defence lands. Great pressure built up in the House and outside in the 1960s for the release of substantial areas because they were no longer required. Eventually, the Government were persuaded to set up the Nugent committee, in 1969, I think. The committee was packed with people sympathetic to the Ministry of Defence. Even so, four years later—the establishment of the committee having been a delaying tactic in itself—the committee recommended that the Ministry should release substantial amounts of land because they were not being used for manoeuvres to the extent that the Ministry had claimed.

Sadly, very few of the recommendations of the Nugent committee were implemented. Some access was gained at Lulworth cove and other places. Around barracks in urban areas, some land was sold for housing, but on the whole the Ministry of Defence held on to most of the land. Throughout the 1970s and the early 1980s the message from the Ministry was that eventually land would be released. For some reason, in the mid-1980s the Ministry started to change its tune and argued that it needed extra land.

Mr. Robathan: There is a certain illogicality in what the hon. Gentleman is saying. The hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) talked about keeping more troops, which I applaud. As we know, we must bring troops back from Germany. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that defence lands are under severe pressure for training. Indeed, territorial and regular units cannot get on training areas because they are so busy.

Mr. Bennett: I understand that argument. I am aware that certain defence lands are used almost to the optimum, but other areas are not used to anything like the same extent. All I am arguing for is a thorough review. In "Options for Change" the Government did not examine the implications of the use of defence lands. They have not been prepared to answer questions in the House about a review. There are areas which the Government should consider.

The Nugent report made it clear that there were unexploded bombs and other ammunition in substantial areas, particularly in northern Northumberland, which had been used for military exercises during the second world war. There was a programme to try to clear those areas to bring them back into recreational use or other military use. Because of the Falklands war, the bomb disposal activities were suspended. Although activities resumed after the Falklands war, with the conflict in the middle east the bomb disposal experts were again taken away. I would certainly argue that much more of that land could be made safe and used for essential military exercises or released for use by the general public.

We need a proper review. The Minster says that there is a review, but in its report just over a year ago the Audit Commission was extremely critical about the fact that there seemed to be no proper strategy for the use of Ministry of Defence land. There seemed to be considerable pressure for exercises to take place on some sites, but other sites seem hardly to be used at all. If we develop an increased peacekeeping role in the world, the exercises and training manouvres are likely to change and it may be possible to carry out those exercises where people are involved in other activities rather than in totally secluded areas. We need a proper review before there is another haphazard Government attempt to acquire fresh land.

The Minister will be aware that there was a public inquiry into claims by the Ministry of Defence that it needed more land in Kent. There was then the question whether the Ministry should take over more land at Holcombe moor. There was a great deal of upset around Bury about the prospect of part of the moor being taken over for military exercises. The Government told the public inquiry that the land was absolutely essential for military exercises and the inquiry found in favour of the Government. Then, perhaps for political reasons, the Government suddently changed their mind and announced that they had decided not to continue with their proposals.

Last autumn, the Government proposed to take over the Cnewr estate in south Wales. Again the proposal was not based on any rational plan. The Government really need to carry out a proper review. There needs to be a proper debate in the House about how much land the military needs for its exclusive use, how much land it needs for exercises but which also could be used by the general public at other times and how much it all costs. So far, there has been no effective response from the Government to the criticisms of the Audit Commission.

My final point concerns arms sales. I do not consider that it is very graceful for Britain to be selling arms around the world, but I understand the argument that, if we do not do it, other people will and that, allegedly, we are extremely choosy about those to whom we sell arms and that we try to choose people who are not likely to use those arms against us or our soldiers. However, some of the messages that I have been getting from the former Yugoslavia suggest that some of the arms used by various factions there have come from some very odd places.

If we are to sell arms, we must work hard to ensure that, when we supply people with new arms, we do not set in motion a chain of second-hand arms sales which ultimately lead to some of those weapons ending up in the most obnoxious places in the world.

Mr. Frank Cook: Cascading.

Mr. Bennett: Cascading, as my hon. Friend says.

The Government should consider the possibility that, when arms are sold, attempts should be made to persuade those who are modernising their weapon systems that, as part of the deal, we should buy back the old weapons so that they can be destroyed and taken out of the arms circuit. It is appalling to see the consequences of the cascade of arms throughout the world, particularly in some parts of Africa and in the former Yugoslavia. It seems stupid for us to encourage the arms trade and then to be asked to provide peacekeeping forces to separate people who are using weapons that we have not supplied directly but have allowed to cascade down to the combatants in those areas.

Mr. Robathan: Which particular peacekeeping operations does the hon. Gentleman have in mind that involve British troops who are likely to be under attack from British arms?

Mr. Bennett: I very much hope that our troops do not become targets in the former Yugoslavia, but we are on a knife-edge in that country, and the situation could escalate.

I am told that some of the weapons finding their way into the former Yugoslavia were manufactured in Britain. I have not been there, so I speak not from experience but from the messages that I receive from my constituents who have members of their families serving there. The Gulf war is another example.

Mr. McWilliam: I got back from Bosnia last week. The only weapon we saw that was not of indigenous Yugoslav or former Warsaw pact manufacture was an old American tank in Croatia.

Mr. Bennett: It is clear that arms are percolating through the world and increasing tension. If we continue selling arms, we must look at the ways in which we can reduce the use of second-hand weapons to create areas of tension in which we are then asked to perform a peacekeeping role. It will be far better for people not to have the weapons for the conflict than for our soldiers to attempt to maintain peace between warring factions.

6.25 pm

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminster): Before I reach the main purpose of my speech about the two reports before the House, I should say a word or two about the Defence Committee's visit to Bosnia. It was covered quite extensively yesterday in speeches by my colleagues on that Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers), and the hon. Members for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook), for Walsall, South (Mr. George) and for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson). I strongly recommend that hon. Members read those speeches, all of which I whole-heartedly endorse.

However, I should like briefly to make one or two new points. First, I extend the thanks of all members of the Select Committee to those members of the armed forces and in the Ministry who organised and hosted the trip. In the extremely dangerous circumstances in which our soldiers operate, it is not always easy, necessary or welcome to receive a delegation of parliamentarians. However, we were given a very warm welcome and I understood from those who greeted us that they appreciated the fact that we went to see what was happening. I certainly have a very much better understanding of the appalling tragedy being enacted in that country.

I make three brief points arising from the visit itself. First, as the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) said, there is some resentment that there seems to be a perception in Britain that only the Cheshires are serving. The Cheshires are doing a magnificent job, and it is wonderful news that my right hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench have decided to reprieve them. However, there are also other units there doing a great job. I single out in particular the Royal Engineers, who have carved roads through virgin territory to enable United Nations aid to get through. Those roads can accommodate heavy-track vehicles two abreast through mountain passes and forests. The quality and calibre of their work is breathtakingly good.

I join the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East in paying tribute to them and to all our soldiers serving in the former Yugoslavia who are facing much greater danger than one might perceive from the limited casualties that we have suffered so far. The death of Lance Corporal Edwards was tragic and extremely unfortunate. He was most unlucky in that he was struck although he was in an armoured vehicle and quite heavily protected. A young officer was also wounded. We have suffered no other casualties as yet, and I pray that whatever casualties we may face will be limited.

However, our troops face increasing danger and I do not believe that the Bosnian situation can be sustained for very long at its present level. It seems to me that the danger is increasing daily, given the increase in the number of direct attacks on our troops. The officers to whom we spoke were gravely concerned about that, although the men faced it with their usual courage and equanimity: their morale was extremely high.

There is a limit to our ability to continue to provide the service that we currently provide and to sustain the limitations on our involvement. I do not believe that, if we try to continue for many more months, we shall escape more direct attacks, or escape being drawn into much more direct commitment to the conflict that we want. I must tell my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State that, in my view, unless we move forward—which will mean the fastest possible promotion of the Owen-Vance peace plan, or something very like it—we shall have to decide either to send in more troops to sustain our support, or to withdraw our troops. The current level has only a limited life.

Let me now deal with the reports. Although publicity has been given principally to the concentration on numbers and tasks which is evident in our report, the equipment side should not be forgotten. I am glad to see that my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement is present. We await news on the Challenger I upgrade and on the degree to which we may order more Challenger II or upgrade more Challenger I; the Army needs to know the details as soon as possible, in order to plan for the future.

We also await news on the MLRS III—the updated multiple-launch rocket system—and its air-launched equivalent, the 1238. I hope that the Government will be able to make an announcement in the near future; I believe that the MOD has carried out an operational search to assess the possible need and has concluded that both systems are indeed required. I hope that both will be supplied and that we shall not be forced to choose between the two.

I pay tribute to my predecessor as Chairman of the Defence Select Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates), who is now Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, with responsibility for security. He chaired the Committee for at least eight years and performed a splendid task. His report, produced a year ago, foretold the current problems of infantry overstretch long before my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) acknowledged the existence of any such problems. I am sorry that my right hon. Friend is not present to hear me say that.

The Select Committee report was greeted with some scorn by the MOD. In its reply—produced, I believe, in July—the Ministry stated that it saw no reason to review "Options for Change" at that time and hoped that the matter was now closed: I remember that phrase. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater is now present; I do not know whether he heard what I said, so I shall repeat it. The current Select Committee's predecessor criticised "Options for Change" and suggested that there were problems earlier than was suggested today by my right hon. Friend. I cannot accept that "Options for Change" was right and that only subsequent events have altered that.

Mr. King: I apologise to my hon. Friend for not being present earlier; when his name appeared on the annunciator, I was on the telephone.

We always made it clear that "Options for Change" must provide a plan to which people could work. We owe no less than that to the armed forces, whose personnel needed to know where they stood. We set out our plan clearly and, at the same time, made it clear that it might be necessary to review that plan. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces nods. If my hon. Friend studies the document from which I quoted, he will find the statement to which I refer. We said the same throughout the process and what we forecast is precisely what happened. My right hon. Friend the Minister has honoured the pledge that I gave then.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I did not come here to pick a squabble with my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater, but I have said that there are points that I wish to pursue with him. I have also said that, in its reply to the Select Committee report in July—my right hon. Friend had given up his job by then and I do not attribute this to him—the MOD said that, at that time, there was no need to review "Options for Change" and that it hoped that the matter was closed. I was going on to say that the matter was not closed and that our report—which followed from the report produced by the predecessor Committee—made several recommendations, which I have no doubt that hon. Members have read.

The Committee reached four main conclusions. First, it concluded that additional emergency tours—particularly the two in Northern Ireland and the one in Bosnia—had led to additional unacceptable contraction in the emergency tour interval for infantry units and, prospectively, for the armoured artillery and engineer units, which also do emergency tour plots. The average was supposed to be 24 months; now it is down to 16 or 17. Unfortunately, the welcome additions to infantry strength will not alter the ETP interval, either in 1993-94 or in 1994-95—or so we have been told by the Ministry. I regret that, because it means that we shall be left with a wholly unacceptable level of ETP commitment during that period, which is not covered.

Secondly, the report emphasised that, although the situation had been exacerbated by the non-availability of battalions undergoing amalgamation, the mismatch of commitments and resources looked set to continue after 1995 as new commitments arose. I heard what my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces said; I must tell him that I have seen no evidence that we are likely to be able to achieve a minimum 24-month gap between ETPs after 1995. If such evidence exists, I should be grateful if my Committee could see it. It strikes us as far more likely—given that more peacekeeping commitments are likely to occur in the next few years—that we shall continue to be unable to meet the 24-month minimum. It is common ground between the MOD and the Select Committee that that should be the interval between ETPs.

It was for that reason, and others set out in the report, that the Committee concluded, first, that a review of armoured reconnaissance strength was needed: the initial peacekeeping role that we are being asked to play calls for additional reconnaissance strength. I agree with the report of the predecessor Committee that we have cut armoured reconnaisance too much.

The report's main conclusion was that the remaining United Kingdom infantry amalgamations and disbandments should be cancelled. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces made great play of the costs of implementing the report's recommendations: he has named a figure of some £200 million. That exactly matches the Committee's assessment; although we did not include it in our report, I shall not quibble with my right hon. Friend. I suspect that the gross cost of reprieving the units involved would be in that region.

However, I do not think that my right hon. Friend dealt fairly with the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill). I do not accept that reprieving another seven battalions would mean that all the existing redundancies in those battalions stood and that the men concerned would be replaced entirely by new recruits. I am sure that, on reflection, my right hon. Friend will not persist in that view.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My point was that the front-line battalions that might be reprieved were, by nature, made up of young men who need to be recruited. Those whom we are making redundant are, on the whole, people who have served some time: most have served for more than 12 years. Obviously, some redundancies would be saved, but not very many.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I take issue with that. I do not think that my right hon. Friend has thought the matter through. I do not believe that, if seven full battalions were reprieved, my right hon. Friend would replace 75 per cent. of the personnel involved: I use that figure for the sake of argument. Were he to save, say, 50 per cent. of those personnel, on his figures, some £175 million a year would be saved for the next two or three years from the redundancy costs. Futhermore, there are ancillary costs to the Treasury.

That brings me to one of my hobby horses, but I shall resist the temptation to ride it too far. The Treasury will have to meet the additional costs of housing allowance, social security and other welfare payments. They will not affect the budget of the Ministry of Defence, but they will have to be met by the country. I believe that keeping these battalions in being would not cost the country a penny over the next two or three years.

I accept that we are proposing what amounts to a long-term reprieve, not something that would end in 1995. In that regard, I should like to make two points. First, I hope that the present economic plight of this country will not be eternal. When the economy recovers, it should be easier to fund a proper Ministry of Defence budget. Secondly, in 1995 or 1996, if various other things change, we may properly be able to make cuts such as are being put forward as being correct now. If nothing else, that would save us two years in which the emergency tour plot would remain at 17 months. People are expected to spend far too much time away from their families and their homes and it is regrettable that they will be asked to do so in the next two years.

On the question of the emergency tour plot, I do not want to go over old ground or to spell out eternally the point that I have just made. I should like, however, to refer the House to an answer, which I received on 17 February, concerning units due to replace those currently in Bosnia. When it goes to Bosnia, the 1st Prince of Wales Own will have had barely 12 months since its last emergency tour. Even more disturbing is the fact that those elements—and I believe them to be substantial—of 21 Engineer Regiment that will take over from 35 Engineer Regiment in a couple of months' time did an emergency tour in Northern Ireland last September.

A gap of that kind between emergency tour plots—especially ones such as Northern Ireland and Bosnia, which are high-risk operations—is not sufficient. At present, we are putting far too great a strain on our soldiers by asking them to undertake such commitments with such frequency.

I should like to have clarification of one or two of the points that have been made about the extra 5,000 troops to be put into the front line. We have been told that about 1,300 of the 3,000 additional men will go to the two restored battalions, and that the other 1,700 will be added to armoured regiments, the logistics corps and public-duty infantry battalions.

> "to reduce the need for augmentation from other units for operational tours".

The Select Committee will look further at this question. I should be grateful for an assurance that the 300-strong public duties increment, which has always been planned, is not included in this number and that it is additional to the 5,000 to whom we are referring. With regard to the 5,000, I shall be watching with some interest to see whether any misuse is made of mirrors in moving the 2,000 personnel from one part of our armed forces to another.

While I am on the subject of reprieve, I cannot resist saying that during my trip to Bosnia I was astounded to be told by the Cheshires that my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces, who had been in Bosnia the previous week, had told the Cheshires that he personally had reprieved them. *[Laughter.]* That is how it was put to me. It is a version of events slightly different from what I had understood to be the case. Anyway, I look forward very much to my right hon. Friend's being able to claim the reprieve of the other seven battalions which I hope will in due course be added to our strength.

I should like to take up another point that my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater made. I am glad to say that on this occasion I wholeheartedly agree with my right hon. Friend. I refer to the review of our use of troops in Northern Ireland. It seems that the only alternative to having additional forces is to find a way in which, without in any way reducing the cover for Northern Ireland and without increasing the risk in the Province, the troops who are involved can be used more efficiently.

We have heard some very good points about the areas in which we may be able to replace soldiers with members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. I feel strongly that we should be able to find a way of achieving a reduction from the very high number of soldiers—19,000—we now have in the Province. I think that I am right in saying that, when the noble Lord Bramall was Chief of the General Staff, we had only 9,000 soldiers in Northern Ireland. That is not so very long ago, and the risk at that time was probably perceived to be as great as it is now.

We should look very closely for ways in which a greater part of the peacekeeping and policing role in Northern Ireland could be transferred back to Northern Ireland itself, with the emphasis obviously on the Royal Ulster Constabulary. I very much hope that we shall be able to find a way of doing something along those lines.

The Select Committee has been criticised for not looking in greater detail at proposals concerning means of reviewing commitments. I do not see how we could reduce other commitments. I do not agree with some of my hon. Friends who asked whether it was desirable to keep our forces in, for example, Belize, where we provide a very useful service and have the advantage of being able to train our men in jungle warfare. Nor do I see any immediate prospect of our being able to withdraw from the Falklands. With the sole exception of a close look at Northern Ireland, it would be very difficult properly to reduce our commitments.

We are on much more difficult ground when we talk about potential new commitments. There is no doubt—I do not think that this will be disputed—that the world is a very different place. The peace dividend for which we looked two years ago has disappeared. We cannot now look forward with any hope to a world in which we can afford to lower our guard as a result of the break-up of the Soviet Union.

My right hon. Friend, in opening the debate, talked about putting this whole question in a global context. I happily do so. I fear that the former Soviet Union increases rather than lessens the likelihood of war. With the stand-off between the old Soviet Union and the western alliance, we had the mutual nuclear deterrent, which had kept peace in the world for many years and looked likely to continue to do so. The Soviet Union has broken up, but there remains a collection of extremely powerful countries. The Ukraine still has 650,000 men under arms and 178 nuclear missiles—quite enough to blow the whole of Europe out of the water. Were those resources to be misused—were there even a threat of their being misused—we should need armed forces and a deterrent of the kind that was required when we were facing the Soviet Union.

Russia itself, currently in good and trustworthy hands, may not remain so. President Yeltsin is not secure, and the reforms are by no means safe. There is a very real danger —a danger of which the Russian leadership itself is acutely aware—that Russia will again fall into bad hands, the hands of ideological, militaristic communists. Were that to happen, the west, including this country, would need to deploy weapons not very different from those that have been needed for the past four decades.

My hon. Friend was right to say that the Americans are cutting their defence, as are most of our European allies. I do not suggest that we should not cut ours; I say that we have cut too much and that our allies are cutting too much. The fact that our allies are cutting back is no excuse for our doing so. I note with some amusement that, in the debate in another place on 10 February, Lord Orr-Ewing, who was a Defence Minister 30 years ago, pointed out that at that time he had looked at the 20 years preceding his term of office. He had found 54 operations in which British forces had taken part. None of them had been anticipated by the Ministry of Defence and none had been allowed for in the forward planning of the day. I take some comfort from the fact that nothing has changed, but it is slightly cold comfort.

Finally, the Army needs leeway for the reason that I have just mentioned. We cannot plan accurately for or know precisely what we shall be called on to meet in the next 10 to 20 years. We now have a high-tech Army with immensely expensive equipment. We cannot make it and unmake it according the peaks and corresponding dips in our economy. We must take the long view—that view is expensive, but we must not shirk from it.

With due deference to my hon. Friend the Member for Davyhulme, I shall quote his grandfather, Winston Churchill, who wrote, on 17 December 1904:

> "The Army is not like a limited liability company to be reconstructed, remodelled, liquidated and refloated from week to week as the money market fluctuates.
>
> It is not an inanimate thing, like a house to be pulled down, or structurally altered at the caprice of the owner; it is a living thing.
>
> If it is bullied, it sulks; if it is unhappy, it pines; if it is harried, it gets feverish; if it is sufficiently disturbed, it will wither and dwindle and almost die; and when it comes to this last serious condition, it is only revived by lots of time and lots of money".

This country made the error of cutting back too hard on its defences in the late 18th century and again in the late 19th century and before the first and second world wars.

[Sir Nicholas Bonsor]

We have not yet reached the stage where the Army has withered and died; it is strong and healthy, but it is too small. We must ensure for the future that we learn the lessons of the past and that we maintain and nurture the Army at a level that will match the needs of the years to come.

6.51 pm

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): Despite the helpful, constructive and informative contribution from the hon. Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor), I find the debate depressing. My morale must be nearly as low as that of the soldiers who will face redundancy when the announcement is made tomorrow. Morale is low because every soldier, like most hon. Members, know that this decision, like too many others taken by the Government, has been made mainly, although not exclusively, on the basis of financial considerations.

The terms of the redundancies have not been planned as one might have expected. A further search by the Treasury for more financial savings next year and the following year will squeeze resources for the military even further. I do not take the same degree of satisfaction that the Minister of State for the Armed Forces took from the fact that there are many volunteers for redundancy. My experience is that the officers and other men in the Army are wholly professional. They joined the Army for a career and to do a specific job. The fact that there are volunteers for redundancy suggests the depth to which the morale of the services has fallen.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Most of the non-commissioned ranks do not serve for more than 22 years. The hon. Gentleman talks about a career in the Army, but it is, by its nature, only a first career. Many will inevitably leave at about the age of 40 and have a second career until they retire. Therefore, the people volunteering for redundancy will often be leaving only a few years before they usually would, and they receive a substantial capital payment when they do so.

Mr. Maginnis: The Minister's response is peculiar. When 3 million people are unemployed, I cannot understand why anyone would wish to volunteer to leave the Army. If the Minister is implying that the soldiers who are volunteering for redundancy signed up for 22 years but are leaving after 17 or 18 years, he is admitting that the Army is losing its most experienced soldiers when a reorganisation is taking place; that cannot be good. He said that the vast majority of officers who were to be made redundant had also volunteered, and that cannot be good, either.

I have two questions for the Minister. First, why is the Army feeling much more strain under "Options for Change" than the Royal Navy or the Royal Air Force? I am not advocating that we should lean more heavily on the two latter arms of the services, but I cannot understand why the infantry is feeling more strain. Has the sharing of the pain been unequally distributed? Will the likely future commitments exacerbate the pressures on the Army, specifically the infantry, more than those on the other two services?

I ask my second question reluctantly. Should such vast amounts of the defence budget for the Army be devoted to the allied rapid reaction corps? Does Britain's contribution of a single armoured division justify its disproportionate cost, especially when future commitments appear to be of low intensity?

Many hon. Members have said that the unprecedented reduction in the number of infantry battalions was far too severe and badly thought out. Recent minor adjustments, which reprieved two battalions, are of course welcome, but I am aware that a certain sleight of hand is being employed. I refer specifically to the enforced amalgamation of four Royal Irish battalions into two battalions, which occurred without adequate consideration of operational needs in Northern Ireland. I shall deal with Northern Ireland later.

Another issue that needs to be examined especially carefully is the extent to which the remaining battalions are undermanned and whether they are likely to achieve their establishment. Mention has been made today of the Cheshires in Bosnia and their need to be reinforced with 150 members of the Royal Irish Regiment. I noticed that every other regiment serving in Bosnia was mentioned, and I take some pride in drawing attention to the fact that 150 members of the Royal Irish Regiment are there: perhaps it is because they are so professional and have integrated so well under the command of the Cheshires that nobody has noticed the difference. Someone who was in Bosnia last week told me that they are playing their full part and have integrated very well, to the extent that, on the Cheshires' special day, they joined them in wearing the oak leaf.

If we continue to overstretch the remaining battalions, it seems inevitable that the problem of overstretch will increase. As the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) pointed out, young soldiers currently serving three, six, or nine years will come under increasing pressure from their young wives and families not to continue, simply because of the increased periods of separation. The result is that fewer will continue in the forces after their initial period of service. That vicious circle must be addressed urgently.

The Minister will recall that, with some reluctance, my party supported the amalgamation of the Ulster Defence Regiment with the Royal Irish Rangers. We did so because we believed that it would be in the best interests of the new Royal Irish Regiment. We recalled, of course, that the Royal Irish Rangers had derived from the Royal Ulster Rifles, the Royal Irish Fusiliers and the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. Once, the part of the United Kingdom from which I come contributed three line regiments. With amalgamation, we were left with one line regiment—the Royal Irish Rangers—and the Ulster Defence Regiment, which, despite repeated promises, was, sad to say, always treated as the poor relation, although the soldiers of the UDR must operate under pressures which no other regiment has to endure.

We wanted to retain our regiment of the line, so what was proposed seemed to make reasonable sense. Certain promises were made at the time. For example, we were told that, once the amalgamation had taken place, there would be a period of consolidation and that no changes would be enforced for at least a year. Instead, because we require two additional battalions to be sent to Northern Ireland —six-month roulement battalions, it should be remembered—they are given their own TAORs—tactical areas of operational responsibility—at the expense of Royal Irish battalions which are there permanently and are commanded by officers on a two-year attachment.

That does not make sense. A roulement battalion coming in for six months has a learning curve of up to three months with, at the end, a rundown period of two, three or four weeks. To remove from the command of TAORs the resident Royal Irish battalions and to replace them with roulement battalions is arrant nonsense.

Many fail to understand the basis on which amalgamations have taken place. For example—I shall use the old UDR terms—11 UDR was amalgamated at one stage with 2 UDR to become 6 UDR. If hon. Members find that confusing, I assure them that I am equally confused, because we now have the amalgamation of the old 3 UDR with the old 11 UDR, forming 3 Royal Irish. One need only look at the amount of territory that that battalion must cover, and remember that one half has its own TAOR while the other half is placed under command of a roulement battalion, to understand how difficult it is for any commanding officer to maintain, under the most difficult circumstances, any sort of cohesion and morale.

The same happened to my old battalion, 8 UDR. It was amalgamated with 2 UDR to form 8 Royal Irish, one half of which comes under the command of a six-month roulement battalion and the other half of which has a TAOR of its own. Those changes were made selfishly—as it were, for political reasons in the military sense—and gave little thought to the real needs of the people of Northern Ireland and those serving in that difficult theatre.

I do not want to be told that that happened because six-month roulement battalions are capable of performing duties for much longer periods than are the members of the Royal Irish. The position is changing because of the pressure on battalions to return to operational duties within a shorter time scale. The hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) spoke of the great stress under which soldiers operate. Can the Minister justify full-time members of the Royal Irish Regiment having to be on duty, week after week, for between 70 and 80 hours? Does he have any concept of how that affects the entire families of those soldiers—their wives, children, mothers and fathers? The strain is enormous working under such stressful conditions, remembering that Royal Irish soldiers are never off duty. They are on duty, whether literally or at home with their families.

I fear that such stress is forcing young men to leave the regiment after serving their initial three or six years. The human resource in Northern Ireland is finite. We do not have scope to work our soldiers to the extent that is now required of them. They should not be treated as cheap labour, putting it bluntly. Nor should they be an alternative to the RUC. I listened carefully to the comments of the hon. Member for Upminster about the RUC accepting more responsibility in less dangerous areas, if it is possible to find such areas in Northern Ireland. The hon. Gentleman will be aware how easy it is for the IRA and other paramilitary organisations, which are mobile, to move into previously quiet areas.

If those areas exist and can be identified, of course it is fine to say that the RUC should assume the duty of policing them on its own. However, I hate to disillusion hon. Members about what seems a logical suggestion, but until we have a political dedication that matches the dedication of the police and the military, that will not be possible.

Over the past 20 years politicians have dedicated far too much time and effort in Northern Ireland to trying to placate those who refuse to be placated. The upturn in violence is a direct result of that. Everyone in my party, and everyone in the House, deplores the upsurge in loyalist violence—but that upsurge is a direct result of some nonsensical political decisions that have been made over the years.

It is no slight on the RUC to say that the situation today is less conducive to their policing on their own than it was three, four or five years ago. I know that hon. Members will be disappointed to hear that.

There is something else that I want to say, but it is futile for me to mention it, because I do not think that my making a proposal will have the wished-for result. None the less, it is especially disappointing that, when adjustments were made to the number of battalions, no one thought of trying to retain two general service battalions for the Royal Irish Regiment. I believe that that would have been worth while partly because, with six home defence regiments, we need to bring on young officers who will eventually take over as commanding officers of the home battalions. Furthermore, great benefit could be achieved by giving NCOs, including senior NCOs, scope to move away from the home battalions for periods of service with general service battalions.

My main criticism of "Options for Change" is that, when the proposals were made, they did not properly assess the needs of our Army and of the United Kingdom.

I shall allude briefly to Bosnia. There was much truth in what the hon. Member for Upminster said about the position in which we shall find ourselves there. I have never believed that we should be in Bosnia with such an open-ended and ill-defined commitment. It is folly to commit any of our ground troops without some artillery and air support. The problem will be exacerbated if the Americans, with their high-level drops, come into the equation. The frustrated combatants in the area will find that our troops are the only people on whom they can vent their anger.

I finish by congratulating all our forces who carry out their many and varied duties throughout the world—not least in my part of the United Kingdom—with such dedication and discipline—a discipline which I do not believe that any other army in the world could match.

7.15 pm

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I am not sure whether I should declare a pecuniary interest in the debate. To be safe rather than sorry, I should tell the House that I am in receipt of a very small military pension.

I wholeheartedly endorse the congratulations that the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) offered our armed forces, who do a splendid job. In a society that has increasingly little regard or respect for its institutions, the Army is generally respected and retains the affection and support of the vast majority of the British population—as, indeed, do the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force. The Minister of State said much the same. Deservedly, the Army remains a respected profession at all levels of society. Today's troops are serving all over the world and doing a fine job in support of our national interests, earning continuing respect.

The Army remains above politics such as we see in this place, because its allegiance is to the Crown and it remains

[Mr. Andrew Robathan]

motivated by traditional values that most people respect, such as loyalty and service. The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) talked about the finest traditions of the British Army. I was delighted to hear those words coming from the Opposition, because those traditions and values are respected, and are enhanced by the excellent regimental system, which I should not like to see harmed in any way.

It is my intention not to denigrate that fine institution but to suggest means by which it may be improved for the 21st century. The Minister knows that I, like many others who have spoken in the debate, am unhappy about "Options for Change" and the especially severe reduction in our infantry manpower. I agree with almost every word that my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) said.

The Minister may disagree, but I am told by many people in the Army that there is now severe overstretch in our forces. The Foreign Secretary has said as much. Furthermore, the overstretch and the planned reductions have led to a worrying situation with regard to morale and spirit. The hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) —sadly, he is not now in the Chamber—said the same. This is one of very few occasions on which I agree with him.

The implementation of the redundancy programme, in the present climate, is leading many excellent officers to apply for redundancy. Those are the dynamic people who are capable of finding civilian jobs even in the recession. The programme is encouraging first-class expertise to wither away. It would have been better by far to have made a more objective assessment of the soldiers and officers that we require for the future. Many excellent officers and soldiers of all ranks wish to remain in the Army, but it is at officer level in particular that valuable expertise is being lost. As the Minister said, long careers involving people over the age of 40 are largely restricted to officers.

Instead of cutting manpower and overstretched regiments, Ministers might have considered a thorough reappraisal of the command structure. In my opinion, it is grossly top-heavy. There are to many chiefs and not enough Indians. That was illustrated when, as part of "Options for Change", the chiefs decided to cut the Indians but, as I understand it—my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces may correct me —they have not yet decided how many of themselves to cut. By considering the serious savings to be made in the higher echelons of the armed forces, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State might find that he has greater scope for saving more battalions of infantry.

It is not for cost purposes that I make remarks on the command structure: it is because I believe that a much better service could be provided with less bureaucracy. At present we have a top-heavy bureaucracy which strangles initiative. In any conflict it is seen immediately to be largely irrelevant. Few people would disagree that lean command structures in organisations, in business and industry, as well as the armed forces, are more efficient. They make decisions more quickly. They can find solutions to problems more easily.

I fear that the Ministry of Defence and the Army are swamped by huge staff structures, both civilians and military. That is not to criticise the people in those staff structures, because they work extremely hard, whether soldiers or civilians, and for good motives. However, that is not to say that the work could not be reorganised more efficiently.

I have seen able, hard-working and intelligent individuals beavering away at paperwork which is entirely unnecessary. Their efforts are wasted. The work is nugatory. My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster mentioned 55 contingency plans, none of which was ever used. That is the sort of work which is not necessary.

A senior person at the top of a department—in the Army, a senior general—requires work to justify his existence. Therefore, there is an enormous amount of work. Of course, all the generals need to visit military establishments. Therefore, everyone is required to work hard to ensure that the visit is a success and not the disruption which everyone can often see that it might be.

Depending on rank, a general requires back-up officers. That is not unreasonable, and I support it. So one major general will probably require at least one brigadier, a brace of colonels and a few lieutenant colonels and majors to keep him and his department working. All those important people in the structure, not surprisingly, interfere where they should not do so.

The hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone spoke about Northern Ireland. I recall that in the Province, every activity of the guardsman on the street would be monitored not only by the corporal in charge of his patrol, the platoon commander in charge of his platoon and the company commander in charge of his company, who all had reasonable input into his operational needs, but by the commanding officer, who had some good interest in what he was doing. Then there was a brigadier who was fascinated with the activities of the guardsman and interfered in operations which could not possibly be within the scope of his knowledge. There was a major general, and there is still, the commander of land forces, who was equally fascinated by what was happening on the streets.

On top of it all, there was a general officer commanding. They were all excellent men. The general officer commanding also had his input into what was going on. The minutiae and detail of operations do not require everyone at every level from lieutenant general downwards to involve themselves in the activities of private soldiers. Nevertheless, I fear that this culture has been inculcated into the ethos of peacetime command.

Of course, reductions are planned in the number of senior officers in proportion to the overall reductions in the size of the armed forces, including the Army. I am not sure that we know yet what reductions are planned. But we should take a more radical look at the structure. The figures that I have are for 1992. In that year, there were eight full generals to 10 lieutenant generals in the Army. That must amount essentially to a one-on-one command structure, which I was always taught was not a good idea.

There were 54 major generals—as many as there are battalions of infantry. Yet in a war, a major general is expected to command about 12 battalions or regiments. To turn to the Ministry of Defence, let us take as an example the quartermaster general's department. The quartermaster general has a director-general of logistic policy, a director-general of transport and movement, a director-general of ordnance services and a director-general of equipment support, all of whom are major generals and, I am sure, excellent, hard-working people.

The director-general of equipment support has five directors of equipment support under him—another five brigadiers, I assume. All those people deal with important matters, but one must ask whether they are working to best effect and whether more junior, less exalted people could do the job better with fewer staff and less bureaucracy. Could it not be streamlined?

In equipment procurement, I remember the "great success" of the Nimrod programme and the even worse success of the SP70—the self-propelled gun 1970. After about 18 years of work on the SP70, it was scrapped. I do not know how many millions of pounds went down the tube with it.

Let us examine the other armed forces. In 1992 there were the same number of air chief marshals—six—as there were in 1950 and 69 per cent. of the number of air marshals and air vice marshals—a total of 52 in 1992 compared with 75 in 1950. Yet the total number of personnel had fallen from 183,000 to 83,000. As I understand it, in the Air Force a flight lieutenant normally commands an aeroplane. A squadron leader commands a flight. A wing commander commands a squadron. A group captain commands a wing. In the Navy, the number of admirals to ships does not bear examination.

One of the difficulties of the structure of the Army is that young men and women join the Army at 17 or 18 at all levels for reasons about which one reads on recruiting posters. They join for camaraderie, mates, excitement, adventure, travel and a trade. You name it, you will see it. However, the scope for adventure and excitement rapidly diminishes after the age of 30, 35 or 40. But people stay in the forces for reasons of security and career structure.

Therefore, in order to have good senior officers, one must offer a decent career structure. But essentially the armed forces, and the Army in particular, should be for the younger men and women because the nature of service life requires agile,, fit, quick people and similarly agile quick, fit minds. I recall that John Hackett was a brigadier who parachuted into Arnhem at the age of 33. When I joined the armed forces in 1970, he was still a general almost 30 years later.

If we wish to attract able people into the Army, as we do at present, we must provide an attractive, long-term future for able people, but not a career to 55 for all who want it. We need many junior officers but only a few senior officers. So we should encourage most people to leave at the age of 30, 35, or 40. Unfortunately, in a sad catch-22, it becomes increasingly difficult to find a job in civilian life as one gets older. Indeed, some of us have to come into Parliament because we cannot find a decent job elsewhere.

The people who are accepted into the armed forces generally go through a difficult selection process. They are generally vigorous spirits with good minds and they have rigorous training. I believe that the Ministry of Defence could do more to encourage business men and industrialists to give former soldiers and service personnel a chance at later ages to enter their businesses. Surely British industry would benefit from some of the dynamism and high standards which are recognised by all sections of the House to be an attribute of many forces personnel.

Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Minister mentioned new measures, including in particular the Services Employment Network. I welcome it and hope that it will operate along the lines that I have described. There have been many initiatives for work placement schemes. My right hon. Friend said that they would be increased. It would be for the benefit of companies because they could see whether ex-officers would be dynamic, capable and flexible employers and managers. Dynamism, capabilities and flexibility are required in the armed forces.

If we can achieve a much leaner command structure, the Army could be more outward looking and less introspective for the next century. It could turn to a security policy to co-ordinated national strategy instead of the narrow MoD strategy, which is adopted all too often today.

Looking further forward, we need to reappraise our defence and security needs, but it is difficult to do so with top-heavy organisations. Our future defence policy may need to be more closely linked with foreign policy and Home Office policy in counter-terrorism matters, for national security. Clausewitz said that war was an extension of diplomacy by other means. Perhaps we should simply say that all defence is an extension of diplomacy by other means. The 21st century will need flexibility in reaction to events. The present structure is notoriously inflexible, with too much evidence of entrenched interests.

I do not intend to be negative, and I hope that I have made positive comments on the future of the Army. If the Army is to continue as a respected institution, there is need for a review of its structure. We need fewer staff officers, civilian and military, we need less bureaucracy and we need far fewer senior officers with all that they bring with them so that the front line can concentrate on the proper training and operations, about which we have heard today, which are the proper job of the Army.

I value tradition, and I value the old regiments. I value the paraphernalia of bands, of uniforms and of mascots. We have one of the best armies—if not the best army—in the world with all that paraphernalia. Let us not concentrate on that and suggest that everything should be rationalised. Our Army is the envy of most of our allies and of most of our enemies. I am not sure that we are allowed to talk about our enemies any more, if they exist.

I know that, in the Ministry of Defence, Parkinson's law has had a field day, as it has had in the rest of Whitehall. There are too many bureaucrats who exist purely to write letters to each other. I urge my right hon. Friend to change the peacetime culture, and to make the Army and the Ministry of Defence better for the 21st century. We should encourage young officers to join for a short while and we should then encourage industry to assist in resettling them into civilian life. That would make for a leaner, more effective and cheaper command and organisational structure throughout the Army. Let us have fewer chiefs and more Indians. That may help to keep our excellent Army and the rest of the armed forces respected both at home and throughout the world.

7.31 pm

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): I am not sure whether the hon. Member (Mr. Robathan) should ever be employed by the armed forces recruitment office. He gave a very depressing picture of the Army chasing its own bureaucratic tail. That is not my impression of its operation, or of the requirements that society places on the armed forces.

[Mr. Andrew Welsh]

The hon. Member asked whether the Army could be streamlined. The answer must be yes, although it depends on what we are streamlining. We ask the armed forces to walk the paradox of democracy. We expect them to be trained in the arts of war, although in the hope that they are never employed. When we ask them to go into action on our behalf, we expect and demand the highest standards of quality of end product. Thankfully, we have never yet been disappointed by what the armed forces have produced in extreme crises.

The Government still have not got the regimental amalgamation and conventional defence policy correct. They are wrong in their approach. I welcome the cancellation of the amalgamation of the Royal Scots with the King's Own Scottish Borderers, but I continue to press for the cancellation of the merger between the Gordon Highlanders and the Queen's Own Highlanders. Having got their corrections half right, I encourage the Government to get it absolutely right and to retain the Queen's Own Highlanders and the Gordon Highlanders.

The present altered programme produced by the Ministry of Defence represents a quick fix which does not address the problem of overstretch in the infantry because it merely scratches the surface of the problem. I could employ arguments against the remaining amalgamation of Scottish regiments based on economic and social grounds, such as the impact of new unemployment in areas of high unemployment, especially during a recession. There are also the effects on local authorities because there are extra demands on scarce housing and on other resources. A compelling case against amalgamation could be made on those factors.

Instead, I shall concentrate my opposition to the regimental amalgamations on military and defence grounds. I hope that even the Ministry of Defence will recognise those arguments. The Government have not taken on the overstretch argument. The situation facing the world is far worse than the Ministry of Defence will yet admit. In answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), the Secretary of State said last month:

> "I am satisfied that at present we can meet all our obligations without undue overstretch."—[*Official Report*, 12 January 1993; Vol. 216, c. 750.]

Those words may come back to haunt the Secretary of State. His certainty is not shared.

It may be that, yet again, the Government are overtaken by events. In a series of spheres of operation, the Government are prone to being overtaken by events. They are dragged into policy decisions by outside forces and events rather than taking policy decisions themselves. It seems that defence is included in the list.

There have been significant changes in the strategic environment since 1990 which could not have been foreseen when "Options for Change" was produced. Those changes include the violent break-up of Yugoslavia, growing instability in the middle east and the growing military commitment to the United Nations. Other events loom on the horizon. If the Owen-Vance peace proposals are accepted or if another peace proposal is eventually implemented in Bosnia, there may be significant implications. I have not yet heard the Government address those potential problems.

Despite those problems, the Secretary of State, in evidence to the Select Committee, referred to

> "a combination of developments, none of which, we believe, in any fundamental sense changes the assumptions that were made at the time of Options."

The Committee replied in its report:

> "We find this barely credible."

The Committee is not alone in finding the Government's response less than credible.

The Select Committee slated the amalgamation in its report. It states:

> "everything in the past three years leads us to the bleak conclusion that the proposed rundown goes too far, and that . . . even minor contingencies are imposing an unacceptable strain on the Army."

The report makes it clear that the developments of the past three years

> "point to a greater rather than a lesser demand for armed forces capable of interventions over a wide spectrum of activity."

The number of infantry battalions envisaged is simply too few to meet all peacetime tasks. The Ministry's own target of 24 months between operational tasks is not being met. Even a slight change in commitments will make it absolutely impossible. Since 1991, three extra units have been deployed on six-month unaccompanied tours. Even without taking that duty into account, deployments filled by the infantry should be backed by 10 extra battalions if the two-year period between tours is to be maintained. The add-back given by the Government of two battalions that were scheduled to be lost by amalgamation still leaves a deficit of eight battalions. The Ministry has unilaterally decided that the two-year interval is essential if operational efficiency and morale are to be maintained, yet the current tour interval is 15 months.

I draw to the Minister's attention words in a letter sent to all Scottish Members by Lieutenant-General Sir John MacMillan

> "The reprieve of two units does not mean that the interval will increase. It merely means that it will not decrease quite so far . . . By the MOD's own criteria the infantry is going to be overstretched unless or until unit deployments are reduced."

I have not heard the Government addressing the overstretch issue this evening. I should like to hear the Minister meet the points made on an all-party basis by the Select Committee and by the military.

The Select Committee clearly agrees with the argument on overstretch. It states:

> "In the light of the chronic overstretch being experienced by the Army, which shows no sign of abating, we recommend that the Government cancel all amalgamations or disbandments of UK infantry battalions currently planned."

Again, there is clear disagreement between an all-party Committee and the Government. I look to the Government to refute the arguments being put. If they cannot, they should agree with what is being said to them and they should reconsider overstretch and the requirements that we place on the military.

If the Government do not reconsider, the inability to meet the 24 months between operational tasks will have a number of serious consequences. Army units are unable to train for high-level warfare. Only one unit instead of seven is presently being trained in the Army's top-level training unit. If troops were required to go back to the Gulf, for example, they would find it more difficult to adapt to the situation quickly because of the training constraints. The lack of a 24-month interval will place intolerable strains on the family lives and marriages of soldiers serving in the Army and it will be much more difficult to retain staff long-term the longer these conditions are maintained.

The Army has traditionally made up in quality what it has lacked in quantity. What certainty can there be that that will continue if it cannot maintain the two-year interval which the Ministry of Defence has said is essential? The Government should never forget that every European country, with the exception of Eire, has conscription and can therefore quickly mobilise in an emergency. The United Kingdom strategy has always relied on full-time professional forces maintained at the highest readiness. Training is thus essential, and the Government must look again at the strains that their policy is imposing on the armed forces.

The Ministry of Defence based its decisions on which units should be amalgamated on simple projections of the numbers of young men in given recruiting areas, irrespective of whether they had proved to be good recruitment areas in the past. The policy failed to recognise that Scotland has always sent more men to the forces than the United Kingdom average. At present, 12 per cent. of the Army comes from 9·8 per cent. of the United Kingdom population. That is in no small part due to the close links between regiments and their recruiting base. The amalgamations will break the tie on which recruitment has depended. Experience of previous amalgamations has been that when new regiments cover larger geographical areas local ties are broken or weakened.

We are about to sacrifice an intangible asset; we do so at our peril and long-term cost.

Defence requirements are being distorted by the Government's obsession with Trident nuclear weapons. Defence expenditure has declined from 5 per cent. of GDP in 1985-86 to 3·8 per cent. in 1992-93 and is projected to decline even further to 3·4 per cent. in 1994-95, so it is clear that something must give. That something should not be our conventional forces and certainly not our Scottish regiments.

In its first report on the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1992", the Select Committee said:

> "Either sufficient resources must be found or the Government must acknowledge its inability to meet all the commitments and take the political decision to reduce or abandon some of them."

I agree wholeheartedly. The one commitment that the Government must abandon on defence and cost grounds is the Trident programme—not to mention the other nuclear missiles which they are buying and cannot possibly use—and the one commitment that the Government must make up their mind to honour is the one to all Scottish regiments and battalions.

Mr. George Kynoch (Kincardine and Deeside): I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman could explain that to the people of Rosyth. I believe that he is also arguing that it should get the Trident nuclear contract.

Mr. Welsh: The people of Rosyth know what the Government are doing to them and how insecure employment is under this Government. If there were a move towards more spending on conventional forces, there would be jobs at and a future for Rosyth. The Government cannot guarantee the workers that.

I repeat my plea to the Government that they should rescind their decision and retain the Queen's Own Scottish Highlanders and the Gordon Highlanders, whose record of valour, expertise and service merits their retention. The logic of our strategic needs demands their continuing and independent contributions. I hope that the Government will listen and take action on this plea.

7.43 pm

Mr. Winston Churchill (Davyhulme): The hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) would not expect me to agree with him about Trident, but I endorse his tribute to the role of the Scottish regiments in the British Army and the disproportionate contribution of recruiting in Scotland, which is severely threatened by the "Options for Change" cuts. I also echo the tribute paid by the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) to all our forces serving in Northern Ireland—in particular to the men and women of the Royal Irish Regiment, who serve there 365 days a year. We owe them a great debt. On a personal note, I commend the hon. Gentleman for the gallantry that he has shown for so many years serving in what was the Ulster Defence Regiment.

When the cynically named "Options for Change" was announced in July 1990, no options were brought before the House of Commons or before the nation: all options were foreclosed by the Treasury. At that time, the world was a different place. In the wake of the dramatic transformation of the Soviet Union, the tearing down of the Berlin wall and the overthrow of the Ceausescu dictatorship, hopes were high that we might be moving into an era of "peace in our time". Sad to say, and as before, such expectations proved illusory.

This complacency was abruptly shattered within a week of the publication of "Options" when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait and we found outselves having to fight a war in the Gulf which stretched even our pre-options armed forces to the absolute limit.

Since then, with the fall of Gorbachev and the spread of civil war and instability across vast areas of the former Soviet Union and the Balkans, the optimism that characterised "Options for Change" cuts has been shown to be utterly misplaced. Moreover, "Options" failed to take account of the already tiny size of Britain's armed forces. The Government seemed utterly oblivious of that when they embarked on reorganisation. The fully mobilised strength of Britain's Army at the time stood at 424,000 men and women. Post "Options", by the turn of the century it is likely to be no more than 300,000. That compares with the Swiss army of 600,000 the Swedish army of 750,000 and the army of tiny Finland, which is 700,000 strong.

Of course, ours is a professional, full-time Army. That fact is continually reinforced when we visit the forces of the Crown. The Defence Select Committee was privileged only in the past week to visit British forces in Bosnia; that brought home to us the fact that ours is, without exception, the finest Army in the world.

Ultimately, however, it is not only calibre that counts —important though it is. There comes a point when numbers count, too. The numbers have already been cut far too much. Already our commitments in Bosnia and Ireland are straining our Army to the limit. Having recently returned from Bosnia, I join my colleagues on the Select Committee in paying tribute to the wonderful job that our forces are doing there. Some of the United Nations forces arrived in theatre with trainer shoes and little sports bags—that was the extent of the back-up they

[Mr. Winston Churchill]

had. I am pleased to say—this is by way of tribute to our Ministers—that our forces arrived in theatre wanting for nothing in terms of their equipment and their capability to do [illegible] limited job of humanitarian assistance assigned to them.

There are almost as many Royal Engineers in this theatre as there are members of the Cheshires—the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers and many other units are involved. The back-up is fantastic and it is the envy of all the other nations involved in the United Nations peacekeeping force in Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia.

The Government have acknowledged that three extra battalions are required on account of unaccompanied tours which were not foreseen at the time of the "Options for Change" statement; two in Northern Ireland and a third, reinforced, unit in Bosnia. The Government's objective of a 24-month gap between tours means a requirement for an extra 15 battalions.

While the House welcomes the Secretary of State's reprieve for two battalions, that represents but one seventh of what is required to bring the emergency tour plot up to a 24-month interval. On the Government's calculations of the figures involved, we are still 13 battalions light and that is before any response to an outbreak of peace in the former Yugoslavia, which might require the deployment of a reinforced British brigade as part of a United Nations force. The reprieve of 3,000 men, out of the 40,000 to be cut from the Army, goes nowhere near meeting the urgency of the situation.

Neither the Ministers, the mandarins nor the Ministry of Defence's army of desk-bound warriors will pay the price for the overstretch of the British Army. It is the Tommy at the sharp end who will pay the price, as has been brought home time and time again to those members of the Defence Select Committee who have had the opportunity to visit the Army in their operational bases.

For instance, in Northern Ireland we found units that had spent 269 nights out of bed in a single year. Just before Christmas I visited the 2nd battalion of the Light Infantry at Tidworth barracks on Salisbury plain, which had been deployed to Northern Ireland four times in two years. My right hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench cannot treat men and their families in that fashion. Those members of the armed forces who depend on us deserve better than that.

If the Vance-Owen plan succeeds—we must all hope that it does—and there is a high-level political agreement, a United Nations force will be required to translate that into peace on the ground and it is variously estimated at anything between 50,000 and 100,000 men. We shall be invited to contribute about 7,500 men, which is a reinforced brigade and represents an additional 5,000 British troops in the region. At that point, "Options for Change" will go by the board, because, given the already overstretched state of the Army, there is no way that such an addition can be accommodated.

The time has come for an urgent reappraisal of commitments and resources. Meanwhile, there should be an immediate halt to all regimental amalgamations and suspensions of armoured and infantry units, as unanimously recommended by the Defence Select Committee. Ten regiments should be reprieved from amalgamation—adding back five—and Army manpower should not be allowed to fall below an absolute minimum of 125,000, which would require the adding back of about 6,000 men according to present plans.

In opening the debate, the Minister of State for the Armed Forces helpfully costed the Defence Select Committee's recommendations at £200 million per annum. He paraded that as an enormous potential burden on the taxpayer, when it is but a tiny fraction of the defence budget let alone of Government expenditure. It has to be set in its proper context, against Government plans to spend £350 million during each of the next two years to make those men redundant.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor), the Chairman of the Defence Select Committee, made clear, that is not the end of the cost of the redundancies but merely the beginning. We must also consider the loss of income tax and national insurance contributions, the cost of housing allowances and the unemployment and social security benefits that they will draw. All told, it is unlikely that the cost to the taxpayer of going ahead with "Options for Change" during the next two years would be less than £1,500 million, which effectively doubles the redundancy costs that the Government have acknowledged and published.

I submit to the Secretary of State that, for the same cost, every one of the remaining threatened regiments could be funded until the year 2000. He and his colleague, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, should deal with that problem. The time has come for the Secretary of State and his ministerial team to go into battle for the British Army against the depradations of the Treasury. They owe it to the famous regiments that are facing extinction, many of which have a glorious history of gallantry and sacrifice going back 300 years, as well as to the soldiers, and especially the non-commissioned officers and middle-ranking officers who are in the middle of their careers.

Furthermore, I appeal to the Prime Minister to get a grip on the Government's tunnel vision of viewing everything departmentally without taking the overall cost into account. We are told that every Government Department is strapped for cash and I can believe it. That is all except one—the Treasury. For example, if the Secretary of State for Defence comes up with a plan for getting rid of 58,000 service men—I acknowledge that it was not the present Secretary of State but his predecessor—or the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has a plan for getting rid of 80,000 workers in the mines and related industries, the Chancellor of the Exchequer will instantly reach deep into the taxpayers' pocket to get out a cheque book and write a cheque with many noughts on the end. In the case of the Army, it will be £1·5 billion, and £3 billion in the case of the mines. That cannot be a sensible or a cost-effective use of taxpayers' resources and must be questioned by the House and by Ministers.

There is an urgent need to give the men and women of the armed forces, who are the finest of their generation, the future and the quality of life that they deserve. They do not have a union to represent them, nor do they ask for one. They rely on Ministers and on the House to treat them fairly. They are not only the finest in the world, but the envy of the world, as has been said, so let us give them the backing that they deserve.

7.59 pm

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): This will be something of an historic occasion, as I confess agreement with almost every syllable uttered by the hon. Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill). However, the House should not be too surprised at that, as the hon. Gentleman and I, together with our colleagues on the Select Committee on Defence, have sat through the same inquiries, and the same question and answer sessions, and have made the same visits.

When something is so rational that it hits us between the eyes with the strength of a thunderbolt, we must take notice. I understand that the Minister of State for Defence Procurement—who may respond on behalf of the Government if he is fortunate enough to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker—is a rational person. I have also noticed that he has been paying careful attention and taking note of everything that has been said.

I commend to the Minister the rationale that has been displayed and discovered today by a number of hon. Members, not only the hon. Member for Davyhulme. The hon. Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor), who has the privilege of being Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence—a post which he fulfils with great distinction—gave the House the benefit of a well-measured resumé of the Committee's findings. He laced it effectively with brilliant observation.

I also commend the speech of the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) who, while offering an entertaining piece for our consideration, presented a thesis with many serious ideas. I also commend the contribution of my colleague from the Scottish National party, the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh), and that of the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis), who offered us plenty of serious matters to consider.

I associate myself with the well-presented requests of my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid), particularly his demand—dare I call it that—for a full-scale review. I shall dare to call it that as, in October 1988, I made the same plea. That was the only time in my political career to date that I have ever been able to address the House from the Dispatch Box. At the time, Conservative Members tried to laugh me out of court. The chickens are now coming home to roost with a vengeance, and I shall not apologise to the House for gloating a little.

I associate myself with the issues raised by the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell), who referred to comments that I made last night about the strange rules of engagement controlling the United Kingdom contingent to the first United Nations Protections Force, which provides the medical and hygiene facilities for battalions engaged in the Krajina region. It is clearly understood that the standards of conduct are such that, if members of the United Kingdom force are required to relinguish their small arms and side arms to Serbs or Croats, those members are instructed to do so. Our forces can shoot to protect their lives, but cannot shoot to retain their weapons, which is a contradiction.

Therefore, my first question is: did the Ministry of Defence and Her Majesty's Government know of that instruction? My second question relates to intelligence gathering. It was our understanding that United Nations rules forbade any exercise intended to gather intelligence of a political, social or military nature. We train our service men and women to operate in an area that they try to control through hearts and minds, as well as gun and bayonet.

The roads up to Vitez and Tuzla are partly controlled by obtaining such information and maintaining forms of dialogue with the opposing forces that straddle the area. The Spanish on the Mostar road use a different technique. Spanish is not spoken there anyway and the forces simply dash to and from point A to point Z at a rate of knots. That does not do them too much damage, other than mechanical damage. It seems strange that, in having to maintain a relationship, our men have to break the United Nations rule that does not allow intelligence gathering. Did the Government know about that?

My third question is easy—most of my questions are easy, but I am sure that the Government will not want to answer them. If the Government knew of the rules, are they doing anything about trying to change them, as they seem preposterous?

My fourth question is predictable and relates to the overseas living allowance of service men—an evergreen issue. The problem emerged during the Falkland islands incident and it now applies to UNPROFOR 2. When those forces are moved from Germany to Bosnia-Herzegovina, where they do not go out as there are no nightclubs or cinemas, their overseas living allowance is removed.

There is an additional source of resentment as UNPROFOR 1—which provides the medical and hygiene units for all the battalions in the Krajina region—is paid for by the United Nations. The Government receive an income for the presence of UNPROFOR 1 in that region. But UNPROFOR 2 does not derive that income. I understand that to be the case and I am sure that the Minister will correct me if I am wrong. UNPROFOR 1 service personnel resent the fact that their force is being paid for by the United Nations and they are losing their overseas living allowance by virtue of their presence in Krajina.

I shall now comment on "Options for Change". We have sought and gained a leading role and are responsible for the management structure and future operation—please God—of the Allied Command Europe rapid reaction corps. Participation in the rapid reaction corps is so sought after that it is 250 per cent. over-subscribed—everyone wants a place on it.

A rapid reaction corps requires rapid reaction training, rapid reaction equipment and rapid reaction discipline. However, that in itself is not sufficient; it also requires rapid reaction planning, rapid reaction procurement and rapid reaction preparation. We may have complete or partial provision in those sectors, but we fall down badly in the most critical sector of all: rapid reaction politicians.

For a period of at least two years we have been flagging the fact that overstretch, particularly of the infantry, has been going disastrously wrong. The fact that it took the Government so long to react is proof positive that we lack rapid reaction politicians, at least in the positions that count.

Mr. Ian Bruce: We should not be too critical about politicians being slow. One of my constituents was told when he first started work at Horton Heath laboratories that they would close in a year or so. He has now retired, having had a full career there. I would not press Ministers to close things too quickly.

Mr. Cook: That intervention may have been enlightening for some people, but I am merely a simple man. I do not know whether to say that the intervention has beggared my understanding or buggered my understanding.

It has taken the Government so long to take on board even a portion of the argument that has been made plain time and time again. Anyone who could believe that the cunning plot hatched by the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) would come right at the end of the day must believe in Enid Blyton. It is quite preposterous. The hon. Member for Upminster told the House that in July we were told that there would be no further arguments about the issue.

The House should take note of the lack of rapid reaction by Ministers. So far all my questions have been easy to answer, but my next one is easier still. What exactly prompted the statement on 3 February? After all the delay, denial and refusals, what on earth happened to make the Government change their mind on that day when 10 days before nothing that they said even approached what they said then? I wonder whether I will get answers to any of my questions.

8.10 pm

Dr. Charles Goodson-Wickes (Wimbledon): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook). He is a distinguished member of the Select Committee on Defence whose unanimous report is well worth reading.

In declaring my interest as a Regular Army reserve officer I approach the debate with the same misgivings which last year made it impossible for me to support the Government in the Lobby on the logic and mathematics of "Options for Change". My misgivings are offset only by delight that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence recently not only followed my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary in admitting the existence of overstretch, a concept which had hitherto been denied, but did something about it, to the relief of our ever adaptable and tolerant soldiers and, not least, their families.

I pay tribute to the Secretary of State for Defence and to the Chairman and members of the Select Committee who have exposed so many fallacies in Ministry of Defence arguments. I still believe that the statistical basis for "Options for Change" is fatally flawed. How is it that arguments produced on pre-Gulf war situations are still considered basically valid? After all, the Gulf campaign was sustainable only because of the collapse of the Warsaw pact, when we were able to cannibalise equipment in Germany to enable our forces to use it.

Until the Secretary of State is able to convince many hon. Members in all parts of the House—I shall not embarrass the many Opposition Members who are profoundly sound on defence matters—that our arithmetic is not up to the standards demanded by the Secretary of State for Education, we shall continue to press the point.

When "Options for Change" was first conceived it was rightly calculated that, owing to the reduction of commitments in BAOR and Berlin, there was no further need for 19 major units. That is fair enough, but "Options for Change" earmarked for cutting no fewer than 31 major units. It took the deployment of British troops to Bosnia and the overdue reinforcement of our commitment to Northern Ireland to bring matters to a head. My right hon. and learned Friend responded about a fortnight ago with a modification involving 3,000 men.

The saving of two infantry regiments—it is the infantry which has been hardest hit—reduces the apparent shortfall to 10 major units. I appreciate that in debating such issues it is dangerous to use round numbers. Matching units to manpower is not an exact science, but I still believe that we have got it wrong for our existing commitments, let alone any other commitments. The Minister may tell us of future reductions in our commitment to Cyprus, Belize and even the Falklands, but I remind the House that Bosnia came out of the blue and we had to turn down any commitment to Somalia.

Although we cannot be everywhere, yesterday's debate on international peacekeeping pointed to further developments when British troops would fulfil the role of United Nations peacekeepers. I emphasise "peacekeepers", because there was no mention of peacemaking. I shall keep it at that lower level. It is entirely appropriate for us, as permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, to be willing to give a lead, given our special expertise, in an international peacekeeping role throughout the world.

We have never achieved the aspiration of a 24-month interval between tours in Northern Ireland. Several hon. Members have spoken about that. If my mathematics is right that leads to three possible options. First, we can abandon the unrealistic policy of a 24-month tour interval; secondly, we can stick to that policy and cut commitments, let alone undertake what are quaintly described as "discretionary commitments", which seems a somewhat odd combination of words; thirdly—this is the course that I recommend—we can look at the whole options exercise again and examine it much more rigorously than it has been examined previously.

We are about 6,000 men short, which means that the threshold is wrong by about 6,000 men. That recommendation is not lightly made. There have been profound arguments about costs and counter costs and what can be set against this, that or the other. However, if we are to match our tasks to resources, that is what we need. Only in that way can we get rid of existing problems and confidently look our allies in the face and say that we are fulfilling our roles properly throughout the world.

To argue about whether "Options for Change" was Treasury-driven is sterile. We have gone far beyond that, and have to look at the problem as it is. Of course it would be naive not to recognise the economic pressures. I should like to suggest to the Minister one or two areas where he could make savings which would enable our fighting soldiers properly to fulfil their role.

First, why has "Options for Change" produced an organisation which seems to have very much the same shape but is smaller and has a top-heavy command structure? My hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) will get himself into much trouble with his senior Army friends. I would not want to enter the exercise of working out how many other ranks could be financed for the cost of a general's salary. There were one or two enlightening statistics in yesterday's debate, such as the fact that one ambassador was cheaper than one battalion. We shall have to examine such sums much more critically.

Secondly, civilian manpower has not been adequately addressed. I specifically exclude those civilians who release soldiers to do the job for which those soldiers are trained.

Why has the remaining civilian manpower been less rigorously examined than the armed services? Finally, why has the knotty legal problem of the deployment of reservists and, thus, the proper use of the reserve forces and the TA in the future not been thought through? We have not yet reached a sensible conclusion.

There are other, narrower points which I continue to find disturbing. I should like to use them today simply as an illustration of policies which I think have been inadequately thought through. There are two infantry points and two Royal Armoured Corps points.

First, on the infantry, the fact that our NATO allies have tolerated one or two battalions missing at any one time from 1 Division and from 3 Division not only prejudices the specialist roles of those forces being used in Northern Ireland, but puts at risk the leadership of the Allied Command Europe rapid reaction corps, which was so hard won and is likely to come under diplomatic challenge sooner rather than later.

Secondly—I declare an interest as a former member of the Household Division—I am deeply disturbed that the Foot Guards have had to take a higher cut than the infantry as a whole. I say that in view of their ceremonial and fighting roles, which are unique, and also because of the standards that they set, which go through the whole of the rest of the Army. It smacks of the ghastly phenomenon of levelling down, and levelling down is the sort of philosophy which Conservative Members and many Opposition Members feel should be roundly rejected.

With regard to the Royal Armoured Corps, my first point concerns our armoured reconnaissance units. We have heard many wise words from hon. Members who have seen the situation in former Yugoslavia, and there are many others who believe that the armoured reconnaissance regiments are uniquely well equipped to fulfil the sort of role needed in Bosnia. I refer the House to a speech made in another place on 10 February by the noble Lord Vivian, who speaks with special authority, having recently retired as a brigadier. His speech is well worth reading by hon. Members.

My second point is the extraordinary fact that, in the ACE rapid reaction corps, the recce element is provided by a Territorial Army unit. However expert that TA unit is, I believe it to be a contradiction in terms that the recce element of a rapid reaction corps should be drawn from people who follow civilian occupations and are, I believe, drawn mainly from the north-east of England.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): Will my hon. Friend accept that the recce element of the rapid reaction force could best be provided by reversing the enforced union of the two regiments of the Household Cavalry?

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: My hon. Friend and I share an interest in that very matter and I wholeheartedly endorse what he says. It is a matter that I drew to the House's attention in an Adjournment debate in November. I believe in the philosophy that, if one presents problems, one must come up with solutions. We have too few recce regiments and we have this ridiculous system of a union in the Household Cavalry whereby one service regiment will have to provide the same ceremonial duties as two service regiments have provided in the past. It is unsustainable. I have given the solution to my right hon. and learned Friend, and I very much hope that he accepts it soon.

Finally, I should like to make a point which is slightly different but which has deep significance for all of us who have the welfare of our forces at heart. I am informed that this year's Sandhurst intake is down by about 150 people out of 800—and that at a time of very high unemployment. It is a sign of the trouble that we are storing up for the future. If we cannot attract the right men and women into our armed forces at a time of high unemployment, we will see the effect not now but at the time when those people are leading our Army in the future.

In conflict, as in politics, the unexpected always happens. Military planners in the past few decades could hardly have foreseen an 8,000-mile supply line to a conflict in an island dependency, or western involvement in a tank battle east of Suez—an emotive phrase—in the 1990s. I must caution the House that, because we scraped by—I use the phrase advisedly—in those two conflicts, for reasons that we all know, we must not now be lulled into complacency that everything in future will turn out all right, that we can cut here and cut there but that it will all turn out right in the end. One day it will not.

I should like to offer another constructive thought to my right hon. and learned Friend. One certainty that we have amid the uncertainties is that in 1997 we shall quit Hong Kong. May I leave my right hon. and learned Friend with a suggestion which I believe to be sensible both militarily and politically and one which to me is mere common sense? Rather than adopting the view of the Select Committee, whose views I respect, I believe that there is a practical solution to the complex problems that lie before us. It would be sensible to slow down the implementation of "Options for Change" until 1997; in other words, to slow down the whole timetable. That would satisfy all the problems that I have posed to the House this evening, or at least a large part of them.

If my recommendations were taken up, it would then be sensible to take up the Opposition's suggestion of a full defence review, but I suggest that such a review should take place in 1997 so that our armed forces will then be properly equipped for the tasks which none of us can identify at the moment but which lie ahead of us into the next century.

8.26 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): There are other hon. Members who wish to speak and, even though they be on the opposite Benches, I think we should all restrain ourselves. My speech will therefore be truncated.

> "As former government servants who assisted successive British governments with their aim of preventing the spread of nuclear weapons, we urge the Government to declare now an indefinite suspension of British testing. We are convinced that it would be in Britain's best interest to do so."

That was a letter in *The Independent* of 18 February. Who signed it? Sir John Thomson, Sir Michael Palliser, Sir Anthony Parsons and Sir John Edmonds, the ambassador to the comprehensive test ban treaty from 1978 to 1980. For reasons of time I will not pursue that letter, but it must be well known to the Ministry of Defence.

But hon. Members may care to listen to this:

> "We believe this—"

that is, the call for a nuclear test ban—

> "is one of the most pressing foreign policy issues facing Britain. As the Americans, French and Russians have now realised, they have to restrain their own nuclear programmes to have any chance of avoiding global nuclear proliferation. Without a test ban as part of a strong non-proliferation regime, what case do we have for persuading countries on the

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

> **brink of developing nuclear weapons not to do so? . . . It is not too late for Britain to play again an influential disarmament role, in this and many other areas. But if disarmament does not set the agenda now, proliferation very shortly will. By banning nuclear testing, we can take an important step back from the proliferation abyss."**

Who signed that? Those well known left-wingers, Lord Callaghan and Lord Healey. Having spent the past 30 years listening to them on defence, I really think that, when they say it, the Government ought to give a more serious answer, and a more serious answer also to General Sir Hugh Beach and to Frank Blackaby.

I read carefully Lord Zuckerman's article in *Nature*. Having had many ups and downs with Solly Zuckerman for over 30 years, I know that, when he makes a plea like this, it is an extra reason for taking it seriously.

I want to ask two questions on it. In a report, Sidney Drell, John Foster, the director of the Lawrence Livermore Laboratory, one of the most distinguished in the United States, and Charles Townes, a Nobel prize winner in physics, gave it as their opinion that there is no need to test. When Russians and Americans think that there is no need to test, why do the British Government take a different view? At least there should be an explanation for that.

I quote from Zuckerman in *Nature*:

> **"In subsequent testimony before a panel of the House of Representatives Armed Services Committee (31 March 1992), Drell gave as his firm view that the additional and marginal gain in safety that could be derived from continued testing was less important than 'the political value, real or perceived, of a CTBT for strengthening or even preserving a non-proliferation regime'."**

Do the British Government disagree with that? We are entitled to be told.

On the second issue, I should have liked the Secretary of State for Defence to be here, because it is personal to him. It concerns public interest immunity certificates. The Defence Secretary testified in a second certificate that, as far as his Department's paper mountain was concerned:

> **"I have read all these documents and am satisfied that they are of the nature described."**

This relates to the documents in regard to the exports from Matrix Churchill and the Defence Secretary's locus in it.

The Defence Secretary, a Scottish QC himself, was content, like a policeman in court backing up the contents of a colleague's notebook, to agree with everything that the right hon. Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones) had said. He said:

> **"I have formed the opinion that for the reasons described in the hon. Gentleman the Member for Watford's certificate, with which I agree and whose arguments I adopt, that production of such documents would be injurious to the public interest."**

That is what the Defence Secretary went on record as saying.

In the House he later attempted to defend himself against accusations that he was among Ministers who had signed certificates to allow innocent men—that is, the directors of Matrix Churchill—to go to prison. He described the accusation as

> **"deeply offensive, deeply insulting and entirely without foundation."**

I watched him as he said that. I was taken aback when he went on:

> **"There is no way that a Cabinet Minister who has no idea what the defence in a criminal trial might be can come to any judgment as to whether the papers before him are likely to be helpful or harmful to the defence or the prosecution."—[*Official Report*, 23 November 1992; Vol. 214, c. 706-07.]**

That seems naïve in any Minister of the Crown, but the Defence Secretary is not exactly any Minister of the Crown. He is a Queen's Counsel, he is an experienced lawyer, and he is used to reading documents. As a senior lawyer, he must have known that it was the defence team who were trying to prise the papers out of Whitehall, and Customs who were going about obtaining PII certificates to stop them. What did the Defence Secretary think that the defendants were on trial for?

It is difficult for another Minister who is not in the Cabinet to answer in the House tonight, but I should like a letter about it. As with so much else that I have said on the Floor of the House, I shall submit it for his consideration to Lord Justice Scott. Incidentally, I say again that it is scandalous that the Scott committee, contrary to the undertakings given to Parliament when the terms of reference were announced, is expected to cope with answers that should be given by Ministers.

Because other hon. Members wish to speak, I undertook to be brief. I could have continued much longer on the subject.

8.34 pm

Mr. George Kynoch (Kincardine and Deeside): It is with pleasure that I take part in the debate. I shall try to cut short my comments, knowing that colleagues wish to speak.

Although I come from a business background, I speak with a family history of several generations in the Army, going back to the origin of the Gordon Highlanders. There I have a link with the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh). However, I was not impressed by his answer on the subject of Trident and Rosyth. I hope that he will explain to the people of Rosyth how getting rid of Trident will bring wealth and prosperity to the area.

Mr. Welsh: Will the hon. Gentleman explain to the people of the north-east why his Government are abolishing regiments? Can he explain why cuts in defence have been made by his political party?

Mr. Kynoch: If the hon. Gentleman will wait and listen to my comments, he will hear what I have to say on that.

In my constituency, support for the Gordon Highlanders is obviously strong, since it is the local regiment. Many of my constituents have given long service and have a long association with the regiment and feel strongly about its proposed amalgamation. It becomes even more difficult for them to accept the proposed merger with the Queen's Own Highlanders when they hear of the Gordon Highlanders being asked to top up the Prince of Wales Regiment in Bosnia in May because it is under strength, when that regiment is not to suffer merger or disbandment.

However, there is a clear understanding that the world has changed dramatically over the past few years. We lived for so many years in the shadow of the threat of the eastern bloc that we required to equip and man our armed forces accordingly. Thankfully, with all the deterrents which we and our allies have had, that threat was contained and never came to anything.

In 1987, when the Soviet Government, under Mikhail Gorbachev, initiated dramatic changes to the military posture of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw pact, it was

inevitable that our military manning would need to be reassessed. Since then, further dramatic changes have occurred throughout the world, with the unification of Germany, and so on. The proposals in "Options for Change", while not universally popular, recognised the need for change in the light of the changing world, although the planned reduction in Army personnel from 156,000 to 116,000 was highly debatable.

It was also then that the debate intensified and the term "overstretch" became commonplace. I recognise from my past business life that cool, clear decision making is necessary, especially when ground rules change. However, it is important to retain flexibility whenever possible when difficult decisions have to be made. For the latter part of my business career, the concept of over-capacity in relation to demand, and thus overmanning, reluctantly played a prevalent part in much of my decision making, but in business, once the decision has been made and the machinery has been stripped out or the work force reduced, flexibility has changed immeasurably. One has to assume that one has made the best decision for the business.

In international affairs, the variables are much more unpredictable. I welcome very much the recent announcement by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State on Army manpower and the changes thereto. The decision to reverse the planned amalgamation of the Cheshire and Staffordshire Regiments, and that of the Royal Scots and the King's Own Scottish Borderers, was welcome. That decision graphically illustrated the ease with which a reversal of merger could be made at that juncture, but not when we are further down the road. I welcome the flexibility which my right hon. and learned Friend showed. I hope very much that he will use it again in future.

I think it was George Herbert who said:

> "One sword keeps another in the sheath."

The responsibilities which international peacekeeping brings are indeed onerous and the Defence Select Committee report, in quoting my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, sums up succinctly the choice which faces us:

> "If boils keep on breaking out on the face of the world, our commitments could well increase—provided, that is, that we wish to maintain our position as a medium-sized power with a developed sense of international responsibility."

Hon. Members heard yesterday from my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary about the number of areas in the world where the United Nations is a peacekeeping force today. There are 13 operations with a fourteenth on the way. We are playing our part in this, and playing it well. We heard of the horrific scenes in the former Yugoslavia, a land which until a few years ago we knew as a holiday resort. Who would have thought, while sitting on the beach in Split in the 1980s, of the horrific scenes that would be prevalent there today and the humanitarian aid that is necessary to be provided for those poor people?

Of course we have to play our part in protecting the United Nations effort, and our armed forces are the best, the most courageous and the most efficient in the world.

The situation in the middle east is still not stable; the old eastern bloc countries are in a delicate state of stareteility and problems could erupt any day. At home, we still have a significant defence requirement in Northern Ireland.

All in all, our military commitments are still great, although they may be significantly different from before, when the cold war existed. We must determine whether we can fulfil all our commitments, or indeed whether we want to. If we do, we must man accordingly.

There is clearly the argument, particularly within the Select Committee on Defence, about the level of overstretch within the Army. Even with the revised total of 119,000 men announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State, opinion continues to be expressed that the emergency tour interval may not be extended as far as the target 24 months.

I received a letter today from Major General Hopkinson, the Colonel of the Queen's Own Highlanders, which refers to the deferment of the amalgamation from the King's Own Scottish Borderers:

> "This change of heart had been brought about by the inability of the infantry organised as proposed under Options for Change, to fulfil all the requirements expected of them. Even with the two battalion add back proposed the situation will be barely changed, and the reasons for this are clearly outlined in the Defence Committee's Report . . . The Scottish Division besides always providing battalions of the highest standards has proved that it is also able to maintain its battalions at the required strength."

He goes on to justify the Queen's Own Highlanders.

I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's agreement to review manning levels in the light of changing circumstances, but I urge him to keep an ever watchful eye on the level of overstretch within the Army. It is with this concern in mind that I ask my right hon. and learned Friend to ensure that, before the time for each amalgamation, he reassesses the current level of overstretch at the emergency tour interval against his target level in aiming towards that 24-month period. I fully accept that, inevitably, it will be more difficult during amalgamation, but would stress that once an amalgamation has been effected it cannot be reversed. Each of the proud regiments to be amalgamated has a recruitment area and a family source to feed on. Once amalgamation has taken place, that will be all but lost.

It is clear that, on present projections, we can reduce numbers. It is clear that the main assumptions in "Options for Change" are still valid, but it is important to base decisions on facts and not emotions and I urge my right hon. and learned Friend to be absolutely 100 per cent. certain of his requirements before he finally merges regiments such as the Gordon Highlanders and the Queen's Own Highlanders. He has adjusted his figures once already and obviously, with the Gordon Highlanders in mind——

Mr. Welsh: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kynoch: Other hon. Members want to speak and I am very close to completing my speech.

With the Gordon Highlanders in mind, I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will reconfirm that he will do the same again if the requirements demand it.

8.44 pm

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): There is an almost complete consensus in the House about the policy that the Government should apply to the future of the Army. I say that there is almost complete consensus because, sadly, there is one small group of dissent and that tragically, is on the Treasury Bench. I hope against hope

[Mr. John Home Robertson]

that Ministers are listening and that there will be further movement in the light of the debate and the unanimous report of the Select Committee on Defence.

I shall not detain the House for long because I was lucky enough to address it only yesterday on the subject of our peacekeeping role. We had the opportunity to discuss the growing need for peacekeeping operations under the auspices of the United Nations such as I and my colleagues on the Select Committee saw when we visited Bosnia just last week.

There is a desperate need for such operations in an increasingly unstable world, to protect suffering humanity, and no one is better at undertaking that task than the professional and highly equipped British forces, who prove it day in and day out in Bosnia and have done for many years in Northern Ireland.

It is downright irresponsible for any Government and indeed for the House to continue to overload our forces as is happening today. The House should join the Select Committee in insisting that the Government address the critical problem of overstretch in the Army. We should look at the evidence and analyse the task and the risk facing our armed forces. If necessary, in the light of other considerations, we should adjust the commitments that we are undertaking and, having done that, we should provide for sufficient forces to do the job. We should not do what the Government are doing now: burning the Army at both ends.

The Select Committee reached the unanimous conclusion that we need to add back another seven infantry battalions in addition to the two conceded by the Secretary of State for Defence on 3 February. I was delighted that one of the amalgamations that was cancelled on 3 February was that between my two local regiments, the King's Own Scottish Borderers and the Royal Scots. I hope to have the opportunity to celebrate with the Royal Scots in Northern Ireland before too long. I was happy and privileged to join the Cheshire Regiment in their celebrations in Bosnia last week. However, that concession is still not enough. I implore Ministers to look at the evidence.

Opposition Members, Conservative Members who voice the same opinion and all the members of the Select Committee on Defence are not suggesting that there should be an increase in expenditure on the Army. We are suggesting that there should be a 21 per cent. cut instead of a 26 per cent. cut in the size of the Army. We did that on the basis of the evidence that we have been able to glean. Clearly, it would be far better if there were a proper comprehensive defence review, but on the evidence that we have been able to obtain from the Department and elsewhere, there must be a further add-back of seven infantry battalions.

As a Scot I am very grateful for the reprieve of the Royal Scots and the King's Own Scottish Borderers and I am happy to join hon. Members for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) and Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch) in putting the case for the retention of the Gordon Highlanders and the Queen's Own Highlanders when those extra seven battalions are added back, as I believe they must be.

I sincerely congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) on his forensic analysis of the history of the Tory Government handling of the Army. He described the entire process of "Options for Change"; options they are not and cannot be as they are framed. He was kind to the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, who had the temerity to suggest there was some logic or continuity in the Government's policy for the Army. If he believes that, he does not know much about what is going on in his own Department, and there is evidence for that as well.

It was only on 12 January, reported in column 758 of *Hansard*, that the Minister of State said about the size of the Army:

> "I do not think that we are talking about a review of the proposals for the amalgamation of regiments under 'Options for Change'. We still feel that we have the right number of regiments. We do not think that long-term commitments have changed sufficiently to want to change that."—*[Official Report*, 12 January 1993; Vol. 216, c. 758.]

Three short weeks later, the Secretary of State for Defence told the House:

> "I have been considering for a number of months"—

not weeks, months—

> "with my military advisers"—

but evidently not with the Minister of State—

> "the need to adjust the force levels set out by my right hon. Friend."—*[Official Report*, 3 February 1993; Vol. 218, c. 319.]

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Does my hon. Friend think that the Minister perhaps recognised the inconsistency between paragraphs 326 and 327 of the 1992 statement. Paragraph 326 says:

> "During the process manpower shortages are likely to persist"

and then leaps on in paragraph 327 to say:

> "manpower reductions will be achieved . . . by natural wastage."

Perhaps the House should be grateful for that.

Mr. Home Robertson: There are a number of manifest inconsistencies in the way in which the MOD has dealt with such matters. I hope that the unanimous view expressed in the House may lead the Ministry to think again. Either the Minister of State for the Armed Forces genuinely had not a clue about what was going on, or he was being as economical with the truth as he has been with the Army over the years.

In an eloquent intervention, the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) said that everything that had happened recently—including the add-back of the two battalions—was consistent with his plan. If that was the plan, it was a "cunning plan" worthy of Private Baldrick himself. We have had enough Baldricks in the MOD for the time being; it is time to use some common sense in these affairs. I welcome the fact that the present Secretary of State has begun to move, but he needs to move that little bit further. Those two cancelled amalgamations are not enough; we shall need to add back more and examine the Select Committee's evidence about overstretch.

According to any analysis, overstretch is already a feature of the circumstances in which our Army finds itself. We have heard about the emergency tour interval, nights out of bed, the need for training and, crucially—this was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) and the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes)—our leading role in the NATO ACE rapid reaction corps. This is supposed to be a multinational standing force, trained, equipped and ready to react rapidly. How can it possibly do that if the leading element from the British Army is tied up on the streets of Northern Ireland, or undertaking other duties? It simply does not make sense.

That covers the general aspect, but I wish to raise two specific points. One may be trivial, but the other is very important. I tried to intervene on the Minister of State for the Armed Forces at the beginning of the debate, when he was talking about redundancies in the Army. The subject was raised with me by a number of non-commissioned officers in the Cheshire regiment when I met them last week in Vitez, in Bosnia. I met some people who had volunteered for redundancy. They said that, had they known that their regiment would not be amalgamated, they would not have volunteered for redundancy. They hoped to have an opportunity to withdraw their applications for voluntary redundancy because they wanted to continue to serve with their regiment—and I have no doubt that the same would apply to my people from the King's Own Scottish Borderers and the Royal Scots.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In such circumstances, people can appeal against their redundancies, and their appeals will be considered.

Mr. Home Robertson: I am grateful to the Minister. I hope that appeals made in the circumstances that I have described will be accepted and looked on favourably. I see that my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) is in his place: he has a number of Cheshires in his constituency. No doubt he listened carefully to that intervention.

My other point is one that should have been made at the time of the Crimean war. It concerns problems with Army boots. I was disturbed to hear soldiers in Bosnia say that they had to buy their own boots, because standard-issue Army boots are not insulated against the cold, and leak. That should not be necessary. I suppose that, at the time of the Crimean war, left boots were sent out, and it was possible to have a waterproof left boot and an insulated right boot; but why cannot the Army get it right now? The point may sound trivial, but I think that it deserves an answer.

8.54 pm

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): I welcome the opportunity to speak. First, I shall make a few comments about the Regular Army; I shall then focus on the Territorial Army.

I greatly welcome the personal style that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has brought to the Ministry of Defence; I know that it is much appreciated in the armed forces. Like other speakers, I believe that the armed forces—and, indeed, the Army—are severely overstretched. Although the welcome announcement made a fortnight ago will help, serious overstretch will remain. The proportion of gross domestic product allocated to defence has fallen from just over 5 per cent. in the mid 1980s to a projected 3·3 per cent. in two years' time. The level of commitments that we are trying to face has not fallen commensurately.

Unlike earlier speakers, I recognise that the Treasury has distinct problems with public spending, about which I have spoken in another debate. For that reason, I think that we must recognise where our priorities should lie. I believe that what differentiates the Conservative party from the Opposition parties is not concern about the armed forces, which is shared by hon. Members on both sides of the House, or a willingness to become involved in a range of different peacekeeping and other operations in different parts of the world—I believe that our forces are involved with the United Nations in 14 such operations. What differentiates the Conservative party from the others is its absolute commitment to maintaining firm defences for Britain and western Europe, both nuclear and conventional.

At a time when eastern Europe, the ex-Soviet states and the middle east are in turmoil, and when nuclear technology and possibly even nuclear weaponry are spreading into ever more irresponsible hands, we must be quite clear that, if we cannot find more money for our projected defence expenditure—in other words, reduce the level of planned reduction—we must cut the fringe commitments. We must look at our commitments, from Bosnia to Cambodia—those 14 United Nations commitments and our military training missions, and others.

A single figure says it all. The percentage of the defence budget spent on equipment this year will be 37, the lowest level since we took office in 1979. This cannot be commensurate with smaller and better. We cannot, within the existing defence budget, have a higher level of projected manpower for that reason: the commitments must be reduced unless more money can be found.

There is a danger that, within the Army, people will begin to feel either increasingly cynical—the phrase "smaller and bitter" is going around—or, more likely, because I have the greatest admiration for our armed forces, will experience the more workmanlike and everyday but nevertheless equally dangerous feeling that we should get on with the immediate, short-term problems and forget about the longer term. That wearied feeling is more likely.

The danger there is that we shall do a superb job in Bosnia, that we shall do whatever is required by way of RAF supply runs in Somalia, that our 350 people in Cambodia will continue to do excellent work, but that our commitment to the rapid reaction corps, which is so central to the defence of western Europe, and our ability to fund projects that I regard as essential—Opposition Members may not agree—such as the tactical nuclear weapons system TASM, will be diminished or completely eroded.

Mr. McWilliam: Will the hon. Gentleman please explain his rationale, given that most of our commitment to the rapid reaction corps at any given time is on duty in Northern Ireland anyway? It cannot be in two places at once.

Mr. Brazier: The hon. Gentleman is right to some extent. There is such a level of Army overstretch at the moment that it is not possible for some units to train properly for the rapid reaction corps. If the hon. Gentleman had been listening to my speech, he would have heard me suggest that the solution is to reduce some of those commitments. The large number of commitments that we have to the United Nations are examples. I do not know how many hon. Members knew that we have 350 people in Cambodia until the fact appeared recently in a paper. Our central commitment must be to the defence of Britain and western Europe.

[Mr. Brazier]

On to the Territorial Army, I am sorry to have to deliver more bad news, but I believe that an opportunity was missed in 1991. I, for one, welcome the news from the Ministry of Defence that the Government are planning to look again at the future of the reserve forces. A proper survey should have been done in 1991, and should certainly be done now, to establish how to achieve better value from our reserve forces—in particular, the TA—drawing on lessons from abroad. Alas, two years ago, a team led by regular officers, the leading one of whom had never served in a TA unit, carried out a review. That review was based on theoretical criteria and was then negotiated in detail with the TAVRs, which are obviously very conscious of what is happening on their own patches. It is not good enough for such a review to be based on theoretical considerations rather than practical matters.

The Director General TA and Organisation, to whom I have just referred, in a submission to the Select Committee about the criteria on the basis of which TA units were selected for survival, spoke of

"their links with regular units, the territorial balance in a particular area, recruiting trends, the availability of TA centres, historical factors, regimental factors and local links."

At no point in any document that I have seen is the issue of the quality of the units concerned touched on. Amazingly, some of the weakest units in the Territorial Army—I could mention names, but it would be invidious to do so—were retained, although they were down to an effective 30 per cent. of their strength, whereas some of the best units were earmarked for disbandment simply because they did not fit the theoretical, geographical and other criteria that I have mentioned.

As a result, there has been a significant loss of morale in many parts of the TA. There has also been a loss of key personnel and an increase in turnover. We see the beginning of a vicious circle, with an unhealthy reaction between the regular command structure and the TA units concerned. The Regular Army's expectation of the TA has progressively dropped, and in some cases the TA is starting to fulfil the lower expectations. A number of very good units remain, but there are fewer of them.

It must be recognised that we shall never be able to fund everything we want in the Regular forces. The cost of a TA unit is between one fifth and one seventh of the cost of its regular counterpart. Reservists can make very high-quality units. Let me give two examples. In the last war, the most highly decorated company-size unit was a territorial unit; two years ago, the highest-scoring tank battalion in the Gulf was an American marine reservist unit.

We should have asked ourselves two years ago, and we should certainly be asking ourselves now, why large parts of the TA are not performing as well as they could. Why, for example, is TA turnover in Britain 30 per cent. and rising? In Australia, where the resource base for units is much lower—there are fewer permanent staff and an even lower man-training-day allocation—the turnover is 22 per cent. and falling.

I welcome the fresh approach that Ministers are bringing to this question, and I cannot stress sufficiently the fact that I welcome their intention to look again at the Territorial Army. However, I should like to make a point to them and, through them, to the Regular Army and the chiefs of staff. Eighteen months ago, Lord Bramall said that, with the disappearance of the national service generation over the next few years, the Regular Army will be in serious danger of cultural isolation and of finding that there are fewer and fewer people in the world who understand what defence is about and what armed forces are for. It would be very short-sighted and unwise for our extremely high quality but very small professional forces to believe that they can maintain their central position in the esteem and affection of the people of this country in an extended period of peace without the support of the reserve forces whose members go on to become prominent figures in civic life and business and a few of whom even become hack Members of Parliament like myself.

I shall be brief in order to allow other hon. Members to speak who have extended a similar courtesy to me. I shall make four points about what went wrong in the review last time and which my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State should reconsider this time. The first is their mistaken willingness to consider moving good units. Fortunately, most of the moves have not yet taken place. For example, the 73rd Signal Regiment, which has a multi-million pound specially equipped drill hall, is due to be moved from Bexley to Bracknell. That will not only entail the loss of a new expensive facility but will mean losing most of the people because TA personnel cannot move far from their jobs and homes.

Secondly, I was astonished to learn that the document on the reserve forces, which was published a year ago, makes virtually no mention of the importance of leadership in the reserve forces, although that is the central drive of the excellent advertising programme of the National Employer Liaison Committee. We should ask why the TA standard officer training course at Mons lasts two weeks whereas the equivalent course in Australia last seven weeks.

The third point is the duplication in the command structure of the reserve forces between London and Wilton. It is strange that we have a tri-service arrangement in London to look after the reserve forces, which are 90 per cent. Army, and a duplicated single service arrangement to look after that 90 per cent. in Wilton.

That brings me to my fourth observation on the review, which may cause concern in the Ministry of Defence and the Regular Army. However, I believe that my right hon. and learned Friend has the freshness and openness of approach to re-examine the question. It is an extraordinary anomaly that Britain is the only country in the English-speaking world whose director of reserve forces is not a reservist. The last director of the reserves had never even served in a reserve unit. I do not blame him as an individual; it was not his fault.

We now have a great opportunity, and I am delighted that my right hon. and learned Friend is reconsidering the reserve forces. I suggest that a quick way, involving no cost, to give an immediate lift to morale in the reserve forces and to convince them that a new practical approach will be adopted is to recruit someone who has achieved a certain eminence in civilian life and has served a successful period in the reserve forces. Such a person should drive forward the change process and the new blueprint for the TA.

9.8 pm

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): I do not intend to engage in the wider issues considered by so many hon. Members in the debate. I know that I must be brief, but I am grateful for the opportunity to raise two issues involving my constituency but with wider implications. I hope that they are also of general interest.

It is my privilege to represent the people who work at the Donington depot, which, for more than 50 years, has given outstanding service to the defence services, not only during the second world war but in more recent conflicts in the Falklands and the Gulf and now by supplying equipment to operations in the former Yugoslavia.

Relations between the civilians who work at Donington and the Ministry have always been extremely good. The service provided by the workers there has been outstanding and the depot has been an important source of employment, particularly for engineering apprentices at the 34 base workshops. The workshops have provided an excellent training ground for many years, and in the past morale there has been good.

The obsession of the Conservatives in recent years with contractorisation and privatisation, and the threat to jobs and the confidence of the people resulting from that trend, has been a persistent problem in the Donington depot. There have been all manner of threats, and even the security services there were at one time threatened with contractorisation.

I shall not tonight rehearse all the arguments against contractorisation, which are overwhelming and well known to the House. I urge the Government to acknowledge that constant meddling in affairs locally has a deeply depressing effect on the morale of the work force.

I have written to the Minister of State several times pointing out that if the Government persist with constant changes which involve threats to people's terms and conditions, it is incumbent on them to have the fullest consultation with the workers before changes take place.

A characteristic of the Donington depot has been the strength and skill of the union representation. Conservative Members often indulge in smears about union membership. At Donington, the Transport and General Workers Union and the engineering and white collar unions have always been extremely well represented and closely involved in decision making. They have worked closely with the management and have negotiated successfully on behalf of their members.

While I speak with pride on behalf of those unions, I urge the Government to accept that it is essential, when changes are proposed, that there is adequate consultation with all concerned. I am sure that members of the local management echo that view. We constantly have the feeling that decisions are made in London without reference to the people who live and work locally.

The only other issue I shall raise tonight, because of the shortage of time, may be regarded by the House as somewhat esoteric and might be thought to relate particularly to my constituency. Hon. Members will appreciate how one can, almost by accident, discover something in one's constituency, only later to appreciate that it has wider implications. A couple of years ago I heard from people working at the depot and others in my constituency about plans to close a two-mile rail link from the depot to the main line.

I objected to the plan, for all sorts of reasons. It seemed common sense that we should encourage rail transport, being safer, more predictable, more environmentally friendly and because it relieved clutter on the motorways. I objected strongly, but without success. I followed that up with a series of parliamentary questions, for I wondered whether it was a narrow constituency point or was part of a pattern. I asked the Secretary of State for Defence

> "what proportion of Ministry of Defence freight is being carried by (*a*) road and (*b*) rail".

I was given the sort of predictable answer that I expected:

> "A detailed breakdown of the proportions moved by road and rail could not be provided without incurring disproportionate cost".—[*Official Report*, 15 October 1991; Vol. 196, c. *143*.]

It is appropriate that the Secretary of State should be present tonight. No one can be better placed, as a former Secretary of State for Transport, to note what I am saying on this issue. After all, we listened with interest to his statements when he was Secretary of State for Transport, when he spoke about the importance of rail transport and the need to move traffic from road to rail. I recently asked the Secretary of State for Defence

> "what plans he has to encourage the use of rail for freight by Ministry of Defence depots."

The reply was:

> "My Department uses the most convenient and cost effective methods to transport freight and has no plans to favour the use of rail over any other method of transport."—[*Official Report*, 2 June 1992; Vol. 208, c. *527*.]

It is amazing how Ministers shift Departments and fairly rapidly shift their values.

The most interesting of all the replies was that which I received when I tried to find out what had happened to Ministry of Defence use of the railways since the Government came to office. I asked a couple of simple questions, the first of which was how many diesel locomotives were maintained and operated by the MOD in 1979 and in 1991. The answer was that there were 176 in 1979 and 106 in 1991.

Perhaps the most important question that I asked was how many Ministry of Defence depots had rail links when the Government came to power, and how many had them now. The answer was that, when the Government came to power, 38 depots had rail links but that now only 21 have them. The arithmetic is fairly simple—the number has been almost halved. I also asked for a list of the depots that had lost their rail links, and there was a whole string of them all over the country, including:

> "Regional Depot Aldershot; Ordnance Support Unit Ashford; OSU Burscough; Royal Air Force Carlisle; Central Ordnance Depot Donington"—

as I said, that is in my constituency—

> "Royal Naval Stores Depot Eaglecliffe; RD Hereford; OSU Hessay; RAF Quedgeley; Procurement and Experimental Establishment Shoeburyness; RAF Stafford; RD Stirling; RD Thatcham; RD Thursk, RD Warcop; OSU Warminster".—[*Official Report*, 14 October 1991; Vol. 196, c. *63*.]

When the Secretary of State for Defence was Secretary of State for Transport, he told us how important it was to use rail rather than road for freight carriage. The Ministry of Defence is the one area in which even this freewheeling, free-market Government have direct control over what means of transport are used to carry large amounts of freight—and the MOD's record is appalling. At the very least, it should maintain the track beds of the rail links that it has closed and encourage their reopening, especially the rail link at Donington in my constituency.

9.16 pm

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): This has been a strange debate. There have been more attacks on the Government from Conservative Members than from Opposition Members. Ministers must think that they have parachuted behind enemy lines. They have been subjected to a series of shots which can only be described as "friendly fire".

Parliament is telling the Ministers that they are wrong and should change their policies. Before I go into detail, I shall put on record the thanks of Labour Front-Bench spokesmen and, I am sure, of the whole House, to the Select Committee not only for its excellent report—although I am not sure whether Ministers will thank the Committee for it—but for the fact that the members of the Committee went to Bosnia. When one is elected a Member of Parliament, one expects that security will become a bit tighter, but to fly into a war zone requires some bravery.

If those hon. Members had not gone to Bosnia, the debate would not have been as informative. It is important that Members of Parliament continue to make such visits and report back to the House what is actually happening on the ground. I am sure that none of those hon. Members has been accused of having gone on a jaunt this time—and that not many of their constituents would have wished to go with them. The next time that they are accused of having holidays in work time, they should invite people to go to Bosnia with them.

I was most impressed by the excellent speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid). The way in which he dissected the Government's arguments will make the people who work and serve in the armed forces and who read his speech wish that he was in government and that Ministers were in opposition. It was an excellent speech. I am sure that it will be read in regiments throughout the land, and that people will say, "That is the way forward. If only we had elected a Labour Government."

There is no argument on the Opposition side about the nuclear test ban treaty. Hon. Members have said that we need to stop testing nuclear weapons. I predict that, within two years, the Government will stop testing and that, if they do not stop it, President Clinton will stop it for them. So let us stop testing nuclear weapons and keep our dignity.

The Chairman of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor), made a withering attack on the Government. He did it in a nice way, but it was effective. It was even more effective because it came from the Conservative Benches.

Mr. Frank Cook: He is blushing.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: It is just modesty.

Mr. Martlew: Modesty has rarely prevented me from saying anything, so I shall continue.

The right hon. Member for Bridgewater (Mr. King) told us that "Options for Change" was all a cunning plan. yes, I am sure that it was devised by that military man Captain Blackadder and his batman. We have seen that "Options for Change" was an option for anything. It was not a defence review but a quick fix, which is coming apart before our very eyes. That has been pointed out by other hon. Members.

My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) expounded Labour party policy on the nuclear test ban treaty, and he was dead right. He was also correct about the scandalous position with regard to defence lands. There is a need to provide access to the countryside, but we seem to be tying up more and more defence land instead of releasing it.

Mr. Brazier: Will the hon. Gentleman explain how he squares his party's line on the overstretch of manpower with saying that there should be less defence land for the armed forces? Presumably, if there are to be more armed forces, they need more land on which to train. They are already overstretched.

Mr. Martlew: That question is based on the premise that the armed forces do not have too much land now. Many of us would maintain that, ever since the end of the second world war, the armed forces have held on to too much land and should release even more.

The hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan), who is not in his place, made a courageous speech. I just hope that he is never called back to the colours, because if he is, he will not be promoted, at the very least.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) made a major speech about Bosnia. He is not noted for agreeing with Conservative Members but he agreed with the hon. Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill). That gives more credence to his views. We are united in saying that "Options for Change" is wrong. The only people who say different are on the Government Front Bench.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) made an important point about redundancies. Although the Minister intervened, I was not happy with his explanation. People from the Cheshire Regiment volunteered for redundancy because their regiment was to be amalgamated. Then fortunately, as everyone would agree, the correct decision was made not to amalgamate the regiment. The people who volunteered for redundancy have been told that they can appeal against redundancy. They should be able to withdraw their applications for redundancy, because they applied on the premise that the regiment would disappear.

It turned out, as a result of the Government's incompetence, to be a false premise. I hope that in his reply the Minister will change his view and say that any member of any regiment that has been saved who applied for redundancy will have the opportunity to withdraw the application. That would be only fair. I suspect that the answer will be negative. Perhaps the Minister will surprise me.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I am uncertain about what is unfair about appealing, and having that appeal considered sympathetically.

Mr. Martlew: I shall tease the Minister a little more to get something more out of him. Is he giving us a commitment that any member of the armed forces who, having applied for redundancy in the regiments that have now been saved, appeals against that redundancy will have that appeal granted?

Mr. Hamilton: I am saying that such people will be able to appeal against redundancy on the ground that the basis on which they applied for redundancy was that their regiment was going to be amalgamated. One cannot say that anything is automatic. The appeal will be considered on the grounds on which it is made.

Mr. Martlew: Again, I suspect that there are one or two weasel words there. We shall take the Minister as an honourable man, and we shall monitor the position. We shall come back to the House if we find that people are having their appeals turned down. I am sure that the matter will be viewed with great interest by the regiments concerned.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott), first for mentioning my constituency, which is always a good thing, and secondly for bringing to the attention of the House a different aspect. The civilian side of the Ministry of Defence and of the Army is important, as is the morale of those people. I know of the efforts that they put in, especially during crises. I also know of the hard work of the trade unions at the depots.

We have heard a lot today about what is wrong with the Army. We accept that people who sign up for our armed forces, especially for the Army, are different in many ways from people who join armies in other countries of the Alliance. For the past 25 years, the soldiers of the United Kingdom have unfortunately had to go on active service in Northern Ireland. They may join up because of unemployment or because of a sense of adventure, but they do not join up because it is an easy option. We accept that they are brave people to join up, so we believe that they deserve respect and support, which they get from Opposition Members.

Although we must accept that there has been an end to the cold war, which must mean radical changes, there is a feeling that there is a lack of leadership at the very top. I am not talking about the generals, but about Ministers. What the Government have done has turned the Army into a bad employer. It is getting very much like the cowboy security firms, which give people a fancy uniform but then do not take care of their basic needs.

The Government are cutting soldiers' pay this year—a point to which I shall return. They are introducing compulsory redundancies and evicting former soldiers from their homes. They have failed to make adequate provision for rehousing former soldiers. They have decreased the length of time between dangerous tours of duty. They have failed over overseas allowances. They have failed to define the role of women in the Army. Above all, they have failed to generate a belief that those in charge know what they are doing. I repeat that I am talking not about the generarls, but about the Minister of State, about the Secretary of State and about the Prime Minister.

Mr. Colvin: The hon. Gentleman believes—and I agree—that we have problems. Surely there are even greater problems in NATO as a whole. The role of our Army must be looked at in terms of its job within NATO. It has been mentioned that other member states in NATO are cutting their defence forces even more than we are. In the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1992", my right hon. and learned Friend showed in table 4 that the cuts in the armed forces across NATO were on average 23 per cent. between 1990 and 1995. In the British Army, cuts amounted to only 20 per cent. We have now persuaded our Secretary of State to restore some of the proposed cuts. Is it not even more important to persuade our NATO allies to take another look at their proposed cuts too?

Mr. Martlew: That would appear to be a failure on the part of the Ministry of Defence and of the Foreign Secretary. The fact is that we must put our own house in order. We are talking about a decline in the quality of life of the British soldiers—I think that the hon. Gentleman will accept that that is the problem.

We need to raise morale by giving the Army a commitment. I fear that the Government give commitments only to the Treasury. Such improvements as they have made in the system have been done in a mean-minded way. For instance, the reduction in the secrecy surrounding boards of inquiry, and soldiers' ability to claim compensation from the Ministry of Defence have been effected in a mealy-mouthed manner, and if I have time, I will give examples.

I realise that I have made a long list of charges, and that they will need to be substantiated. I am sure that I will be accused of being a barrack-room lawyer—not a title that I would reject if it means that I am seen as a supporter of justice and fair play for our service personnel.

In a reply to me from the Dispatch Box, the Secretary of State said that service men would accept an increase in pay of 1·5 per cent. Does he realise that that is a greater cut than all other Government employees face? I arrive at that conclusion on the basis of the retail prices index. Headline inflation is running at 1·7 per cent., and seen against that, a 1·5 per cent. increase does not seem too bad. It is only 1·7 per cent., however, because of a big drop in mortgage rates. The underlying rate of inflation is 3·4 per cent., and soldiers, of course, tend not to have mortgages. So the Government are in effect reducing the pay of our soldiers by almost 2 per cent. this year.

The Secretary of State did nothing to stop this. He must have been aware of the retail prices index. Tories have praised the bravery of our soldiers, but they have cut their pay.

Mr. Ian Bruce: The hon. Gentleman has been misrepresenting what I was going to say. I firmly believe that the Treasury was right to ask for cuts in the Ministry of Defence budget. It is extraordinary of the hon. Gentleman to suggest that the budget should not have been cut in any way. Where would the Labour party have made the cuts that it promised at the election?

Mr. Martlew: I am delighted to tell the hon. Gentleman that the Labour party would not have cut the wages of British soldiers.

We have already discussed compulsory redundancy notices for 628 officers. That was not a new announcement; in fact, it emerged in a written reply quite some time ago, on 10 December. So despite deciding to save two battalions the Government have not been prepared to reconsider these redundancies. They simply took the decision that the officers were to go, and that was it. They are so arrogant that they take away people's jobs and careers, without giving the matter a second thought.

There has also been confusion over housing. This year, a record 22 members of the armed forces were evicted. No provision has been made for returning soldiers and local authorities are in deep trouble with housing. I appreciate that the Government have introduced a new scheme to help soldiers and other service personnel to buy their houses, but they did so ten years too late, and it is no good to those people who will be told tomorrow that they are to be made redundant: it will not help them one bit.

The Government even seem to be cheating our troops over overseas allowances. If they work for the United

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Nations in Cambodia, they get a subsistence allowance of $145 a day—from the United Nations—but if they work for the United Nations, through the British Government, in Bosnia, they get next to nothing.

Finally, the Government's failure to follow the Labour party's advice and to have a total defence review, and the "Options for Change" proposals have made the Government a laughing stock within the Army, especially their proposal to decrease the number of infantry battalions from 55 to 38. That proposal has been exposed as unrealistic, and was based on flawed facts. That is why the Secretary of State had to make a statement to the House on 3 February to reinstate two of those battalions, but that is not enough.

The Tory-dominated Defence Select Committee has said that there should not be any amalgamations or disbandments. It has also been said that the stress and strain of overstretch is a serious threat to life and family life, because of the grossly reduced intervals between tours of duty, and that cannot continue. If the Secretary of State is to remain credible, we need an immediate defence review.

This is not the first time that we have had such a debate—it has happened many times. There was a similar debate in 1794, when William Pitt was Prime Minister. The Commander-in-Chief of the Army was having major problems in Flanders. The event is remembered to this day in the jingle "The Grand Old Duke of York". Hon. Members know the rhyme:

"The grand old Duke of York,
He had 10,000 men,
He marched them up to the top of the hill,
And he marched them down again."

Does that not remind hon. Members of someone? The Secretary of State had 55 battalions, he decided to take them down to 38 battalions and now he has said that he will take them back up to 40 battalions, while the Select Committee says that he should not have touched them at all. The British Army does not know whether it is coming or going.

The grand old Duke of York resigned on that occasion, although he was reinstated because his brother was King George III. Perhaps the Secretary of State should do the same tonight.

9.38 pm

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Jonathan Aitken): We should remember that his brother used to say to the grand old Duke of York, "They will never kill me, James, to make you King." We certainly would not replace my excellent right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State with the shower of Opposition Members who have spoken tonight.

One admirable aspect of the debate has been the steady flow of tributes which have rightly been paid to the skill and dedication of our armed forces and to the Army in particular. I thank the two Opposition spokesman—the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) and the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid)—who paid particularly warm tributes early in their speeches.

As my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces made clear in his opening speech, the Government share that high admiration for the Army. The Army is a beacon of professional excellence that always shines brightly—it is perhaps shining particularly brightly now when we seem to be living through a not unfamiliar period of doom and gloom in our national life and every institution is under attack. The Army, happily, is immune from such attacks, perhaps because it enshrines some of the old-fashioned values of loyalty, duty, discipline and patriotism, as well as its conventional professionalism and skill. I am sure that the Army will be gratified by the unity of the tributes paid to it in the House during today's debate.

This is the first service debate in which I have spoken from the Dispatch Box. I had always heard that they were quiet, amicable occasions, but today's debate has not turned out quite that way. I do not exactly feel—as the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) said—as though I have been parachuted behind enemy lines, but the words of the poet Tennyson came to mind—

"Cannon to right of them
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon in front of them
Volley'd and thunder'd."

I hope to persuade some of the Opposition Members and some of my hon. Friends whose speeches were critical to reason a little more deeply. If they did so, they might see some of the issues in a fairer perspective.

I shall attempt to address as many issues as have been raised in the debate as possible. However, I shall not respond to those points that ranged wide of the Army subject.

I turn to the extraordinary speech of the hon. Member for Motherwell, North with some relish. The only point on which I agreed with him was his tribute to the Army. After that, with the air of a funny-money salesman about to perform the three-card trick, he took us into a world of pure statistical mumbo-jumbo and sought to persuade us that the Labour party has a consistent defence policy by projecting the trends of the Callaghan Government defence budget in 1977 to show that the Labour party was sound on defence spending today.

The argument was not convincing when one remembered that the Labour conference in 1992 proclaimed that it would require defence cuts equivalent to £6 billion. Then, to cover up the embarrassment with a convenient conjuror's handkerchief, the Labour party produced that all-singing, all-dancing formula—the defence review. Hiding behind that device, Labour Members call for increases in defence manpower and resources in speeches in the House, then go to their conference in Blackpool or Brighton, where there are simultaneous calls for huge reductions in defence spending. That formula does not fool anyone.

When he finished his funny-money routine, the hon. Member for Motherwell, North showed a flash of anger on the subject of redundancies. However, he got his party's policy stance absolutely wrong. His anger was directed at the regrettable fact that some redundancies that are to take place in the Army will fall on those who are today serving on active duty in Bosnia and Northern Ireland. The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East made the same point, but in noticeably more cautious and measured tones.

All redundancies in the Army are much regretted. We are losing first-class people, which is painful and sad for the Army and for Britain. However, it is the Army's opinion—and not just that of the brass hats—that it would be wrong and unfair to make a special exception to the redundancy programme on the grounds that a service man happens to be serving in a specific operational or geographical theatre at any one time. That view is shared by all sensible people who think deeply about the Army's welfare and, of course, by Ministers.

I think it was my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) who said that a wounded man could be brought out of theatre and be exempt from redundancy in one place, but liable for redundancy in another. It would be nonsense to grant exemptions on the basis of special theatres. That would be unfair to the Army as a whole. I am sure that our policy is right—and the Army certainly thinks so.

With his great experience as a former Secretary of State for Defence and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater spoke with great authority. I was grateful to him for nailing the absurd misrepresentation that "Options for Change" was planned on a financial-only basis, without strategic considerations. As my right hon. Friend rightly said, if that were true—it certainly is not—it would be an insult, not just to him, but to the Chief of the Defence Staff and the other military advisers.

Since "Options for Change" we have added commitments in Bosnia. It was envisaged in the original statement that there might have to be extra military resources—[HON. MEMBERS: "It was planned."] No, it was not the plan. But there was certainly a plan for possibilities—that was always said and always recorded. *[Interruption.]* No one is being smug. I do not know why there is so much joviality among Opposition Members when the Government do what is sensible and right in accordance with changing commitments, because commitments have changed and increased and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State deserves great credit for thinking about the matter for a long time. I know that he was thinking for many months before he made the announcement on 3 February which was widely welcomed in the House and the country.

The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East made a serious allegation, which was repeated by the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook), about the rules of engagement in Bosnia. I was surprised by their allegation that those rules somehow resulted in weapons having to be handed in, according to statements made to those two hon. Members when they were on their travels.

There are no United Kingdom or United Nations rules of engagement which require members of United Kingdom forces in the former Yugoslavia to hand over their personal weapons under any circumstances, nor is there any local clarification note to that effect. Of course we shall look into the reports by the two hon. Members but they are out of tune with everything that we know.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Perhaps the Minister is about to offer some reassurance to me and to the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook). I suppose that we both stand as credible witnesses and I assure the Minister that when the matter was put to a senior British officer the answer was that which we have reported to the House. If by doing that we bring about a change in circumstances in Croatia, we shall have done our duty by the House and by our forces.

Mr. Aitken: Of course, I accept that the two hon. Members have correctly reported what they were told. We shall get it clarified down the chain of command.

Two hon. Members raised constituency matters. One was my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague), who rightly takes great pride in Catterick. Like him, I am glad that it is expanding and that infantry recruitment training is to go there. I was glad to hear his welcome for market testing. I assure him that there will be a level playing field and open and fair competitions. I hope and expect that many in-house bids will succeed.

The other Member to raise a constituency point was the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott). The Donnington depot to which he referred is being market-tested and I accept that there will need to be the fullest consultation with the work force. The market testing programme is on a level and fair playing field and if it does result, as market testing programmes usually do, in savings of about 20 per cent., they will go to the sharp end of the defence budget. All those who care about our defences will welcome that programme.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will my hon. Friend give way briefly?

Mr. Aitken: I should prefer to make progress.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) wanted a review of defence lands. We need our present training areas. The defence estate consists of 600,000 acres and 80 per cent. of it is needed for training. As we reduce our training areas in Germany, we need our domestic training areas and we must keep them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor), who is the Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence, made an important speech. I thank him for his leadership on the Select Committee and for its important work. He spoke about the equipment budget and, as the Minister responsible for that budget, I am pleased to have something to say about it, although I cannot make announcements now on the equipment issues that he raised.

The equipment programme for the Army remains strong and healthy, with AS90, Warriors, and tenders having gone out for the attack helicopters. For those who take a great interest in Royal Ordnance plc, I am pleased to announce that, in line with the strategy for ammunition procurement announced on 20 January, a five-year contract for the supply of L106 fuses has today been awarded to Royal Ordnance plc. It is a vital order, which is worth up to £15 million to the factories in Blackburn.

Mr. Greg Pope (Hyndburn): As the Minister is aware, that contract has been long fought for, not just by me but by my hon. Friends the Members for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) and for Rossendale and Darwen (Ms. Anderson). The award of the contract is extremely good news, not just for defence procurement but for the economy of east Lancashire, where the Royal Ordnance factory has long been a skills base which has spread into the wider economy. I hope that the Minister will accept my thanks and congratulations and those of my hon. Friends the Members for Blackburn and for Rossendale and Darwen.

Mr. Aitken: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks.

My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster raised the great issue of overstretch. The kernel of the charge that he and many other hon. Members made against the

[Mr. Aitken]

Government was that the present arrangements are such that the Army is unable to meet the 24-month interval between emergency tours. We know and accept that that is a difficult problem. We have always acknowledged that the process of restructuring would inevitably lead to additional pressures and demands on service personnel and we are sensitive to the impact of those additional demands. That is why my right hon. and learned Friend made his important announcement on 3 February.

I can say that the add-back of the two battalions announced by my right hon. and learned Friend will have the immediate effect of increasing the average interval between emergency tours during the difficult period of transition to the new force structure and, on the basis of our current commitments, this should comfortably exceed the target of 24 months once restructuring is complete. We now have the 15-month figure for the current year, and that will increase to 17 months. By 1995 the figure will be more than 24 months, so we are moving in the right direction.

The hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) rightly paid tribute to the work of the Royal Irish Regiment in Bosnia, and I agree with him. He raised many detailed points about the situation in Northern Ireland, particularly relating to the TAORs, and my right hon. Friend the Minister of State will write to him about the detailed points that he has raised.

I now turn to the important speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan), who argued that a reappraisal of the command structure was needed and that we had too many chiefs and not enough Indians. He made some telling points. I certainly have some sympathy for his view that there is too much paperwork in the Ministry of Defence. I can tell him that senior service appointment numbers will fall as a consequence of "Options for Change", but senior Ministry of Defence posts are under particular scrutiny as part of the rationalisation of headquarters. I agree that he made some telling points which we will consider carefully.

I was glad that the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh), who spoke for the Scottish National party, came out in such strong terms for greater spending on defence and much greater expansion of our armed forces. I am glad to know that it is SNP policy, as it is apparently to strangle the workers of Rosyth by withdrawing the Trident submarines immediately.

Mr. Welsh: Strangling the workers of Rosyth is something that the Government do rather too well, and I wish that they would not. Will the Minister now answer the question about overstretch? He rather skated over it. If there were extra commitments in Bosnia following a peace plan, could the Government meet such commitments?

Mr. Aitken: I have just answered the central point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster on overstretch generally. It is true that if the Vance-Owen plan was implemented and Britain made a major contribution in troop numbers, it would cause a re-evaluation of the numbers in "Options for Change"; but that is a hypothetical situation at present.

I dealt with the point of the hon. Member for Stockton, North about the rules of engagement. He thought that the most important question was what exactly prompted the statement on 3 February, as though this was the most fundamental question of our time. There is no great mystery about it. I think that it was Sir Winston Churchill who said, when answering a similar charge of inconsistency from the Opposition Benches:

> "My thoughts are a harmonious process in tune with the music of current events."

My right hon. Friend responded simply and wisely and was sensitive to pressures that are building up in this area.

Turning briefly to the point made by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on the subject of nuclear testing, there is no question of our carrying out nuclear tests while the United States moratorium lasts, but we continue to believe that testing remains the best means of ensuring the safety and credibility of our deterrent. We are keen to develop alternative warhead-proving techniques, but we do not regard these as adequate substitutes for testing in the present state of technology. The Russians, French and Americans must speak for themselves, but I remind the hon. Member that United States legislation does not propose an immediate end to nuclear testing.

Mr. Dalyell *rose*——

Mr. Aitken: I would rather not give way.

Mr. Dalyell: May I congratulate the Minister on actually answering the debate? Would he be indiscreet enough to say what he thinks about a Queen's Counsel and the questions on the public interest immunity certificate that I raised with him?

Mr. Aitken: I will be indiscreet enough to say that I thought that the hon. Gentleman's allegations were totally unfounded and unfair.

I was grateful that at least one voice on the Government Benches, that of my hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch), accepted that we could reduce numbers in the new strategic environment. An unreal and unwordly air ran throughout the debate. So many hon. Members, from all sides of the House, demanded extra spending, extra resources and extra commitments. My hon. Friends the Members for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes), for Upminster and for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill) and the hon. Members for Angus, East and for Stockton, North were all on the theme that we should increase substantially defence spending in financial or resources terms.

Defence spending is not an island isolated from the rest of the economy or Britain's economic needs. Nor is defence strategy isolated from a favourable change in the strategic environment, if it takes place. I should remind the House that we are withdrawing some 27,000 Army personnel from Germany, including 3 Battalion garrison at Berlin. In addition, we will lose 4 Battalion garrison from Hong Kong by 1997. Those reductions in commitment far outweigh the commitments that have been taken on. Sensible points have been made about how we should manage the changes. I took the point of my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) about the need to look again at our reserve forces. We are doing just that.

Parts of the debate seemed unrealistic. I want to end with an illustrative anecdote which I think it is worth telling the House. I feel that it is necessary to bring us back to the realities of spending commitments and strategy. Last week I was travelling in east Germany, a country which until 1990 was bristling and bulging with the menace of 500,000 Warsaw pact troops, all hostile to the west. I was being taken on a tour of military installations by my host and friend, the State Secretary of Defence for the Federal Republic of Germany.

One highlight of the tour was a visit to a vast encampment of military equipment at Grimma. The encampment was about the size of Hyde park and it was jam-packed with tanks, armoured cars, field guns, missile launchers and attack weapons of every description, all abandoned by the east German army and destined never to fire again, waiting only for destruction by scrap merchants.

Then I was taken to the huge Soviet barracks near Leipzig, which less than a year ago was packed with thousands and thousands of red army troops. Today those barracks are totally empty and deserted. It was a surreal, almost spooky experience to wander among those cavernous blocks and buildings in a ghost town atmosphere, to see weeds growing on the parade ground, to see cobwebs in the machine rooms where once nuclear warheads had been fitted to missiles, and to look at the broken plinth where the statute of Lenin once stood, which the troops had to salute.

In that atmosphere of complete emptiness suddenly I felt overcome by a quiet feeling of enormous pride at the realisation of what our defence policy and our commitment to NATO had achieved. Those abandoned Soviet barracks symbolised vividly and visually that the cold war was over, that we had actually won it, that our old enemies had gone home and that we are starting to make friends with them again. That happened only because the NATO alliance, and particularly the British Army of the Rhine, had held the line for many years, and had kept the peace so professionally and so patiently for long enough for western democratic ideals of freedom to take root and for the Communist ideology to crumble and fall.

When we consider the Army of the future, we must not forget the lessons of the recent past. The massive job of peacekeeping which the British Army did so well with our allies in Europe in the last part of the 20th century may need to be repeated, but surely in much smaller scenarios. Other tyrannies and dictatorships may arise on the European land mass in the 21st century. At home Northern Ireland remains a steadfast commitment, because there, too, the Army holds the line professionally and patiently against the IRA terrorists, whose ideology of evil and hatred will surely one day become as discredited and will crumble and fall, just as Communism fell.

Of course, there may be other aggressors elsewhere in the world; there may be other Saddam Husseins who will need to be checked by coalition forces in which the British Army will play a vital role. We all recognise that those commitments will exist, but I cannot accept the arguments that were made so easily for massively increasing resources and spending when there is no truly identifiable or immediate threat. There is plenty more work for the Army to do in the closing years of this century and early years of the next.

The debate has revealed some understandable anxieties, but it also shows that the British Parliament and the British people are proud of our Army and that they will support it and require it to continue its superbly professional role in safeguarding Britain's future for many years ahead.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Chinese and Taiwanese Bicycles

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

10 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): As it is close to bedtime, I shall tell the House a bedtime story. Although it is a bedtime story, it is a nasty story about cheating, dirty tricks and commercial chicanery. It has a devious plot. The one ray of light is the guardian angel, personified by the Minister for Trade who is on the Front Bench tonight. It is a delight to cast the Minister in the role of guardian angel, which I know he will prove when he replies to the debate. If everyone is sitting comfortably, I shall begin.

Let us set the scene. Worldwide, 100 million bicycles are made every year and 40 million of them are built in China in some of the most modern plants ever to be constructed. They look like something one would expect to see in a James Bond film—meticulously clean with thousands of Chinese rushing around in the Chenzhen free trade zone near the China sea.

How can the Chinese afford to build such modern and wonderful factories of which Britain would be envious? They can do it thanks to the World bank, to which Britain made a contribution of £110 million in 1988 and more subsequently. The World bank generously offered soft loans to China for its emerging industry, as it is called. However, not much is emerging from an industry that has 40 per cent. of the world market.

The clever Chinese are producing bikes in ultra high-tech plants solely because of the World bank's money to which Europe and the United States have contributed. One could say, "Good for the Chinese," but the impact on Europe has been devastating. It has been like asking a unicyclist to compete in the tour de France.

We should not get it wrong; the Europeans are no fools either. They are still in the story by virtue of the fact they have put a ceiling on EC bike imports which is expressed as 9·5 million ecu from what are called generalised system of preferences—GSP—countries. As China is a GSP country, the bikes can come in free without any tax whatsoever. Above that figure of 9·5 million ecu they have to pay, in theory, 17·1 per cent. tax per bicycle. As the plot unfolds, we shall see that they do not pay a penny in tax; they have managed to find a way round it.

Under GSP there are a number of countries that enjoy special preference which allows them to import into the EC free of tax. When China realises that it has reached the ecu ceiling on imports, it does not stop manufacturing bikes; on the contrary, it surreptitiously arranges, through subsidiary companies and agents, for its bikes to be sent to other GSP countries such as Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia or Hong Kong. As all those countries enjoy special GSP status, each can import to the EC—free of tax —9·5 million ecu worth of bikes, thus avoiding the 17·1 per cent. tax that would have been added if they had not switched through the other GSP countries.

Taiwan, unfortunately, is the odd man out: it has no GSP status. It therefore relocates its bicycle manufacturing industry in GSP countries. Even Taiwan has Chinese factories, with thousands of Taiwanese rushing around in ultra-modern plants making bicycles. That is swelling the number of bicycles in China, which means that more and more bicycles made in China are not moved from China to Europe, but go to some of the other GSP countries that have not used their quota of the EC allocation and then go to Europe.

The Chinese employ other, rather shady devices. They send their bikes out of China to Hong Kong in unmarked crates with false destination labels. In Hong Kong, the bikes are repacked and sent to the United Kingdom in different containers, unassembled, in what is known in the trade as a knock-down condition, which attracts only 8 per cent. tax on accessories. That is the process of last resort, when all the other tricks have been exhausted.

Let us take a look at Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia —all GSP countries. Bicycle exports have gone through the roof: they have grown sixfold in the past two years, not because any of those three countries are building more bikes—the Chinese and Taiwanese are building more bikes in China, and sending them to Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia for shipment into Europe. It is a very shady story, and I know that my hon. Friend the Minister will be greatly troubled by it.

Some of those listening to this story will say, "So what? So Chinese bikes are being dumped in Britain." It matters a great deal, because Britain's bicycle industry is being squeezed into extinction. Britain used to have one of the largest bicycle industries in the world, and we were very proud of that industry; today, thanks to the Chinese and the Taiwanese, we have only 1·2 million bicycles out of a world production of 100 million bicycles a year.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Perhaps a parallel could be drawn with the method by which the Japanese have undermined our motor cycle market in past decades. They ruined that market, only to up their prices as soon as it collapsed.

Will my hon. Friend comment on the fact that, although Nottingham is the home of the Raleigh bicycle, not many Nottingham Members seem to be present to listen to his sensible comments?

Mr. Steen: I cannot see any hon. Members on the Opposition Benches. Perhaps I am suffering from restricted vision after writing one of the best speeches that I have ever written, but my hon. Friend's point is very telling. When a scare story was put out that the British motor cycle industry was going to collapse, everyone said that it was not true; then the industry collapsed. Now the same is happening with the British bicycle industry.

It is not that Raleigh and other leading manufacturers have not modernised their plant; on the contrary, they use robots, lasers and other innovatory products. Raleigh and Dawes, two of the leading manufacturers, are aggressive and dynamic. But how can these industries in Britain compete with the sweatshop labour in a totalitarian country that pays pence, rather than pounds, an hour, where management will stop at nothing to see that their bicycles are landed on our shores?

Where is the cavalry? Who will rescue our industry? The Canadian Mounties found that cheap imports were being dumped on their doorstep. Within five months those goods had been banned, blocked and stopped at the port of entry. Why has not the cavalry responed like the Canadian Mounties to protect Europe from this influx of bicycles? The single market and the free trade will not be much good if they are unable to prevent illegal products from flooding in.

The people in Brussels, I am told, are not too concerned about the dumping of bicycles in Britain, so long as they have their steak and chips and chocolates. We have to rely on the votes of member states to ensure that the dumping will stop. While our industry is bleeding to death, while our people are being put on the unemployment heap, the Eurocrats continue to make merry with a glass of Burgundy. While Brussels continues to party, Raleigh has already laid off 500 staff in the past few months because of Chinese dumping.

We are witnessing a commercially corrupt process aided by the World bank and making any competition virtually impossible. The Treasury is using taxpayers' money to put our own people out of business.

But the story does not end there. We have the Taiwanese also to deal with. My hon. Friend should watch out for the Taiwanese bicycle company whose fax came into the possession of a British bicycle company. The Taiwanese have a wheeze whereby they send their bikes to Britain through a GSP country, knowing that the rule that 60 per cent. of the components have to be made in that country and that the condition of GSP preference is that 60 per cent. of the product be manufactured in that country are being broken.

There emerges the picture of ruthless men in the east aiming to destroy our bicycle market. We are dealing with cunning Chinese business men who are making a killing on the manufacture of bikes and throwing our work force on the dole.

When Raleigh buys Shimano gears from Japan it has to pay duty of 8·1 per cent. The far eastern bloc avoid paying any tax on any part of any bike as a result of the devices that I have outlined. This is a horror story. Free trade is being choked. State-run dictatorship is destroying yet another manufacturing industry in Britain. Where is the guardian angel? Where is the Minister for Trade? Have his wings been clipped? Will evil triumph?

There is a sub-plot. European Community officials are trying to correct the balance by instructing the Chinese to pay 34·4 per cent. tax on every bike imported. They believe that that is the figure that is needed to correct the unlevel playing field. Yet Commissioner Brittan has been prevented from signing. Why will he not sign? Has something been done to his right hand? Is he part of the plot? Is there something going on about which we do not know? Let us not forget the clever lawyers being employed in Brussels by the Chinese to help them to corner the market.

But the Chinese will clearly have the last laugh. Their bikes are not safe. Often, their brakes just do not work in the rain and do not conform to BS6102. When the European Community finally put on the 34·4 per cent., the unsuspecting British public will find themselves unable to stop as they head towards a brick wall.

10.14 pm

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): With the permission of my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) and the Minister for Trade, I shall speak for one minute strongly to support my hon. Friend. I speak as chairman of the all-party parliamentary friends of cycling group. I wish to give two statistics which should be laid before the House.

In Denmark, 11 per cent. of the population still cycle to work whereas in the United Kingdom the figure is only 4 per cent. People here have enough to contend with, such as dangerous roads, without having dangerous bicycles from China foisted on them.

It must be said that the ruthlessness with which the Chinese have set about getting bicycles into this country has to be observed in practice to be believed. It is only right that our great cycle industry—Raleigh and other companies have been mentioned—should be allowed a level playing field on which to operate. However, they demonstrably do not have a level playing field, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams so graphically outlined. We are looking to the Minister for Trade to ensure that the industry has a level playing field in the interests of our nation and of cyclists in particular.

10.15 pm

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) for providing me with a brief opportunity to support him in the debate. He made his strong case with flamboyance and sincerity.

In a brief intervention, my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) drew a comparison with the destruction of the British motor cycle industry and, of course, in many ways he is right. However, there is one difference. We must admit that the Japanese stole a march on our motor cycle industry because, in many respects, their products were technologically more advanced but the products of the British cycle industry are technically supreme. Hon. Members who saw examples of its frames recognised that the most modern technology—space technology—is now being used, and nothing can compare with those frames.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Hams mentioned anomalies which, for example, allow importers to pay nothing on components which are popular with all purchasers these days—Japanese components such as brakes and gear sets—whereas United Kingdom manufacturers importing the same components have to pay 8 per cent.

My hon. Friend also referred to dumping and the fact that injury has been proved by a European Community investigation. More than 2 million bicycles have been dumped on the United Kingdom market since 1987. Now that the United States has taken action to deal with dumping, we can expect to see more diversion into our market. The downhill path has been rapid because in six years imports from the far east have grown from 29 per cent. to 70 per cent. That is an unimaginable change in such a short time.

The message to the Minister is clear. There must be ratification as soon as possible of the anti-dumping measures which are now regarded as justified by the EC investigation. It is necessary to deal speedily with the anomalies that enable far east importers to undercut our excellent home-produced bicycles.

10.17 pm

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Richard Needham): I have seen the yellow peril knocking at the door, and I understand my hon. Friends' concern. I fully support their comments about the lack of interest shown by the Opposition, especially as many Labour Members represent areas in which bicycle manufacturing still exists.

[Mr. Richard Needham]

We must consider a series of issues. My hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) rightly said that the matter falls under European Community competence. He knows perfectly well that the only power I have is to try to move on the debate in Europe. I am not sitting at the elbow of Sir Leon Brittan, giving him the pen. Were I in that happy position, he would no doubt have already signed the anti-dumping measure that we have supported in the European Community. However, it is an EC matter, and two separate issues are involved. One is the GSP—the generalised system of preferences—problem about bikes coming in up to a quota level which, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams said, because of the way in which the rules operate, can then be circumvented by the Chinese continuing to export bikes until a GSP abuse has been proved.

The key question is dumping, because that introduces an element of a tax of 34 per cent., which represents a considerable additional benefit compared with 8 per cent. Put another way, after the devaluation of the pound, that 8 per cent. has disappeared to our benefit because of that devaluation. Even so, we accept that there has been a proven case of dumping and that we should move against it. We are doing what we can, and will continue to do so, to pressurise the Community to move in that direction.

The Chinese ride around on bikes. They may produce 40 per cent. of the world output of bikes, but—I do not have the figures with me—they are also by far the world's biggest riders of bikes. It is no good our now saying that China is a backward third-world country which is not capable of making modern bicycles. The Chinese can make them. My hon. Friend the Member for South Hams says that they have been supported in that effort by the World bank. So they have, as have many other third-world countries, with the aim of trying to modernise their industries and raise their standards of living.

I accept that Chinese workers are paid much less than British workers. Unfortunately, that does not preclude them, under the rules that operate not only in terms of the Community but in terms of GATT, manufacturing products that they sell to this country. If all Chinese workers were paid as much as British workers, no doubt it would be a truly level playing field, but they are not and I am not clear what my hon. Friend suggests we should do about that.

We have an advantage in that our workers are paid, including the social cost, half that of German workers. Are we to make the same argument about dumping British products in Germany because our workers are paid half as much as theirs? That would be a dangerous route to take.

We must look at the matter of fair trade, and my hon. Friend raised a series of questions about that. He asked whether the Chinese were trying to get round the 8 per cent. by moving their finished bikes to Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia or wherever. If my hon. Friend has evidence to that effect, he should let us have it. The only way we can tell whether a bike comes from Indonesia or China is to ask the relevant authorities in, say, Indonesia whether it is an Indonesian bike. If they say it is, we must believe that, unless we are given evidence to the contrary.

I cannot see why the Indonesians, who are not rich, should take massive numbers of Chinese bikes into Indonesia to bring them here, unless there is that level of corruption. In relation to Indonesia, Thailand or Malaysia, what would be the reason for them doing that? Perhaps they are Indonesian bikes, and that is one of the problems. If duties were imposed on China, perhaps they would, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams suggested, move out of Taiwan and start making bikes in Indonesia, which they might move to somewhere else, perhaps to India or Sri Lanka. So the problem is that one is continually chasing a chain which it is hard to catch. But if my hon. Friend is right about the bikes being moved, we shall act on that.

My hon. Friend did not make the point—I will make it for him—that it seems strange that one should have to prove the case twice. In other words, if there is an anti-dumping measure against China, it would seem reasonable to assume that one should not then have to prove further damage because China exceeded its GSP quota. I assure my hon. Friend that we shall take up the matter with the Commission to see how we can bring it to bear.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Hams raised the question of safety. I appreciate why we need a level playing field in regard to bikes—otherwise, he is right in saying that we might go downhill and crash into a wall if the brakes did not work. There are the environmental health officers; there are the pedal bicycles safety regulations. My hon. Friend is a great expert on the subject, as are some of my other hon. Friends. Why are those regulations not being enforced? If the bikes are unsafe and fail to meet British standards, what are the environmental health officers doing? What is the Department of Transport doing?

Mr. Steen: That is a good question.

Mr. Needham: It is indeed, but as this is the first time that the matter has been raised before us, or before you, Madam Speaker, I am not in a position to answer it tonight—except to say that I shall raise the matter with the Department of Transport and the environmental health officers to find out what they are doing. If the bikes are dangerous, I need my hon. Friend to give me the details.

Mr. Steen: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for what he has said so far, but two points arise. The first matter that troubles me is that there is a world of difference between trade between Britain and Germany, which are parts of the same European Community, and trade between China and Britain, in which China is using its cheap labour to bring in bikes that are undermining our industry—we have precious little manufacturing industry left in this country—and causing gross unemployment. Secondly, there is now overwhelming evidence that many of the Chinese bikes are unsafe in wet weather.

Mr. Needham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those allegations, but they must be proven. If they can be proven, action will be taken.

My hon. Friend said that partly assembled bikes were flooding into the country to be made up here. Customs and Excise tell me that they have a monitoring system and have checked a number of consignments of bicycle parts from China, and that they have found no evidence of the practice. As a member of the party in government, my hon. Friend knows perfectly well that the Government cannot act on such matters unless there is proof of the malpractice. I give him a categorical guarantee that, if we have such evidence, we shall act upon it.

The fact that some countries have cheaper labour than others—whether we are talking about us against Germany or China against us—is not a reason for excluding goods from third-world markets. This country has always stood for free trade. As my hon. Friend said, the reasons for the demise of the British motor cycle industry were significantly different from those that we now face.

We shall do everything that we can to assist our bicycle industry and protect it against dumping and any unnecessary abuse of the world's trading system, but my hon. Friends will have to accept that we must work within the rules laid down both in the Community and by the GATT. I hope that my hon. Friend will not take this amiss, but his speech is not so different from the speech that President Clinton made recently about airbus subsidies, steel dumping in the United States, and so on. Those things, too, affect British jobs.

I accept what my hon. Friend says about dumping and the misuse of existing regulations—we all agree on that—but we must be careful not to wind up the people of this country into believing that a way to solve the problem is to introduce protectionism by the back door. That would not benefit us as a nation.

I agree that our manufacturing base is narrower than it should be, and that we have to build it up; but we can do that not least in a market such as China. In China there are enormous opportunities for us to build power stations, transport networks and metro underground systems, and to set up factories ourselves. We can do enormous business there, in the fastest growing economy on earth, which will create many British jobs in future.

It is all a matter of balance. We shall do whatever we can to stop unfair trading practice, but I am sure that my hon. Friend will accept that we must maintain the balance and continue to support fair trade—because free trade is the salvation of our manufacturing industry.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Twenty-nine minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 25 February 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[Madam Speaker *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

Allied Irish Banks Bill *(By Order)*

Order for Second Reading read.

Read a Second time, and referred to the Examiners of Petitions for Private Bills.

British Waterways Bill *[Lords] (By Order)*

Crossrail Bill *(By Order)*

East Coast Main Line (Safety) Bill *(By Order)*

Greater Manchester (Light Rapid Transit System) Bill *[Lords] (By Order)*

Woodgrange Park Cemetary Bill *[Lords] (By Order)*

River Humber (Upper Burcom Cooling Works) Bill *[Lords] (By Order)*

Orders for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Thursday 4 March.

British Railways (No. 4) Bill *(By Order)*

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [8 February], That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Debate to be resumed on Thursday 4 March.

Questions for Oral Answer

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Set-aside

1. **Mr. Milligan:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what opportunities are afforded by set-aside to enhance the countryside.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John Selwyn Gummer): Set-aside offers the opportunity to create and extend wildlife habitats and bring a wide range of benefits to the countryside.

Mr. Milligan: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that answer. Is he aware that the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds is doing a research project into the effect of set-aside and has found that fallow land is extremely helpful for the development of birds such as the linnet, the sedge warbler and the yellow wagtail? What measures are the Government taking to ensure that long-term set-aside produces benefits for wildlife and the character of our countryside?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is right. The RSPB has been supportive in this area. People should remember that, until relatively recently, fallowing was a natural part of the farming scene. I hope that we will be able to use long-term set-aside to have other environmental advantages on which the RSPB is working as well.

Mr. Bennett: What progress has the Minister made towards agreement with his EC colleagues that long-term set-aside can have broad-leaved trees planted on it?

Mr. Gummer: We are discussing that point at present. It has all-party support and I hope that we shall achieve it.

Mr. Colvin: In further enhancing wildlife, will my right hon. Friend consider including in the new set-aside proposals provisions for the planting of what is known as game mixture? That would not only add to wildlife and do nothing to increase agricultural production, but would benefit the environment and be very welcome.

Mr. Gummer: We are looking at a whole range of matters. I believe that the provision of countryside sports is an important part of the contribution to the economy of the countryside.

Mr. Tyler: In administering the set-aside proposals, will the Minister ensure that red tape and bureaucracy are kept to the absolute minimum? Following his speech yesterday, is he aware that his Department's manpower costs for the years 1990-95 are calculated to have increased by 42 per cent., even before the set-aside bureaucracy is in place? Does not it look as though the only growth sector in the industry over the next few years will be in Ministry snoopers?

Mr. Gummer: As the hon. Gentleman has been foremost among those who have asked for supply controls and is supported in that by a large number of farmers, he must expect that the only way to ensure that people are not defrauded is to ensure that those supply controls are met.

As I said in my speech yesterday, there are real problems with supply management. That is why the

Government oppose it in principle. When we must carry it out, as we must do in the context of the common agricultural policy, we shall do so with the least red tape which is commensurate with ensuring that the public purse is protected.

Poultry Industry

2. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the state of the poultry industry.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Nicholas Soames): Competition has been fierce in the egg and poultrymeat sectors over recent years and margins have been tight. But British producers and processors are among the most efficient in the European Community and I expect that present output levels will at least be maintained.

Mrs. Gorman: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. Now that the Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food has ruled that the poultry industry has a clean bill of health, will he take this opportunity to congratulate small businesses on the excellence of their products, perhaps sparing a sympathy vote for the nuns of Daventry who, of course, were put out of business during those sad events? Is not he right to refuse to be railroaded by the Labour party into another food scare over apple juice which he is determined to prevent?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is herself a jolly good egg. I know that she is aware that the Dick report acknowledges that eggs are an importatnt source of human salmonella infection, but that the contribution that they make to current levels of human salmonella infection cannot be quantified precisely. My hon. Friend is entirely right that the reaction to events of this type should be a proportionate response and we must ensure that the measures taken are coherent and sensible and can be pragmatically enforced.

Mr. Morley: Will the Minister confirm that since the regulations were introduced, £10 million of public funds have been wasted on the policy and 3·25 million hens have been slaughtered, while in the same period outbreaks of this strain of salmonella have increased by 82 per cent? Does the Minister agree that he did not listen to the advice of the Agriculture Select Committee, endorsed by the Opposition, when it told him that the policy would not work? What does he intend to do about the increasing level of salmonella food poisoning in Britain?

Mr. Soames: On this, as on many other matters, the hon. Gentleman is entirely wrong. The Select Committee wholly endorsed the action of my right hon. Friend the Minister. The relationship between cases of human food poisoning caused by salmonella and the incidence of infection in laying flocks is extremely complex. Several factors are involved, from production to the safe handling, storage and use of eggs, including by the consumer. The Government have acted on all the recommendations in the Dick report, not merely on the one that the hon. Gentleman raised.

Mr. Martyn Jones: The Government have agreed to use-by dates and to stop their slaughter policy. When the Select Committee visited the public health laboratory service, admittedly after reporting, on 7 February 1991, Professor Humphreys of the PHLS had evidence that stopping the slaughter policy and introducing use-by dates on eggs was the path to follow. Does the Minister agree that the policy has been an ineffective and monumental waste of time and that two years have been wasted in responding sensibly to the problem?

Mr. Soames: No, I cannot agree with the hon. Gentleman's statement. The Government were obliged, following the events of those days, to take action that secured consumers' confidence in the product and protected the egg industry, which was in great difficulty because consumption of eggs had fallen by 80 per cent. after the egg scare. We have acted at all times following the best scientific advice offered to us. We have now acted following further evidence from Professor Heather Dick. I believe that the steps that my right hon. Friend the Minister has taken are absolutely right.

Mr. Marland: Does my hon. Friend agree that in promoting further sales of British poultry the Strathclyde food initiative is an excellent undertaking? Large British companies such as Safeway, Allied-Lyons, Unigate, Rank Hovis and others have got together with producers and farmers to ensure that the right conditions prevail whereby they can sell more home-grown British food in British shops. Does my hon. Friend agree that the initiative should be widely endorsed?

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend is entirely right. The Strathclyde food initiative is immensely valuable to the industry. It is a remarkable endeavour on the part of some major retailers and others. It will be and is of great benefit to the farming community. It is true that the farmers must pay more attention to marketing the goods that they produce. We must pay a great deal more attention to what we will do with the produce. To that end, the Strathclyde initiative is to be welcomed and I wholly endorse what my hon. Friend said.

Mr. Garnier: Does my hon. Friend accept that if there are to be further changes in the regulations on poultry welfare, they should be introduced on an EC-wide basis so that British poultry farmers are not placed at a disadvantage to their EC competit[illegible]s?

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend is entirely right. We are totally committed and will not introduce welfare amendments that are not practised throughout the Community and could thus disadvantage our people. My hon. Friend has my assurance and that of my right hon. Friend on the matter.

Potatoes

4. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information his Department holds as to the contract price for potatoes in EC member states.

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Curry): We do not hold information on contract prices for potatoes outside the United Kingdom, but have analysed movements in average market prices.

Mr. Gerrard: Has not the price of potatoes collapsed in much of Europe during the past 12 months, forcing many producers into bankruptcy? Given that fact, why are the Government insisting on driving British producers into the same sort of market, rather than supporting the existing successful marketing scheme?

Mr. Curry: If it were true that prices had collapsed throughout Europe, including Britain, by definition the British scheme would not be working. In the processed market—the part of the market that is expanding—the United Kingdom is getting far too little of the investment and the continent far too much. We wish to ensure that we modify the present arrangements, to put British farmers on a level playing field and to ensure that we continue to dominate the European snacks and crisps market, which is at the leading edge of technology.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my hon. Friend confirm that, due to the operation of the potato marketing scheme, we are even importing frozen chips because it is too expensive to make them here? Can he tell the House whether any EC country has a quota scheme to restrict the output of potatoes?

Mr. Curry: Potatoes are the only part of Community agriculture which are not brought within the common agricultural policy regimes. There is a proposal to do so which would not permit the continuation of quotas. It is our view that the quota scheme, which has served its purpose—as it used to do with milk and the forgotten hop quotas—has probably been overtaken by events. We need to ensure a competitive and level playing field in Europe for our producers and for those who work in the processing industry.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Before forcing Britain's potato producers into the destructive conditions of the free market, and before any decision by the Community, or the United Kingdom unilaterally, would not it be wiser to press the European Commission to set up an investigation into the use of direct and indirect subsidies to European producers and processors? Could not such an investigation consider the subsidies in Holland, Jersey, France, Spain and Italy?

Mr. Curry: If it were true that the free market was destructive, one would expect there to be no healthy industry in France, Germany and Holland and one would expect consumers to be suffering from potato shortages —neither is true.

Abattoirs

5. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received on new regulations relating to abattoirs.

Mr. Soames: We have received many representations and have been able to reassure a large proportion of them of the flexibility and care with which we will be implementing the regulations.

Mr. Evans: Is my hon. Friend aware that massive bills are landing on the floors of many of our small and medium-sized abattoirs? I have one here. It is going to cost a small abattoir more than £20,000 extra per year for a vet as well as a meat inspector. Can nothing be done about such massive veterinary charges, which seem to have no rhyme or reason but are acting like a tax on our abattoir owners? If something cannot be done about the charges, can anything be done about the directive? If we cannot amend it, perhaps we can interpret it as loosely as some of our European Community neighbours interpret other legislation.

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who faithfully represents the great concern felt on both sides of the House about that serious matter. All other major meat-producing countries insist on veterinary supervision of meat production and a dual standard for slaughterhouses and meat hygiene is no longer acceptable. All those people who have come to see us agreed about the importance of hygiene standards. Their real concern is over the level of veterinary charges for inspection. My right hon. Friend and I are doing all that we can to bring some sense and order to that matter. There has been extensive consultation with the local authorities and we await the full detail of their response before we consider our next move. I assure my hon. Friend that we are entirely seized of the necessity to get the costs down and we shall continue to make the strongest possible representations to the veterinary profession about that.

Mr. Hain: I welcome the Minister's statement. I draw his attention to the case of Mayberrys abattoir in Pontardawe in my constituency, which has been charged £70,000 in vets' fees for no more than a few hours' work a day during the week. Will the Minister investigate that case as a matter of urgency and consider the extra costs that fall on abattoirs as a result of the wider impact of the directive, which is having a severe effect on employment opportunities at that important local employer?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for presenting his case in a measured way. I cannot comment on an individual case, but if he would like to get in touch with me, I shall, of course, consider it closely.

Veterinary charges are causing the great difficulty in this matter and we continue to press the British Veterinary Association and the other professional organisations to come up with a proper and sustainable regime of charging. At the moment some of those charges are utterly unacceptable.

Mr. King: May I reinforce what my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) said? There is no point in having achieved the exemption level, which we much appreciated, if that benefit is negated by high veterinary charges, which make it impossible for small slaughterhouses to continue. I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to redouble their efforts to ensure that small slaughterhouses are not genuinely disadvantaged in that way.

Mr. Soames: My right hon. Friend has been extremely vigorous in representing the case to me. He will know that not all closures are due to the new regulations. Our slaughtering sector has been rationalising for many years in response to market forces and there is still some overcapacity in the industry. My right hon. Friend will understand that we simply are not prepared to allow poor plants to survive at the expense of those that have been prepared to invest in order to meet modern standards. We have made enormous efforts to ensure that those good businesses that have been prepared to invest and go along with modern practice can and will survive.

Mr. Enright: Have not some small and medium-sized abattoirs invested to bring themselves up to the standards that were locally recommended? It was only when the civil servants got hold of the directive and over-regulated that we started to have problems. Will the Minister rein in his civil servants and make them see sense?

Mr. Soames: On this occasion, the hon. Gentleman is, unusually, being thoroughly unfair. I am not in the business, normally, of defending vets, but we have made the most vigorous representations to them and we will see that their charges are kept to a proper limit.

Throughout the exercise, officials have implemented the regulations in an extremely sensitive and pragmatic manner. I must tell my right hon. and hon. Friends that a great deal of work needs to be done in the sector. It is quite wrong that the British consumer should have to accept a dual standard of meat hygiene.

I know that the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) has the interests of the meat industry at heart and he will be aware of the great damage that bovine spongiform encephalopathy caused to domestic meat consumption. It is quite right that we should take every step to ensure that high standards in meat hygiene are available.

Food Safety Act 1990

6. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he intends to review the working of the Food Safety Act 1990.

Mr. Soames: I keep the Act under constant review and, indeed, we are now looking at all the regulations that have been issued to ensure that they properly fulfil their purpose.

Mr. Riddick: Is my hon. Friend aware that a number of small bakers and grocers have had to spend thousands of pounds on new shelves and new fridges, depending on how their local authorities have interpreted the Act? Those small business men see that Act as a bureaucratic imposition rather than as a measure designed to improve food safety. Can my hon. Friend assure the House that the proposed EC directive on dairies, which was brought to my attention this week by a local farmer, who tells me that it will cost him £25,000 and might even put him out of business, will not be an equal bureaucratic nonsense?

Mr. Soames: I cannot agree with my hon. Friend that the 1990 Act has been bureaucractic nonsense. It has been broadly welcomed, by not only consumers but firms involved in food processing and manufacture. I agree with my hon. Friend that proper, honourable and accurate assessment of enforcement throughout the country is of extreme and critical importance. The problem that arises with the 1990 Act is that enforcement often appears not to be on a level playing field. We have taken a great deal of trouble with environmental health officers and local authorities and believe that we now have more satisfactory enforcement. As to my hon. Friend's specific point about the dairy trade, if he will give me more details of the farm to which he referred, I shall be happy to see him, with my right hon. Friend the Minister, and to look into the matter on his behalf.

Mr. Salmond: Does the Food Safety Act 1990 have any implications for the substantial quantities of cheap Russian, American and Canadian fish that were imported into the EC last October and November at below reference prices and which are now finding their way through the cold stores and are destabilising the fish market in the Community? If food safety regulations are not relevant, is there any other action that the Government will take to stop that market destabilisation?

Mr. Soames: We all admire the hon. Gentleman's ingenuity, but there are no implications for the Food Safety Act 1990.

Mr. Hicks: Despite my hon. Friend's observations, is not it a fact that absurd cases have arisen—in part, as a consequence of differing interpretations by various statutory authorities—and should not the Government's deregulation unit undertake an investigation?

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend is right. There have been some unfortunate incidents, but also many grossly over-exaggerated and inaccurate media reports. My hon. Friend will be reassured to know that my right hon. Friend the Minister has set in train a substantial deregulation programme. One aspect to which we are turning our attention is deregulation and the whole corpus of food law. My hon. Friend would not expect us to take any steps that could put the consumer at a disadvantage in respect of the high state of food protection that we currently have—but I take his point and will bear it in mind when we consider that issue.

Dr. Strang: Does the Minister accept that while the possibility of BSE being transmitted to humans seems remote, we cannot be absolutely certain of that for some years because the incubation period of the agent in human beings is likely to be very long? What is the Minister's response to the continuing rise, each month over the past year, in the number of cows reported to have BSE and to the likelihood that the total number of cows slaughtered because of BSE will break the 100,000 barrier this year?

Is the Minister still confident that BSE is caused by a single source—cattle feed contaminated with ruminant protein? Is he satisfied that there is no vertical transmission from cow to calf and no horizontal transmission between cattle in the same herd? Can we still be confident that BSE will be completely eradicated by the year 2000, as predicted by the Agriculture Committee of the European Parliament? Will the Minister assure the House that the Government are seized of the importance of the issue?

Mr. Soames: On the hon. Gentleman's latter point, he knows perfectly well that the Government are very seized of the issue. It is one of the most critical facing us and naturally we spend a great deal of time on it. I reassure the hon. Gentleman and the House that nothing in the evidence received since the Tyrrell committee reported has caused the Government's expert advisers to alter in any way their views on BSE and their belief that the disease will be eradicated eventually. I confirm that the source of the infection is undoubtedly, we believe, ruminant protein in feed and that, following the feedstuffs ban, we are beginning to see a considerable decrease in the numbers infected.

Let me make a further point about the increase in the figures. Because a certain period elapsed between the feed ban and the clearing of feed from the farms, the numbers are greater than we had at first thought. As for maternal and horizontal transmissions, even if they do occur—and there is no compelling evidence of that—there is no reason why such transmissions should have any effect on the epidemic itself.

Set-aside

7. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he has taken to ensure that set-aside is implemented on a comparable basis everywhere in the EC.

Mr. Gummer: Detailed Commission implementing rules provide a common basis for set-aside across all member states. We intend to hold the Commission to that, and to ensure that other member states follow the rules as we ourselves shall.

Mr. Mans: Has my right hon. Friend any plans to extend the scheme to the fishing industry, so that it can be implemented fairly? It should be borne in mind that the industry is currently in dire straits—particularly in my port of Fleetwood, where, as recently as this morning, a firm went into voluntary liquidation.

Mr. Gummer: The differences involved are considerable. In the agricultural sector, we are trying to reduce over-production, whereas in the fishing sector we are trying to reduce effort: there are fewer fish to be caught each year because of the over-use of effort. As my hon. Friend will know very well, a decommissioning scheme is now part of our fisheries package, and I very much hope that that will prove helpful.

Madam Speaker: Order. It would be helpful if the Minister addressed the microphone; if he does not do so, it is difficult to hear what he is saying.

Mr. Skinner: Why does not the Minister reconsider the proposal by his hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) for set-aside schemes for fish farms? He might then qualify for such a scheme. He could turn his pond into a fish farm for which the taxpayer would have to foot the bill; then he could have another set-aside scheme to pay for the fence. Some of us think that the Minister is building a farm down there—or perhaps it is a horse-racing stud: after all, it is close to Newmarket.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman's question shows the seriousness with which he takes all our efforts. I doubt whether the House wants an answer to it—*[Interruption.]* I doubt whether the House wants an answer different from the one that I have given. I thank him for bringing yet more levity to our proceedings.

Mr. Moss: No doubt my right hon. Friend is aware of the rumours that now abound that EC farmers, particularly in France, have yet again stolen a march on United Kingdom farmers in securing the right to grow oilseed rape on set-aside land as long as the oil is used for biofuel. Would he care to comment on that? Will he give the House an assurance that he will fight, on behalf of United Kingdom farmers, for our right to a share of the EC funds that have been earmarked for biofuel research?

Mr. Gummer: We already have that right. No march has been stolen on us. Anyone who can sign a contract that ensures that the product will have an end use in biofuels or the like will have that right in this country, just as they would have it in France or any other Community nation.

Common Agricultural Policy (Fraud)

8. **Mr. Booth:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps are being taken to prevent fraud within the reformed CAP.

Mr. Gummer: I have sought on all occasions to insist that European Community agriculture schemes are designed to combat fraud and reduce wastage with the minimum of unnecessary burdens.

Mr. Booth: Will my right hon. Friend bear in mind the widespread anxiety and anger felt by, in particular, taxpayers—in Finchley, for example—at the way in which EC farmers, especially on the continent, are defrauding the system of billions of pounds? I welcome my right hon. Friend's remarks, but will he tell us how the inspectors will produce enough information to deal with the problem? Will he also assure the House that the long-standing border dispute between Northern Ireland and southern Ireland in relation to fraud is being dealt with adequately?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is entirely right: there is a great deal to be done. We shall ensure that, in so far as this country has experienced such problems, we cover them in both Great Britain and Northern Ireland. At the same time, we are determined that the same should happen throughout the rest of Europe, which means insisting that anti-fraud measures are implemented everywhere, from Scotland to Sicily.

Mr. Cryer: Is not the truth that the common agricultural policy is so extensive, cumbersome and inefficient that all attempts to combat fraud have ended in failure? Is not it true that most of the £14 billion which the Tory Government paid to the common market between 1980 and 1990 went on the common agricultural policy, that many millions of that disappeared in fraud and that the only way we shall stop this fraudulent practice is by ending the common agricultural policy?

Mr. Gummer: I do not think that it is the policy of the hon. Gentlemen's party, as far as I understand it, to withdraw Britain from the European Community. Therefore, the concept of ending the common agricultural policy is not an issue which either party can entertain. What we have to do is reform it. We have gone a long way towards that reform. We shall get rid of that fraud and we are fighting hard against it. We are not helped by the hon. Gentleman who, instead of seeking to reform it, wants always to pull it down, but that is the attitude he has always had.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: Putting aside the criminal aspects of this matter, will my right hon. Friend accept that many farmers in this country believe that other member countries go in for a bit of fraud in the administration of the CAP itself? Will the Minister say what steps the Government are taking to see that the rules are applied equally across the board, in many areas, as directed by the Commission?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is right to point to the fact that many feel that the systems that are obtaining in other countries, while they are not encouraging fraud, are not discouraging it adequately. We are seeking to ensure that the Commission, through its inspections and the like, puts an end to this practice. I am pleased to say that recently, for example, the Italian Government both detected fraud that has taken place in its own country, and reported that fraud to the Commission. That is a very welcome sign which we shall be supporting.

Scotch Whisky

10. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will arrange to meet representatives of the Scotch whisky industry to discuss future prospects of the industry and those employed in it.

Mr. Curry: My right hon. Friend and I have frequent contacts with representatives of the Scotch whisky industry.

Mr. Canavan: Is the Minister aware about 70,000 workers are employed directly and indirectly in the whisky industry and that last month, because of the difficulties that are facing the industry, United Distillers proposed 700 redundancies and eight plant closures, including the Rosebank distillery in my constituency? Will the Minister therefore arrange to meet United Distillers to see what can be done to avoid those closures and to save those jobs? Will the Minister urge his right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to introduce a fairer tax regime based on revenue per unit of alcohol? Is it not ridiculous that two thirds of the retail price of a bottle of whisky goes to the Treasury and that the taxation rate on whisky is almost double that on imported wines?

Mr. Curry: My right hon. Friend will, of course, hear what the hon. Member says as he prepares his Budget. It is true that in unit taxation, finding a better balance between wine, beer and spirits in the Community as a whole would be to the advantage of the United Kingdom, and we support that approach in the European Community. United Distillers, which is a Guinness company, is undergoing a restructuring caused by difficulties in the marketplace. We are always open to representations by that company and all companies involved in the drinks industry. I am arranging, in any case, for a meeting with that and other major drinks companies in Britain to discuss the whole question of their marketing and Britain's role in the marketplace.

Dr. Strang: I am sure that the Minister accepts that the loss of hundreds of jobs in this industry is a matter of grave concern and, in addition to taking up the suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan), will he also make clear to his right hon. Friend the Chancellor that the minimum excise rates EC package, which came into operation at the beginning of this year, is quite unacceptable and that when it comes up for review next year it is essential that the Government secure the establishment of something like a level playing field?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman will know that the European Commission is investigating excise duties. The recent agreement at least achieved a standstill, which enables us to consider the matter objectively. I agree that Scotch is one of the United Kingdom's most important export industries. It has achieved substantial growth in export markets, so it is very much in our national interest that we ensure that the taxation regimes to which it is subject put it on a level playing field with other drinks, most of which are deeply inferior to it.

Farm Products (Sales)

11. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Minister of AGriculture, Fisheries and Food what further action he intends to take to increase sales of British meat and other British farm products.

Mr. Curry: I shall take every opportunity to encourage the farming and food industries to seize on market opportunities at home and abroad.

Mr. Pawsey: I thank my hon. Friend for that helpful reply. Does he agree that the quality and variety of British food is among the best in the world, that it represents excellent value to the British housewife and that it creates and sustains thousands of British jobs? Will he redouble his efforts, therefore, to promote British food in the United Kingdom through not only the media, women's institutes and townswomen's guilds but through the education service, the thousands of schools and the national curriculum? I am sure that our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education would be only too pleased to assist.

Mr. Curry: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. We export a third of all our lamb. Pork exports are 44 per cent. up, beef exports are 14 per cent. up and lamb exports are 24 per cent. up. We are conquering the overseas market. It is important, however, that we conquer our own market, which is what the marketing initiative is designed to do. All my colleagues in the Ministry spend much time promoting British products in the United Kingdom, and with two such stalwart promoters of British food as my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary and Cordelia Gummer I do not see how we can fail.

Mr. McGrady: Is the Minister aware that the market for potatoes, especially those from Northern Ireland, has totally collapsed? It is the final nail in the coffin of a disastrous season for potatoes. The industry requires emergency action. Will he make representations for some relief from the EC, because the industry and its associated outlets has totally collapsed due to weather and market conditions? In the meantime, will he introduce relief under a stock feed scheme for potatoes?

Mr. Curry: I understand the problems that the potato industry in Northern Ireland is facing. The hon. Gentleman probably knows that the southern Irish request for emergency aid has been turned down by Brussels. Therefore, I do not think that that avenue offers a realistic opportunity for success, but I am willing to discuss all the industry's problems with its representatives in Northern Ireland, and Northern Ireland Ministers have listened to what the hon. Gentleman said.

Bananas

12. **Mr. Oppenheim:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will make a statement on his policy on bananas.

Mr. Gummer: We have been determined to defend the interests of Commonwealth Caribbean banana producers against great opposition, and we have succeeded.

Mr. Oppenheim: Is my right hon. Friend aware that his policy of import quotas and tariffs penalises not only efficient south American growers but, above all, British consumers of bananas? Is he aware that the bulk of the extra cost that consumers pay goes not to Caribbean farmers but to two large multinational banana traders? If we really believe in free choice and free trade, surely we should give the British housewife the right to buy, at the lowest possible cost, the banana of her choice—whether it be for lunch, breakfast, dinner or at any other time—free from intervention from politicians?

Mr. Gummer: I am aware that five countries in the Caribbean will now have an economic future, which they would not have had if we had not defended them. I was pleased to have received cross-party support and congratulations from the Prime Ministers of those poor democratic countries.

Mr. Tony Banks: Is the Secretary of State aware that the Norwegian Prime Minister went bananas when she was quizzed by Labour and Conservative members of the Council of Europe about the resumption of commercial whaling by her country? What protest have the Government made about commercial whaling by Norway?

Mr. Gummer: I did not discuss bananas when I was last in Norway, but I protested against Norway's decision to resume whaling.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Bearing in mind the fact that we can obtain bigger, better and cheaper bananas from central and south America, will my right hon. Friend ensure that the Caribbean producers do not rest in the nice, comfortable cradle of protection but are given a time limit beyond which they will not be protected?

Mr. Gummer: There is a very strong programme for improvement in the quality of bananas coming from such countries. However, any investigation into the banana market will show that there are countries to which we owe a very clear moral debt. We also have a legal debt under the Lomé treaty. So long as I am Minister I shall fight for those countries and recognise that debt.

Poultry Slaughterhouses

13. **Mr. Morley:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to collect detailed information on what stunning currents are being used in United Kingdom poultry slaughterhouses.

Mr. Soames: Local authorities enforce the law in this area and we monitor compliance.

Mr. Morley: Will the Minister give the House an assurance that in all cases where animals are slaughtered for food use, the highest and most humane standards will apply? Will he ensure that the currents used to stun poultry pre-slaughter are at the level of at least 130 milliamps to ensure that there is no chance whatsoever of an unstunned chicken going into the process?

Mr. Soames: The hon. Gentleman raises a very important point. He knows that the Government regard the question of animals and welfare at slaughter as extremely important. The statutory code of practice on the welfare of poultry at slaughter recommends a minimum current per bird of 105 milliamps for broiler chickens. This is based on scientific research, which shows that a minimum period of insensibility of 52 seconds is achieved by currents above this level.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mrs. Ewing:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 25 February.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is on an official visit to the United States, which is clearly going extremely well.

Mrs. Ewing: Will the Lord President of the Council accept that there has been a very warm welcome for the fact that the European Commission has designated the highlands and islands of Scotland as being eligible for objective 1 payments? This matter has been made all the more urgent by the fact that Ardersier is to be placed on a care and maintenance basis. Will the Lord President make it clear that the United Kingdom Government are to argue that the highlands and islands area to be covered by objective 1 should be the same as the highlands and islands enterprise area, which includes the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) and parts of my constituency? In both cases the economy is very fragile, and we need this assistance.

Mr. Newton: The whole House will join the hon. Lady in welcoming the announcement that the highlands and islands have been included in the list of recommendations that the Commission is making for designation under objective 1 in the next round of the structural fund. Of course, those recommendations are still subject to scrutiny and to final decision by the Council of Ministers. In the discussions, the United Kingdom will certainly seek to ensure that the needs and interests of west Grampian and of Argyll and Bute are taken fully into account as efforts are made to achieve the best outcome for the highlands and islands.

Mr. Dykes: As my right hon. Friend has said, the Prime Minister's visit to President Clinton and the new American Government has been extremely successful. Can he confirm that we are resisting the rather unfair attacks on the Airbus, the excellent British and European aircraft, and on its related equipment being made by American manufacturers, bearing in mind the fact that American subventions for aircraft are much higher than those in Europe?

Mr. Newton: I am not in a position to give details of every aspect of my right hon. Friend's conversations, but I have no doubt that he has emphasised the British Government's view on those matters.

Mrs. Beckett: How would the right hon. Gentleman feel if he were serving in the British Army, under fire in Bosnia, and were handed a P45?

Mr. Newton: The need to achieve balanced and well-considered reductions in the armed forces was made clear by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Armed Forces some months ago. It is appropriate that that exercise should be carried through in a balanced and fair way. Of course, there is no question of anybody becoming redundant while in Bosnia.

Mrs. Beckett: Is it not a further example of the Government's incompetence that one week they are reprieving regiments because the British Army is overstretched and the next they are making soldiers redundant? Are they not gratuitously undermining the morale of British troops in one of the most dangerous theatres of operation?

Mr. Newton: It seems to me that, against the background of a need acknowledged by all parties to make some reductions in the armed forces, it is right that it should be carried out fairly and even handedly. It would be much more unfair to leave troops serving in Bosnia in a state of continuing uncertainty when the position is being clarified elsewhere.

Mrs. Beckett: Surely it is adding insult to injury to make soldiers redundant when the Government know perfectly well that there are no jobs for them to come back to. Is he aware that in some parts of the country, as many as 2,000 people are chasing every job?

Mr. Newton: What I am aware of is that the armed forces have extensive arrangements for assisting those whose services come under the heading that we are discussing and that the great majority of those who left in the previous phase of change in the armed forces have found jobs, and their skills enhanced their prospects of doing so.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will my right hon. Friend commend the action of the judge at Lancaster Crown court who imposed on four youths who were guilty of affray and other crimes—one of whom was on bail—an immediate custodial sentence, which will teach a salutary lesson to other gangs who choose to maraud?

Mr. Newton: Without being familiar with every detail of the particular case, I endorse the general thrust of my hon. Friend's remarks. I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary will have her support and, I hope, that of the House when he issues further proposals shortly in respect of juvenile offenders and of those offending while on bail.

Mr. Ashdown: Does the Leader of the House recall the Prime Minister's commitment that under the citizens charter the public would be compensated when the authorities failed? Is he aware of today's Treasury Committee report which concludes that the Bank of England has manifestly failed in its duty of supervision in the case of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International? Will the sufferers be compensated, or is this to be another example of "do as I say but not as I do"?

Mr. Newton: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has already carefully considered the implications of the Bingham report and made it clear that the Government do not believe that it would be right to offer compensation beyond that provided in general banking legislation under the statutory deposit protection scheme. Of course, my right hon. Friend and the Government as a whole will carefully study the report to which the right hon. Gentleman refers, but I certainly do not expect them to change their conclusion.

Mr. Richards: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Government's trade union reforms have completely transformed the industrial relations climate, and will he join me in welcoming to our policies the Johnny-come-latelys on the Opposition Benches no matter how belated their conversion?

Mr. Newton: Yes. I agree with my hon. Friend and endorse what he says. The Opposition have opposed every significant piece of reform legislation that we have passed since 1979 in that connection, but have had to come to a grudging acceptance of them as their beneficial results become clear. We have a continuing flow of examples of investment coming into this country which has been helped in coming here by precisely those reforms.

Q2. **Mr. Bennett:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 25 February.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bennett: I have here a few reports covering the past 14 years of Home Office Ministers assuring us that they would get tough on crime. Can the Leader of the House tell us how many promises were made and why they have not worked? Could it possibly be because of the sort of society that this Government have created, in which people have been encouraged to be selfish and to put self-interest first; a society in which no one is expected to understand right or wrong, but merely whether one can get away with it, and in which Ministers are trained to say, "Not me, guv"?

Mr. Newton: I would take that more easily from somebody who was not a representative of a party which has voted against or sought to weaken every substantial measure designed to tackle the problem: the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, the Public Order Act 1986, the Criminal Justice Act 1991 and, regularly, the renewal of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989. The test of the hon. Gentleman's commitment will be how he votes when the renewal of the prevention of terrorism Act comes again before the House shortly.

Mr. Waterson: Does my right hon. Friend accept that many people in my constituency of Eastbourne and throughout the country stand to benefit from the Housing and Urban Development Bill? Is it not a great pity that Opposition Members voted against it on Second and Third Readings?

Mr. Newton: Yes it is, and it is typical of the way in which the Opposition so often fail to vote in the way that much of their rhetoric indicates that they should.

Q3. **Ms. Eagle:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 25 February.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Ms. Eagle: Does the Lord President of the Council agree with the views expressed yesterday by his colleague, Lord Lawson, the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, who said that Britain's withdrawal from the exchange rate mechanism was a humiliation which could have been avoided if Britain had cut interest rates earlier and realigned earlier? Does he agree with me that Lord Lawson's comments are hardly a ringing endorsement of his Government's economic competence?

Mr. Newton: No, I do not entirely share the views that my right hon. and noble Friend is reported to have expressed. I would have found it more credible coming from the hon. Lady if she had joined the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) in referring to something that her constituents will benefit from—the inclusion of Merseyside in objective 1 status.

Q4. **Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 25 February.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Willetts: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the battle against over-regulation must be one of the Government's highest priorities? Is it not absurd that health and safety regulations prohibit one of our leading physicists, who has written the "Encyclopaedia Britannica" entry on electricity, from changing a 13 amp plug in his own laboratory?

Mr. Newton: It certainly sounds so on the face of it, but I had better undertake to look into the particular case, while agreeing entirely with my hon. Friend's basic proposition, which is that we need precisely what is now being carried out by the Government—a thorough-going review of some aspects of over-regulation.

Q5. **Mr. Hoon:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 25 February.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hoon: Since the Leader of the House is keen on talking about European Community funding, can he explain to Britain's depressed regions why not one penny of the £1 billion that is available to this country from the EC in regional funding had been spent at the end of last year? Will he assure the House that all that £1 billion will be spent, together with the £2·5 billion matching funds that will be required in the next 10 months, and ensure that the money is spent in Britain on helping our depressed regions rather than being lost to other countries?

Mr. Newton: The Government fully comply with the Community's rules in these matters and have every intention of making that even clearer than, evidently, it is to the hon. Gentleman.

Q6. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 25 February.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Evennett: Has my right hon. Friend observed that on average council tax in Labour authorities will be £100 higher than in Conservative authorities and will he pass that information on to the Prime Minister when he returns from his successful trip to the United States? Furthermore, does my right hon. Friend agree that Conservative councils are efficient and effective, while Labour councils just cost the people more?

Mr. Newton: Yes, I have noticed such reports. There is a remarkable correlation between high levels of council tax and Labour control, and between low levels of council tax and Conservative control. If there is any risk of that lesson being missed, we shall ensure that the electorate are made aware of it between now and the local elections in May.

Mr. Home Robertson: May I take the Leader of the House back to the question of the redundant soldiers? What does he say to Royal Scots serving in Northern Ireland, and members of the Cheshire Regiment serving in Bosnia, whom I met last week, who applied for voluntary redundancy on the understanding that their regiments were to be amalgamated and who would now like to have the opportunity to withdraw their redundancy applications? It is not good enough to say that they have the right to appeal. Under the new circumstances, they should have the right to stay in the Army and should not be issued with P45s.

Mr. Newton: My right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces tells me that that matter was the subject of exchanges in yesterday's debate and that he made the position clear to the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) then. I am certainly not going to add to that now.

London Ambulance Service (Inquiry)

3.30 pm

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside) *(by private notice)*: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the London ambulance service.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): The House will recall that last October I asked the South West Thames regional health authority to commission an independent inquiry into the operation of the computer-aided dispatch system of the London ambulance service. This followed occasions on which the system had seriously failed. That independent inquiry has now reported, and I am grateful to Mr. Don Page and his team for the thorough way in which the task was discharged.

The report finds that there were a series of failures on all sides in the implementation of the CAD system. It concludes that those were attributable largely to the pace at which the new system was installed, following on from the damaging ambulancemen's strike in 1989-90.

I take a very serious view of the catalogue of errors which the report has highlighted. These errors are unacceptable and must not be repeated. In a meeting with both the South West Thames RHA and the London ambulance service yesterday, I made clear the gravity of the situation and the importance which all those concerned with the LAS will attach to the speedy rectification of mistakes and to learning lessons from what has gone before.

I remain to be convinced that the lines of management accountability between the LAS and, ultimately, Ministers are sufficiently robust. Accordingly, I have instructed Professor Marian Hicks, chairman of the South West Thames regional health authority, to produce proposals within one month for strengthening the lines of accountability. I note that Mr. Jim Harris, chairman of the LAS board, has decided to step down, with effect from Monday, in order to allow that process to proceed without inappropriate distraction.

The House should be reassured, however, that significant managerial changes have already taken place at the LAS since the report was commissioned. In particular, a new chief executive, Mr. Martin Gorham, has been appointed, following the resignation of John Wilby. He has taken considerable steps to improve both management and industrial relations at the service. I am also pleased to note that the LAS will appoint an information technology director to oversee the staged implementation of an effective computer-aided despatch system.

The House will also want to know of the significant improvements in service standards which have taken place since the autumn. 999 calls are now answered within an average of six seconds. Ambulance response times are now some 16 per cent. above the level to which they fell last summer. However, they remain well below the levels which are common in other metropolitan areas.

The report recognises that London is a special case. However, the fact that other ambulance services continue to provide a much better response time than the LAS, often with far fewer resources, must give the service and those who work for it considerable food for thought. These problems must be tackled. In particular, I wish to see an early start made to the negotiation of new rosters with the union side which will put more ambulances on the road and improve the service to patients.

I have asked Professor Hicks to provide me with regular reports on progress. We will be agreeing new objectives with the authority to achieve national standards as soon as possible. We will also want to see further improvements in the service's personnel and financial performance.

Both the RHA and the LAS itself have embraced the findings of the independent inquiry. A series of important managerial steps are now in place in response. They will improve the management of the service, management-staff relations and accountability to local people. The result will be improvements to the service for London patients, which London expects and London must get.

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): I would like to pay tribute to Don Page and his team for an excellent report.

Is it not time for the Secretary of State to say sorry —sorry for the mess that was inflicted on the people of London and for the risk to which they were put? Will the Secretary of State accept that the report is a damning indictment of Government complacency, inaction and irresponsibility? Is it not time for the buck to stop, and is it not time for it to stop right here in the House of Commons?

Is it not a fact that the report describes the system as fatally flawed, introduced in what the report calls a climate of mistrust and obstructiveness, not from those working in the service but by those managing the service? As Don Page, the leader of the team described it, the issues raised by staff were swept aside. I may add that the issues raised by London Members were swept aside—swept aside from 18 April 1991, when they were first raised in the House, and swept aside last autumn by the Secretary of State and her Ministers when we tried to hold them to account for what had been taking place.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that the report shows that the only priority was implementation by the date decided, implementation at the lowest possible cost? Is it not time to review a system in the national health service which puts cuts before competence and private contracting before patient care? Does not the report spell out that there was no proper system of managerial oversight, that there was no structure for ensuring that what took place was acceptable or credible? Is it not a fact that the Secretary of State has, across the country, a system which repeats the same errors: the lack of line management responsibility and the failure of Ministers to oversee adequately what is directly within their responsibility?

Will the Secretary of State confirm that criticism in the report talked about the sweeping away of the advice of those working in the service, of quality being rejected purely on the basis of "Will it do?"? Will the Secretary of State confirm that on 28 October she told hon. Members that she would be undertaking an immediate review to prevent such chaos from happening again? Yet Don Page, when asked this morning whether sufficient changes in the system had been made by today, said:

> "No. Today really marks the start of a new era."

Will the Secretary of State confirm that on this occasion what she says will hold water and bears some resemblance to the truth? Is it not time for a new era for the NHS, not simply in London but across Britain? Is it not time to put accountability and caring before accountancy, and to bring back openness and honesty to Government dealings with our NHS?

Does the Secretary of State agree with Chris Spry, the general manager of South West Thames region, who today is quoted as saying:

> "We all have to share some responsibility"?

Will the Secretary of State concern herself with what he went on to say:

> "This arm's-length arrangement, I sense that no one is in charge and that somehow some way we will find a way of holding people responsible will not do. The mechanisms were not helpful"?

Will the Secretary of State confirm that she is changing those mechanisms, the operation of the regional structure, and oversight and accountability for the ambulance service? Is the arm's-length approach, or what Mr. Spry described as neither a fish nor fowl approach, acceptable to the Secretary of State? Will she confirm—[HON. MEMBERS:"Too long."] This is a serious issue, on which the people of London demand answers.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that a junior Minister, replying to my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) on 28 September and to my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms. Jackson) on 21 October, said that he was satisfied with the system? Only five days before the system collapsed, he told them that the problem currently faced was a behavioural rather than a technical one. Did he not say that an inquiry into the London ambulance service would serve no purpose? Did not the Secretary of State indicate that she had given him direct responsibility for the London ambulance service? Should he not accept that lead and, as the junior Minister responsible for the mess, resign this afternoon?

Madam Speaker: Before the Secretary of State responds, may I bring to the attention of the House the plea that I make frequently in the House for brisk exchanges? Of course this is an important statement and hon. Members want to ask questions, but only a few hon. Members will be able to question it if long exchanges take place. I ask for briskness on both sides of the House in future.

Mrs. Bottomley: It is a serious report, which the regional health authority has said that it will act on immediately. I am concerned about questions of accountability. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) tried to extend this beyond all reason because throughout the service we have clear lines of accountability. It is one great strength of NHS trusts that such matters are so clear and successful. As I made clear in my statement, I have asked for a report within a month from the regional health authority as to whether the system of having an advisory board over the London ambulance service is the most appropriate means of securing clear lines of accountability.

As to the securing of such information technology schemes generally, the chief executive of the NHS, Sir Duncan Nichol, issued a directive to the service in January of this year, making clear how project management should work and the importance of getting tested and effective schemes in place. It is right to say that the report outlines a catalogue of difficulties in industrial relations, a spirit of mistrust and a lack of openness.

The real issue to which I draw the attention of the House is the comments in the report. The report makes it clear that, if ever there was a time, now is the opportunity to cast off the constraints and grievances of the past years and start a fresh management and staff partnership. That time is now, and I commend those remarks to the House.

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): I should like to ask the Secretary of State when she was first made aware by the London Ambulance Service Board of the potential dangers in the computer system. If she was made aware of the potential dangers in advance, what action did she take? Did she ask for assistance from other Ministers to avert the potential crisis? Will she now put in place a Londonwide regional health authority which could oversee the ambulance service?

Mrs. Bottomley: When I previously reported to the House on this matter, it is not my view that all the information on which I based that statement was entirely accurate. When I spoke on the previous occasion, I suggested that the difficulties had emerged because there had been an excessive number of calls. I can tell the House now that that is not strictly accurate. More to the point, the system was suffering from overload and there were difficulties in it. That is the reason for establishing the independent inquiry.

I am very concerned that messages in the service were not properly reflected up the line. I regard the matter as serious, but I do not believe that the establishment of a Londonwide health authority is remotely the way of attacking that specific issue. The report outlines some serious matters. I wish to be satisfied that the accountability mechanisms are in place.

I should like to remind the House of the significant improvements in the service already available and of the determination of all those in the London ambulance service to put the past behind them and to build a better service for Londoners for the future.

Sir John Wheeler (Westminster, North): My right hon. Friend has agreed that there have been serious management failings in the London ambulance service. Those failings are evidenced by the extraordinary and bad sick leave rate in the service which reflects partly on management and partly on the trade union attitude. That needs to be addressed as well. May we look forward to an improvement in the delivery of the service in London?

Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the service is adequately funded with an increase in expenditure? Will she also confirm that well over 300 paramedics now go out with ambulances, as against two or three a few years ago?

Mrs. Bottomley: I confirm all my right hon. Friend's comments. Certainly the absentee rate continues to be unacceptably high. As my right hon. Friend well knows, that is often an indicator of other difficulties. The importance of good management which is trusted is essential. I believe that Martin Gorham has made an excellent start on restoring morale and securing a more effective service for Londoners.

I can also confirm my right hon. Friend's comments about resources. There has been an increase of significant amounts—9 per cent. in the London ambulance service this year—which bring the funding to almost £70 million. We have appointed an extra 337 paramedics in the past two years.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Does not the Secretary of State recognise that she simply does not listen and her Ministers have not listened? On 18 April 1991, there was an Adjournment debate in which were set out all the things that were going wrong. The problems have got worse. Despite that, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Sackville) said that what was going on was "behavioural rather than technical".

Does not the Secretary of State agree that her predecessor was asked to see a deputation of London Members of Parliament and refused? Her predecessor referred us to Mr. Wilby, who has now resigned. Mr. Wilby was appointed by the South West Thames regional hospital authority when a Minister of Health in another place was the chairman of that authority. Was not the Secretary of State warned by the Minister in another place that things were amiss?

Does the right hon. Lady think that we would be in this mess if the London ambulance service was run like the London fire brigade? The London fire brigade authority is run by a committee of elected London borough councillors. Would that not be the sort of accountability which is so badly missing in this case?

Mrs. Bottomley: I do not accept the solution advanced by the hon. Gentleman for the effective management of the London ambulance service, but I accept what he says about the importance of building up a more open system. The report makes it clear that there should be a far more open relationship between the London ambulance service and local organisations representing patients, Members of Parliament and the media. I know that the new management intend to act on that. I believe that Martin Gorham has already acted in an open fashion.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary who presently has responsibility for ambulance services has had many meetings with people from the ambulance service. He has, of course, made it his business to visit ambulance services in other parts of the country which deliver much higher standards with comparable resources.

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): I thank my right hon. Friend for her statement, for recognising the gravity of the position and for the prompt manner in which she acted last October and today on receipt of the report. Will she confirm that response times are now much better than they were just a few months ago? Is she satisfied that having just one London regional health authority responsible for the whole of the London ambulance service is the most satisfactory management structure? Is there not a case for creating some sort of free-standing body, possibly a trust, directly answerable to her?

Mrs. Bottomley: I can certainly confirm my hon. Friend's remarks about improved response times. They have improved by some 16 per cent. since the time of the earlier statement. The call ringing times rightly worried many Members of Parliament. It is deeply worrying to members of the public to ring the ambulance service and wait an unacceptable length of time. In some cases an answerphone was used. That cannot be acceptable. The average call ringing time is now six seconds. That is a substantial and clear improvement.

My hon. Friend suggested that an NHS trust could override the London ambulance service. That is certainly a pattern which I would support in due course. However, I am not prepared at present to approve an NHS trust because I must be confident on several matters which still need further progress before I can take that step. It is certainly a vision towards which I should like to work.

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): The Secretary of State was honest in saying that she misled the House by giving information which she now tells us she was given by managers who failed to deliver. What puzzles me is that she went on to say that accountability was not the answer. She can put in as many new managers as she likes, and for a while they may be good, but the problem with centralised, bureaucratic systems is that, without accountability, they fail. Why on earth cannot the Government get rid of the centralised bureaucratic system and introduce accountability, so that managers are genuinely accountable over a period to prevent such things happening in future?

Mrs. Bottomley: I made it clear in my statement that I had asked the regional health authority to report within a month on whether we had the proper mechanisms of accountability. It is clear that we must have direct, effective lines of accountability to the chief executive of the national health service, Sir Duncan Nichol, and, indeed, to Ministers. In this case, as the report makes clear, they were not adequate.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): Londoners will be glad that this further step has been taken to remedy a wholly unsatisfactory ambulance service. Other than from the report, has my right hon. Friend learnt from her conversations with others that it was not so much the failure of the computer system as a wholesale failure of industrial relations in the London ambulance service which caused so much of the problem? Is it not time for full accountability of both workers and management and for proper lines of communication which mean that the taxpayer gets proper value and proper efficiency for the £70 million invested?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend has identified the issues exactly. Time and again, the industrial relations difficulties were only too clear. I still want progress on the introduction of new rostering schemes, and we know full well that they will lead to significant improvements in services for Londoners.

The report also advocates the introduction of single-table bargaining, which will also lead to substantial improvements. A number of factors are involved in such matters, and the aspects that my hon. Friend identified need further consideration. It is right that Londoners should get value for money and should have the ambulance service to which they are entitled.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Following the debacle for which Ministers do not hold themselves responsible, is it not clear that, whatever else the new management need, they need time? In such circumstances, would it not be foolhardy to push ahead with competitive tendering, which can only mean the loss of more jobs among ambulance staff? At the very least, should not the Government abandon dogma and stop competitive tendering to get the service going again?

Mrs. Bottomley: We have to secure value for money in the patient transport and ambulance services as well as elsewhere in the NHS. The report frequently discusses the need for more time, the dangers of setting unrealistic timetables and the importance of the public and their representatives allowing the LAS breathing space to put its house in order. The new management team, which has announced its intention to take on an information technology director, needs time to make further steady progress to improve the service for Londoners.

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North-East): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is dangerous to concentrate on aspects of computer implementation at LAS, because the problems that it experienced pre-date the implementation of the computer system? Is it not important that all parties involved in management and unions at the London ambulance service should get together to bring about a much-needed improvement in the service so that Londoners get the service that they deserve and rightly expect?

Mrs. Bottomley: I totally support my hon. Friend's comments. As is well understood, the difficulties were deep-seated. If anything, they suggest that management were trying to achieve unrealistic timetables because of long-standing difficulties. It is clear that both management and the men and women who work in the London ambulance service wish to put that behind them and to build for the future.

Ms Tessa Jowell (Dulwich): Does the Secretary of State accept that capital that should have been spent on new ambulances was diverted by London ambulance service management to pay for the computer system? Does she accept that, as a result, London's emergency vehicles do not meet the chief ambulance officer's guidance that they should be replaced every three years? Does she accept my concern that 55 out of the 69 ambulances that serve my constituents in south-east London are more than five years old? Will she undertake to fund a replacement programme in line with the chief ambulance officer's guidelines?

Mrs. Bottomley: A large programme of vehicle replacement is already under way: 130 new vehicles were purchased in 1991-92, another 80 are being provided this year, and an additional 30 accident and emergency ambulances have recently been ordered. That is apart from the additional paramedics that my right hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) identified and the increase in call takers, who have improved call response times.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): Does my right hon. Friend agree that what Londoners do not need is the political, synthetic response that we heard from the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett)? They need to know that the report makes it clear that the policy decision on CAD was right but its implementation was wrong. We can now get that policy implemented correctly. Does she also agree that Londoners need to hear the good news about the ambulance service, which has been highlighted by the figures that she has already given on the improvement in paramedic numbers?

Mrs. Bottomley: I am quite convinced that my hon. Friend is right. The ambulance service now needs to build on the major improvements that it has already provided in its service. I ordered the report urgently and it has now been published. We have to learn the lessons from it and ensure that the ambulance service provides the service that Londoners expect.

Ms. Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): The Secretary of State referred to the misunderstanding and mistrust in industrial relations, but is she not aware that she played a major part in creating that misunderstanding and mistrust? On 28 October, in response to a private notice question from my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), on five separate occasions she blamed the then breakdown in the computer system on staff difficulties. She even said that teams in London had to understand that the computer would not work correctly if they did not press the buttons at the right time. Today she has again taken the opportunity afforded by her hon. Friends to blame the people who understand the LAS best and to whom she should be listening first—those who work in it.

Mrs. Bottomley: There is some merit in those remarks, because the difficulty that occurred on 26 October was caused by the receipt of imperfect and inaccurate information, which caused the computer to generate exception messages. I am afraid that the system requires perfect use throughout. I accept totally, however, that the concerns of all those working that system should have been heard. That recommendation is the most powerful part of the report.

There are and have been deep-seated industrial relations difficulties in the LAS. The report makes it clear that it is time to put them behind us. Those difficulties caused other subsequent problems—for example, the absentee rates. There is still an outstanding need to introduce the new roster arrangements. All those difficulties make it clear that there is need for improvement. I hope that urgent action will be taken to introduce single-table bargaining for a start.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Has any estimate been made of the large number of lives that are saved each year by the LAS? Is she aware that the service must have improved, as it is months and months since I have had any complaints about it?

Mrs. Bottomley: There is no doubt that the LAS has turned a corner. Morale is much better and the service is improving significantly. When the system broke down in October, deplorable claims were made about lives being lost, which was the most irresponsible scaremongering. I can inform my hon. Friend and the House that on no occasion has a coroner's court concluded that delay in the arrival of ambulance could be blamed for the death of a patient. It is extremely important to put irresponsible scaremongering to rest.

Ms. Harriet Harman (Peckham): All Londoners had a patients charter put through their letter box and in it the Government promised that ambulances would arrive in less than eight minutes after an accident or an emergency. What redress is available to the thousands of people who have had that charter standard broken? Will the Government apologise, or does the charter mean nothing? When does she expect that the LAS will meet the standard laid down in the charter?

Mrs. Bottomley: The question that the hon. Lady should ask is how it is that ambulance services in metropolitan areas are able to meet those standards. The LAS must learn how to meet the standards set by other services with comparable resources in other parts of the country. We want to see further progress from the regional

[Mrs. Bottomley]

health authority in meeting those national standards. I shall make such a timetable clear to the House when I am able to do so.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): Like everyone else, I am appalled by what happened and congratulate my right hon. Friend on the way in which she has handled the matter. She has just confirmed that the report stated that no coroner's court found that a death resulted from actions by the London ambulance service. However, large question marks remain. Three constituents of mine—Mr. Evans, Mr. Edwards and Mr. Wright—all died after waiting a totally unacceptable time for an ambulance. The wife of one of them waited eight minutes for her 999 call to be answered. Will my right hon. Friend continue her inquiries into those cases, details of which she and the inquiry have?

Mrs. Bottomley: As I made clear to the House, I shall insist that progress towards higher standards continues. There has been considerable improvement in a short time —a 16 per cent. improvement in the response rate and a much faster rate at which calls are answered. As my hon. Friend knows and repeated, no coroner has suggested that the delay in the arrival of an ambulance was responsible for the death of a patient. However, I well understand Members of Parliament representing London constituents wanting to ensure that progress continues. Equally, my hon. Friends and I, through the regional health authority, will make sure that there is steady, firm and determined improvement.

Ms. Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): The Secretary of State will be aware that the state of the London ambulance service has concerned Londoners for at least two years. For at least two years, London Members of Parliament have tried to get Ministers to listen. Over that two years, Ministers refused to listen, refused to meet us on occasions, and refused to face the facts. What is said in the report published today has been said by London Members for at least two years.

Thousands of Londoners have been distressed and inconvenienced by the service's problems. Is the Secretary of State willing to use her imagination and put herself in the place of the many Londoners who have had to sit with dying relatives and wait unacceptably long periods for an ambulance? Delay might not have caused deaths, but is the right hon. Lady willing to use her imagination and put herself in the shoes of those people and ask herself—as those people must be asking now—when will the Government ever take responsibility for anything? When do Ministers ever say sorry?

Mrs. Bottomley: I have been extremely direct and open with the House. On a previous occasion, I made it clear that we would establish an inquiry and that a report would be published. The report has now been published, and once again I have made it clear that I intend to see further improvements. The Opposition wilfully fail to identify the significant improvement already taking place in the London ambulance service. I congratulate the new executive, Martin Gorham, and all those who work in the service on that. It is important that we get accountability straight and make sure that improvements continue.

Mr. Matthew Carrington (Fulham): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the reorganisation of the accident and emergency service in London hospitals will place an even greater strain on the London ambulance service? Does she agree that the only way forward for the service is to follow the principles that underlay the computerised despatch system? Will my right hon. Friend ensure that, before London's accident and emergency service is radically altered, the London ambulance service manages to despatch its ambulances in the most efficient and timely manner?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend again rightly identifies a matter about which all Londoners will want to be reassured. I am able to reassure them. I refer to the statement by my hon. Friend the Minister yesterday when he opened the new accident and emergency department at the Royal London hospital that there is no question of changes in any London accident and emergency departments without proper safeguards that local people will have proper access to accident and emergency services. That of course includes the reliability of the ambulance service.

Mr. Malcolm Wicks (Croydon, North-West): Given that many Londoners died because of Government inaction before the inquiry was finally announced, including many in tragic circumstances in Croydon—as the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) noted—will the Secretary of State comment on the concept of ministerial responsibility? Where in the Department of Health is to be found honour?

Mrs. Bottomley: As I have made very clear, no coroner's court has found that the death of a patient could be attributed to delay in the arrival of an ambulance. It is important to emphasise that, and I am not prepared to tolerate comments from hon. Members implying otherwise. I have also made it clear, however, that Ministers must be satisfied about clear lines of accountability, and it is a source of deep concern that the report identifies difficulties in that regard. That is why I have made it plain that, within a month, I want a report from the regional health authority, establishing whether the structure of the London Ambulance Service Board provides the most appropriate way in which to satisfy the chief executive, and Ministers, that those lines are clear and effective.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. We must make progress on other matters.

Business of the House

4.10 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): Will the Leader of the House state the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): Yes, Madam. The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 1 MARCH—Debate on Welsh affairs, on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

TUESDAY 2 MARCH—Progress on remaining stages of the Education Bill.

WEDNESDAY 3 MARCH—Completion of remaining stages of the Education Bill.

Motion on the Local Government Finance (England) Special Grant Report (No. 7).

THURSDAY 4 MARCH—European Communities (Amendment) Bill: progress in Committee, 14th day.

FRIDAY 5 MARCH—Debate on crime prevention, on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

MONDAY 8 MARCH—European Communities (Amendment) Bill: progress in Committee, 15th day.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committee A will meet on Wednesday 3 March at 10.30 am to consider European Community Document No. 10483/92 relating to the common organisation of the market in potatoes.

[Wednesday 24 February:
European Standing Committee A
Relevant European Community Document
No. 10483/92, potatoes; relevant report of the European Legislation Committee—HC 79-xiv (1992-93).]

Mr. Brown: I thank the Leader of the House for his statement.

On a day when a further 12,000 jobs have been axed—including a further 3,000 at British Gas—and the European Commission has designated parts of Britain as the most depressed areas in the Community, should not the Leader of the House announce a debate, in Government time, on unemployment and the economy? When shall we have a debate in which the concerns of coalfield communities can be raised?

The topic of crime is related to that of unemployment. The Home Secretary seems to be willing to share his views with everyone except Members of the House of Commons. When will the House have an opportunity to debate crime with the right hon. and learned Gentleman? Friday's debate is not adequate for the purpose, as I understand that the Home Secretary will not be present for it.

When will we have a debate on the defence estimates —or do the Government intend to publish next year's estimates before last year's have been debated by the House? Specifically, when will we have a debate on the Royal Navy? Will we have such a debate before further massive redundancies are announced for Tyneside, Rosyth or Devonport?

The Leader of the House must know that we still want a commitment from the Government for a debate on the details of their public expenditure plans.

Finally—not just because the Government seem to be trying to avoid a number of important topics—should we not have an Opposition Supply day so that the Opposition can raise matters that the Government clearly do not want to discuss?

Mr. Newton: That is a fairly lengthy list of demands. I note that the hon. Gentleman studiously avoided giving any thanks for the fulfilment of the main demand of the past two weeks—for a debate on the Education Bill, which is included in next week's programme.

As for the hon. Gentleman's requests in respect of defence estimates and a day's debate on the Royal Navy, I note what he has said, but I think that we have done rather well in recent weeks. We have provided debating time for both defence and foreign affairs—most notably, yesterday's debate.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned unemployment and public expenditure. I repeat what I have said in several previous weeks: the House will be well aware that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will present his Budget in the middle of next month, and I feel that the Budget debate will provide ample opportunity for all such issues to be debated.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned crime. Again, I note his remarks, but I consider them pretty churlish, given that a day's debate on crime and crime prevention is included in the programme.

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to early-day motion 1[illegible]70, which has now been signed by 117 Members on both sides?

[That this House acknowledges the invaluable work carried out by Reunite on behalf of those who suffer child abduction; and urges the Government not to terminate its grant to Reunite on 31st March 1993.]

It expresses grave concern about the Home Office proposal to withdraw its grant from the organisation, Reunite, which is the one national charity seeking to serve the victims of child abduction. When child abduction is very much in our minds and the problem is almost certainly becoming worse, does not my right hon. Friend agree that it would be reprehensible if the Government were to cause Reunite to collapse as a result of the withdrawal of its grant? Will he agree to giving us an early opportunity to debate this important matter?

Mr. Newton: I do not think that I can undertake to provide time for a debate, but I can certainly undertake, as I did to another hon. Member last week, to bring my right hon. Friend's concern to my right hon. and learned Friend's attention. I should add, as I did last week, that I understand that the position in respect of Reunite is that the Home Office agreed to fund it on a temporary basis to help the organisation to establish itself and to find other sources of support. Without in any way minimising the import of what my right hon. Friend said, from my own experience I know that that is a fairly frequent basis on which the Government help voluntary organisations.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Does the Leader of the House agree that, as he acknowledged the importance of the Prime Minister's visit to the United States of America, it would be in order for the Prime Minister to make a statement to the House on Monday, particularly on his discussions with the American President about the GATT talks, a matter which is causing concern, I think, on both sides of the House?

In the context of recent decisions that have been announced about the Commission's view on regional development assistance relating to objective 1 funds, could the right hon. Gentleman arrange a debate in Government

[Mr. Archy Kirkwood]

time on the representations the Government are making to the Commission on the whole gamut of decisions for the future of Europe?

Mr. Newton: The list of requests for debate, against a background of considerable demand, is growing all the time, and the hon. Member might be slightly surprised if I were to give an immediately forthcoming response to his latter point.

On the question of a statement by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, I simply note that the request has been made. It would clearly be a matter for my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to consider. As I intimated when I was wearing another hat 40 minutes or so ago, the talks appear to have gone well; and one of the ways in which they have gone well is in making clear the American Government's continued commitment to a satisfactory outcome of the GATT negotiations.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Will the Leader of the House give us an assurance that we will have a debate early next week on pornography and obscenity, bearing in mind that hon. Members have been horrified to find out that, despite the assurances given during the debate on the European broadcasting directive, there seems to be nothing that Her Majesty's Government can do to stop access being sold for the porn channel known as Red Hot Dutch or to control obscenities from Europe by means of that porn TV channel?

Mr. Newton: I cannot promise a debate next week, but I am aware of the concern that my hon. Friend has expressed, which I am sure is shared by many hon. Members. He will be well aware, I think, that the Government are considering urgently what action they can take, especially in respect of Red Hot Dutch, in accordance with our international obligations.

Mr. Doug Hoyle (Warrington, North): Does the Leader of the House remember the promise that he gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) last week that he would investigate the lack of religious tolerance in St. Mary's Undercroft, the Crypt chapel? What has been the result of his investigations? If he has not completed them, will he report fully to the House when he has?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman is quite right. I have written today to the hon. Member for Bradford, West and, if I may, I shall refer to my letter. I am not sure that it will have reached him yet, but I hope that he will not take that as discourteous. The letter reads:

> "I have made inquiries about the services which can be undertaken in the Chapel, and understand that the limitation on marriage services is not denominational but legal."

The hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) will not be able to have a full marriage service in the Chapel because it

> "is not licensed for marriages. The issue is therefore one of civil law rather than denominational restriction."

Although hon. Members may feel that the matter should be considered, it is not quite the point that was put to me last week.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): The Government seem to be having a spot of bother with the Maastricht treaty. They had a defeat earlier this week and, as we can see from next week's business, they still lack the confidence to have a debate on this vital issue on a Tuesday or Wednesday. My right hon. Friend is a very educated man. I wonder whether I can help him by drawing his attention to the remarks of that eminent philosopher, John Locke, who said:

> "the Legislative cannot transfer the power of making laws to any other hands. For it being but a delegated power"——

Madam Speaker: Order. I am not quite following the hon. Gentleman. I find it hard to see what this has to do with next week's business. Will he come to the point?

Mr. Marlow: It is to do with Europe. Mr. Locke is suggesting that we should have a referendum. The Government can get themselves off the dreadful hook on which they are impaled by debating a referendum next week, thereby satisfying the philosophical requirement and preserving the powers of the House.

Mr. Newton: It is, I fear, about 35 years since I studied the works of John Locke, so I hope that my hon. Friend will understand if I do not get drawn into philosophical exchanges with him but simply rest on the fact that the Government have no plans for making time available for such a debate next week.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): It is not so long since the Leader of the House was responsible for social security and social services matters. Will the Government therefore give a fair wind tomorrow to the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, dealing with discrimination against disabled people, which would allow the House to legislate properly?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman, with his known interest in these matters, will be aware that tomorrow's debate will not be on the Second Reading of the Bill but will be on a motion on disabled people in which my right hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People will seek to set out the Government's attitude.

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): Will there be a responsible Minister present for the debate on crime to take on board criticisms that have been made of the operation of the Criminal Justice Act 1991? Did my right hon. Friend have the opportunity of reading in this week's *Sunday Express* the list of senior magistrates who felt obliged to resign? Is he aware that, only a few days ago, a constituent was fiined £800 for a traffic offence——

Madam Speaker: Order. This has nothing to do with next week's business. A number of hon. Members are rising whom I wish to call. Hon. Members should not raise constituency cases when we are discussing next week's business. With respect, I want brisk questions, and brisk answers from the Leader of the House.

Mr. Alexander: Will my right hon. Friend ensure that a responsible Home Office Minister is present for next week's debate on crime and punishment to take on board this widespread concern?

Mr. Newton: I can do two things: first, I assure my hon. Friend that a responsible Minister will be present—I expect it to be the Minister of State—and, secondly, in common with myself and, I hope, with all other Ministers, he will take on board everything that is said to him.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): The Leader of the House is probably aware that, in the past 24 hours, another two people have been killed in my constituency —a young soldier and a policeman—bringing to four in as many weeks the number of people who have been summarily executed by the petty little Hitlers who use the names Republican and Loyalist and operate as the Provisional IRA, the Ulster Defence Association and the Ulster Volunteer Force.

Will the Leader of the House arrange—preferably next week but, in any case, as soon as possible—a wide debate on the problem of Northern Ireland so that hon. Members on both sides of the House may remind themselves that their primary responsibility is to solve that problem and that, in relation to the loss of life, there is no acceptable level of indifference?

Mr. Newton: The whole House will understand why the hon. Gentleman raises these matters and will join him in deploring what has occurred. However, I cannot undertake specifically to provide time next week for the debate for which he asks.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Will my right hon. Friend arrange for next week a debate on unacceptable aircraft noise, particularly over constituencies bordering Heathrow, such as my constituency? A debate would enable the House to consider in particular the document that has been issued for consideration of the public. The document envisages possible changes in the current ban on night flights, which will come to an end this year. My hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) and I will wish to state our total opposition to any change in that ban.

Mr. Newton: I cannot undertake to provide time next week for such a debate. I take it—without giving offence to my hon. Friend—that the principal purpose of his question is to have my right hon. Friend's attention drawn to his views. I shall certainly see that that is done.

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): Given the European Commission's proposal to put the question of objective 1 status for Merseyside and for the highlands and islands before the Council of Ministers for approval, can the Leader of the House arrange for a statement of endorsement of the Merseyside case in the same way as the Prime Minister has publicly endorsed the case for the highlands and islands?

Mr. Newton: I should have hoped that what I said about an hour ago, when I was wearing what I might call my deputising hat, could be taken as a clear sign of the Government's endorsement of and pleasure at the designation of Merseyside.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): As the loss of 12,000 jobs, including the jobs of soldiers operating in Bosnia and in Northern Ireland, has been announced today, will my right hon. Friend reflect upon the incongruity of the fact that up to 8 March, instead of debating the parlous economic situation of this nation, we shall yet again spend no less than one third of our time debating the proposed treaty on European union, which has nothing to do with the country's economic ills and the misery that many of our people are facing?

Mr. Newton: Of course I shall reflect as my hon. Friend asks, but I ought to make it clear that I do not accept that the Bill to which he refers has nothing to do with the economic future of this country. On the contrary, it has a great deal to do with our economic future and with making sure that it is as good as we should all wish it to be.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): May we have next week a statement on the Government's attitude towards the threats emanating from Iran to Salman Rushdie, the author? Will the Government make it absolutely clear that if these outrageous and murderous threats are supported, either explicity or by implication, by any person in the United Kingdom, that person will face prosecution for what is a very serious offence?

Mr. Newton: I note what the hon. Gentleman says. He will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has agreed to a meeting with Mr. Rushdie. I understand that no date has yet been fixed.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): With reference to next week's debate on crime, will my right hon. Friend ensure that the Minister who is to reply will take time to visit the Metropolitan police exhibition on pornography, which is in this building today? The Minister ought to hear from the police that they do not believe that they have adequate powers, particularly with regard to computer-aided pornography, which takes the face of a child from a catalogue of children's clothing and attaches to it the body of a fully grown woman in pornographic poses and sends the resulting image through the computer system, to be picked up by children or adults anywhere. This practice should be made criminal. Police should be given the power to stop it. Can my right hon. Friend ensure that Members who wish to raise this matter in the debate will get a response?

Mr. Newton: I share my hon. Friend's distaste for the practice that he described. As for the basic point of his question, I understand that the exhibition has been visited by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office, whom I expect to take part in the debate.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Will it be possible to have a debate on the security services, bearing in mind the latest information that the general secretary of the Scottish Trades Union Congress, Mr. Campbell Christie, has had his correspondence interfered with by GCHQ? Is it not wholly inappropriate that such an infringement of civil liberties should occur? Is it not necessary to have a debate as quickly as possible on the security forces, following the recommendation of the Home Affairs Committee that the security services should be accountable to Parliament?

Mr. Newton: I cannot at this stage promise the debate for which the hon. Gentleman asks, but he will be aware of what the Government have said about legislation following what is called avowal of the Secret Intelligence Service.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Is early-day motion 1453 a matter not of civil law but of ecclesiastical diktat dubious in the 16th century?

[That this House is astonished to learn that the honourable Member for Leicester East has been denied permission for the Priest of his religion, Roman Catholic, to perform the rites of marriage in the Crypt, St. Mary's Undercroft, the Chapel of St. Stephen, the Church of the Martyrs; and hopes the decision will be reversed forthwith.]

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

Can it be altered—where there is a will there is a way —next week?

Mr. Newton: I am not sure that I can undertake to alter the matter next week or, at this stage, to add to the words that I quoted from my letter to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden). I said then that I understood that the House might wish the matter to be given further consideration, and I note the hon. Gentleman's further request.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): May I ask the question that I have asked repeatedly over the past 12 months?

Mr. Newton: We have reached the stage where I can be expected to know what the question is without it being asked, but may I say for the benefit of others who may not know that it involves Members' interests. I have now had a further response from the Chairman of the Select Committee following earlier discussions with him. I hope to talk to him again fairly soon—next week, I hope.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The Leader of the House responded earlier to the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) on the question of discrimination against disabled people and said that the Government would make a statement tomorrow. Will he accept that tomorrow or next week would be ideal for adopting the Bill that is due to receive a Second Reading tomorrow? Will he give an assurance that Tory Whips will not shout "Object" to the Bill of my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) when the Question is put at 2.30 pm after the debate on the motion so that we can debate the issue next week? Will the Government give it a chance of being passed?

Mr. Newton: I repeat what I have already said. A wide-ranging debate is expected on these matters tomorrow. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People will participate and will set out clearly the Government's position.

Mr. Jim Dowd (Lewisham, West): The Leader of the House will have noticed the immense interest in the private notice question which was asked immediately before the business question. He will also be aware of the Secretary of State's statement on the Tomlinson report a couple of weeks ago and will have noticed how completely inadequate were her responses on both occasions. Can he undertake as a matter of urgency to provide Government time for a debate on the parlous state of London's health services in the round and ensure that the Secretary of State is here to answer in full before any further irreparable damage is done to those services?

Mr. Newton: I cannot promise a debate. What is more, I must make it clear that I do not for a moment accept the hon. Gentleman's colourful interpretation of the Secretary of State's position. On the contrary, I think that her statement on the Tomlinson report was recognised as a well-balanced attempt to tackle long-standing problems in London; and what she said about the London ambulance service in the light of the report constituted a clear willingness to tackle the problems which have emerged.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): With reference to services in the Crypt, may I thank the Leader of the House for his inquiries and for the letter that I have not yet received. In view of the exchanges that have taken place, can he suggest the best way forward? Would it be possible for him to advise the appropriate authorities to apply for a licence? Is there amending legislation that he could arrange to table as a matter of urgency? Is there any means available to any hon. Member or to the House collectively to ensure that all denominations are able to use the facilities of the Crypt?

Mr. Newton: I received the advice which underlay my letter only very shortly before signing it, and I wished to respond to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible. Many of the same questions had ocurred to me, but I have not yet been able to seek the further advice that is required. However, I give the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends the assurance that I will do so.

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): Further to the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Dowd), and in view of the statements earlier by the Secretary of State for Health about accountability, will the Lord President of the Council find time next week to summon the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to the House to answer for the period that he was Secretary of State for Health and say why he refused to take any action when the crisis in the London ambulance service was brought to his attention by the Association of London Authorities, the National Union of Public Employees and Opposition Members?

Mr. Newton: It is not perhaps quite the undertaking that the hon. Gentleman seeks, but I draw his attention to the fact that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster will be here to answer questions on Monday 8 March. However, it will be for you, Madam Speaker, rather than for me to decide whether a question on those lines would be in order.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement to be made early next week on the second radioactive leak this month from Sellafield? The right hon. Gentleman will recall that we had a statement on 15 February about the leak that occurred on 12 February. However, a second leak of 3,000 becquerels of radioactivity took place on 13 February and not a word was said about it until Radio Cumbria broadcast the news this morning. This has now been confirmed by British Nuclear Fuels. Will the Government arrange for a statement so that the House, if not the Government, can end BNFL's long-standing policy of secrecy and deception?

Mr. Newton: Without accepting the rather argumentative point at the end of the hon. Gentleman's question, I note his request; but I certainly would not wish to excite his hopes of a further statement after the one that was made so recently.

Orders of the Day

European Communities (Amendment) Bill

Considered in Committee [Progress, 22 February]

[MR. MICHAEL MORRIS *in the Chair*]

Clause 1

TREATY ON EUROPEAN UNION

Amendment proposed [22 February]: No. 13, in page 1, line 9, after 'II', insert

'(except Title XIV on pages 36 and 37 of Cm 1934)'.—*[Dr. John Cunningham.]*

Question again proposed, That the amendment be made.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Morris): I remind the Committee that we are also considering the following: Amendment No. 28, in page 1, line 9, after 'II', insert

'(provided that in the implementation of Articles 198(a), (b) and (c) on pages 54 and 55 of Cm 1934 concerning the Committee of the Regions, the 24 members and 24 alternate members of that Committee shall be drawn from elected local government representatives.)'.

Amendment (b) to amendment No. 28, in line 4, after 'representatives', insert

'who in the case of Scotland will include a minimum of one member and one alternative member nominated by each of the four major Scottish political parties'.

Amendment No. 102, in page 1, line line 9, after 'II', insert

'(except Article 198(a) on page 54 of Cm 1934 which relates to the Committee of the Regions)'.

Amendment No. 103, in page 1, line 9, after 'II', insert

'(except Article 130(a) on page 36 of Cm 1934 which relates to regional policy)'.

Amendment No. 106, in page 1, line 9, after 'II', insert

'(provided that implementation of Articles 198(a)(b) and (c) on pages 54 and 55 of Cm 1934 establishing the Committee of the Regions, shall make provision for the direct election of the members and alternate members of that Committee to represent Wales; that those voting in such direct elections shall be local authority elected members, Members representing Welsh constituencies and Members of the European Parliament representing Welsh constituencies; and that there shall be two separate elections the first of which shall provide for representation of the counties of South and Mid Glamorgan and Gwent, and the second for the counties of Gwynedd, Clwyd, Dyfed, Powys and West Glamorgan)'.

Amendment No. 107, in page 1, line 9, after 'II', insert

'(provided that in the implementation of Articles 198(a), (b) and (c) on pages 54 and 55 of Cm 1934 establishing the Committee of the Regions, the members of that Committee representing Wales and their alternates shall be directly elected by a vote of local authority elected members from Wales, Members elected from Welsh constituencies and Members of the European Parliament representing Welsh constituencies and by none other).'

Amendment No. 111, in page 1, line 9, after 'II', insert

'(provided that on the implementation of Articles 198(a), (b) and (c) on pages 54 and 55 of Cm 1934 establishing the Committee of the Regions, the members of that Committee shall include the eight members of the European Parliament representing Scottish constituencies).'.

Amendment No. 156, in page 1, line 9, after 'II', insert 'except Article 130a'.

Amendment No. 157, in page 1, line 9, after 'II', insert 'except Article 130b'.

Amendment No. 158, in page 1, line 9, after 'II', insert 'except Article 130c'.

Amendment No. 187, in page 1, line 9, after 'II', insert 'except Article 3(j)'.

Amendment No. 198, in page 1, line 9, after 'II', insert 'except Article 4b on page 11 of Cm 1934'.

Amendment No. 229, in page 1, line 9, after 'II', insert 'except Article 198c'.

Amendment No. 248, in page 1, line 9, after 'II', insert 'except Article 130d'.

Amendment No. 249, in page 1, line 9, after 'II', insert 'except Article 130e'.

Amendment No. 273, in page 1, line 9, after 'II', insert

'(provided that in the implementation of Articles 198(a), (b) and (c) on pages 54 and 55 of Cm 1934 concerning the Committee of the Regions, the 24 members and 24 alternate members of that Committee shall be drawn from elected local government representatives, and shall include representatives from each English Standard Planning Region as well as representation from Scotland and Wales.)'.

Amendment No. 332, in page 1, line 9, after 'II', insert

'(except Article 198a on page 56 of Cm 1934)'.

Amendment No. 425, in page 1, line 9, after 'II', insert

'provided that United Kingdom members of the Committee of the Regions established under article 198 (a) on page 54 of Cm 1934, of whom at least nine shall be representatives of Wales, shall not be nominated until Parliament has had the opportunity of considering a Bill introduced by Her Majesty's Government to provide for an elected all-Wales forum to elect the representatives of Wales who shall reflect the political balance on the forum, and providing for a monthly report to be made by the representatives to the forum.'.

Amendment No. 431, in page 1, line 9, after 'II', insert

'(provided that implementation of Articles 198 (a) (b) and (c) on pages 54 and 55 of Cm 1934, establishing the Committee of the Regions, shall make provision for the direct election of the members and alternate members of that Committee to represent Wales and that those voting in such direct elections shall be local authority elected members).'.

Amendment No. 432, in page 1, line 9, after 'II', insert

'(provided that in the implementation of Articles 198(a), (b) and (c) on pages 54 and 55 of Cm 1934, establishing the Committee of the Regions, the members of that Committee representing Wales and their alternates shall be directly elected by a vote of local authority elected members from Wales.).'

Amendment No. 438, in page 1, line 9, after 'II', insert

', except that articles 198(a), (b) and (c) on pages 54 and 55 of Cm 1934 may only have effect if the nominated members and alternate members of the committee of regions are numerically and politically representative in proportion to the populations of the countries of the United Kingdom, and the Standard Economic Planning Regions of England,'.

Amendment No. 418, in page 1, line 9, after 'IV', insert

'(except Articles 166, 168 and 170 on pages 76 and 77 of Cm 1934).'.

Amendment No. 56, in page 1, line 10, after '1992', insert

'but not Article 198 in Title II thereof'.

Amendment No. 62, in page 1, line 10, after '1992', insert

'but not the Protocol on the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.'.

Amendment No. 150, in page 1, line 10, after '1992', insert

'but not Article 170 in Title IV thereof'.

Amendment No. 223, in page 1, line 10, after '1992', insert, 'excluding Article 194 thereof'.

Amendment No. 226, in page 1, line 10, after '1992', insert

'but not the Protocol on Economic and Social Cohesion'.

New clause 26—*Committee of the regions*—

'In meeting its obligations under Article 198(a) on page 54 of Cm. 1943 Her Majesty's Government shall ensure that at

[Mr. Michael Morris]

least eight representatives of the Committee of the regions are from Scotland and that the Secretary of State for Scotland shall select such representatives from a list of candidates submitted to him by any organisation representative of Scottish local authorities.'.

New clause 41—*Regional representation*—

'In discharging its responsibilities under Article 198(a) on page 54 of Cm. 1934 the Government shall ensure that those serving on the proposed Committee of the Regions shall reflect, on a proportional basis, votes cast for political parties in Scotland and Wales at the most recently held election for the European Parliament.'.

New clause 61—*Economic and Social Cohesion (No. 1)*—

'Her Majesty's Government shall report to Parliament annually on the implementation of their obligation under Article 130b to conduct their economic policy in such a way as in addition, to attain the objectives set out in Article 130a.'.

New clause 62—*Economic and Social Cohesion (No. 2)*—

'Her Majesty's Government shall report to Parliament on the European Commission report, provided for in Article 130b, on the progress made towards achieving economic and social cohesion; and no action may be taken by the Government in respect of any accompanying proposals, as provided for in Article 130b, without the Commission report first having been considered by the House of Commons.'.

New clause 63—*Committee of the regions*—

'In meeting its obligations under Article 198(a) on page 54 of Cm. 1934 Her Majesty's Government shall ensure that at least eight representatives of the Committee of the regions are from Scotland and that they shall be elected Community, District or Regional councillors, elected by an electoral college or colleges of councillors under a system of proportional representation.'.

New clause 64—*Representation on Committee of Regions*—

'Before Her Majesty's Government discharges its responsibilities under Article 198(a) on page 54 of Cm. 1934, Parliament shall have had the opportunity of considering a Bill to provide that at least four of the United Kingdom members nominated to the Committee of the Regions shall be from Wales and shall be directly elected by the people of Wales.'.

New Clause 65—*Regional representation (Scotland)*—

'Before Her Majesty's Government discharges its responsibilities under Article 198(a) on page 54 of Cm. 1934, Parliament shall have had the opportunity of considering a Bill to provide that at least nine members nominated to the Committee of the Regions shall be from Scotland and shall be directly elected by the people of Scotland.'.

4.37 pm

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): On a point of order, Mr. Morris. In my original point of order that I raised on Monday this week, when the Committee and, I am sure, the country were very appreciative of your decision concerning an opportunity to debate the effect on ratification of the treaty of amendment 27 being carried, I asked you about a further debate on the substance of amendment 27 and the social protocol. You were good enough to say on Monday:

> **"We are some way off a vote on amendment No. 27, and other developments may occur at any time, but at this juncture I am minded to take seriously the need for a further debate before the Committee votes on that amendment."—[*Official Report*, 22 February 1993; Vol. 219, c. 685.]**

Since then, my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) has submitted amendment No. 443, in support of which I shall be appending this afternoon the names of Opposition Front-Bench Members. That is clearly related to the subject of the social protocol, the debate on which has come and gone. I seek your guidance, Mr. Morris, since amendment No. 443 does not appear in today's provisional selection of amendments, on what your intention might be on that amendment, the subject in general, and therefore the position of the Committee in relation to fresh amendments on the subject the legal implications of which we discussed on Monday.

The Chairman: As the hon. Gentleman has just demonstrated, developments are always occurring. Right hon. and hon. Members will recall that on Monday I left open the possibility of a further debate on amendment No. 27. As I said then, other developments may occur at any time and I am not therefore prepared to announce my decision now—although, of course, I shall make the Committee aware of my decision in good time. Equally, amendment No. 443, to which the hon. Gentleman referred, is under my consideration. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the issues raised are very complex and there is no immediate need for a decision. My concern now is not to be over-hasty; a little delay will, I think, be wise.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

The Chairman: There can be nothing further to that point of order.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Mr. Morris. As you are the senior occupant of the Chair during the Committee's proceedings, may I put a point of order to you? Several comments have been made —you may have heard them—regarding our progress, or lack of progress, in the Committee stage. Some of those comments come from abroad. Will you take the opportunity to confirm that it is entirely up to the Committee debating the Bill to decide on progress and that we shall certainly not be influenced in any way by people abroad, however high or senior their positions may be? That applies to Chancellor Kohl—and to anyone else, for that matter.

The Chairman: My job is to ensure that there is a full and fair debate and I am satisfied that we are making adequate progress against that yardstick.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Morris. I much appreciate your comments about considering matters in a measured way and examining things carefully over a period, especially since a new and important amendment has been tabled. May I therefore suggest it would be a good idea to adjourn the Committee until next week, to give you the necessary time?

The Chairman: I am always grateful for the hon. Gentleman's kind concern for my well-being, but at the moment I am pretty fit and able to make decisions—when they are appropriate.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): On a point of order, Mr. Morris. I am sure that you heartened the Committee by saying that you wanted to ensure that there was always full and fair debate, but you will be aware that closures have often been moved in the Committee which have prevented Ministers from replying to important points raised by Back Benchers. I should not wish to impinge on your jurisdiction in any way, but will you do your best to ensure that such abuse of the Committee does not happen?

The Chairman: The Minister will have heard the hon. Gentleman's plea—although I must say that I do not accept his premise.

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): On a point of order, Mr. Morris. I appreciate what you said about the need to consider amendment No. 443 further, but would it be possible to give the Committee any idea when a decision on that important matter may be conveyed to us?

The Chairman: In good time.

Mr. Geoffrey Hoon (Ashfield): Not many people take three weeks to deliver a speech and I shall endeavour to keep my remarks as short as I can. At the end of the debate on Thursday 4 February, which is recorded in column 576 of the *Official Report* for that day, we were discussing whether those representing local authorities should be appointed to take all the United Kingdom's places on the Committee of the Regions.

The Minister of State argued that, because certain other countries had nominated individuals not directly elected from local or regional authorities, the United Kingdom was free to follow suit. He suggested that Greece and the Netherlands were good examples of countries whose nominated representatives on the Committee of the Regions were not chosen exclusively from directly elected local government representatives. The Minister had emphasised the Government's view earlier:

> "I do not think that it is necessary that there be an obligation on any Government to ensure that all the nominees are from local government."—[*Official Report*, 4 February 1993; Vol. 218, c. 515.]

It is necessary to look in more detail at the people actually appointed in Greece and the Netherlands. I am a little concerned that the Minister's advisers in the Foreign Office may have let him down—although I cannot imagine how that could have happened. It appears that a slightly more detailed examination of those who have been nominated from Greece and the Netherlands might present a picture rather different from that suggested by the Minister.

4.45 pm

Every Netherlands representative is from a local authority. Within the Dutch system of local government, councils and their executive bodies are chaired by Government-appointed Queen's commissioners, known as Burgemeesters. Seven of those Queen's commissioners have been chosen, with five members of Dutch local and provincial authorities. As the Queen's commissioners are effectively the mayors of councils in the Netherlands, they are entirely accountable to elected bodies. They are clearly therefore part of the local government system and would be recognised as such if their equivalents had been nominated in the United Kingdom.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones): I do not want to sound nit-picking, but the point that I was trying to establish —the hon. Gentleman may agree with me—is that the seven Queen's commissioners are not elected.

Mr. Hoon: I accept that they are not elected, but clearly they are representatives of local authorities. That is the pont that I sought to establish.

Similarly, the Greek representatives are eight elected members of Greek local authorities and four regional administrators known as nomarchs. To be fair to the Minister of State, I must admit that those four people are Government appointees, but they are in effect responsible for regional administration in Greece, so they have responsibilities that we would identify with local government.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I accept what the hon. Gentleman says, but I hope that he will recognise that in a sense he is speaking against the amendment tabled by his hon. Friend, which clearly refers to "elected local government representatives".

Mr. Hoon: I am speaking to the Minister of State's assertion that he can justify the appointment of the Government's friends from the health authorities, the regional arts boards and the Welsh Office and Scottish Office, instead of local government representatives. The argument that I seek to advance is that the representatives appointed by the Netherlands and Greece are in fact people who represent local government as we understand it. That could not be said of representatives from the Welsh Office or the Scottish Office.

Perhaps the argument could be readily resolved. The Minister has made it clear that he sees no obligation for the Government to appoint directly elected people from local authorities to take all the relevant places for the United Kingdom. Will he make it equally clear that he does not intend to appoint people with no connection with local government? That would satisfy many Opposition Members that he was concerned to reflect the interests of local authorities in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Does not the critical difference, which the Minister has failed to recognise, depend on who chose those people in Holland and Greece? Is not the critical question whether they were chosen by central Government or chosen to reflect the choice of local authorities?

Mr. Hoon: Certainly I believe that the Minister's choice of countries to justify his assertion has been somewhat selective. Decisions already taken in Belgium, Germany, Denmark, France, Spain and Luxembourg make it clear that only elected members of local or regional authorities will be included in those countries' delegations to the Committee of the Regions.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Does my hon. Friend recall that one of the Minister's arguments against choosing directly elected representatives of local authorities was that he estimated that it would take them one or two days a week fully to discharge their responsibilities and that that would be inconsistent with their responsibilities to local authorities? It would be interesting to know how the Minister reconciles that argument with the expressed desire of the Secretary of State for Wales to represent Wales and therefore to spend two days a week away from Whitehall.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful for the hon. Member's observation, because that is a point that was canvassed in the earlier part of this debate some three weeks ago. It certainly strikes me as inconsistent that the Government could make a point in relation to the time that it would involve when members of the Government are indicating their interest in these positions.

Much of the confusion might be resolved by looking carefully at the role and functions of the Committee of the

[Mr. Hoon]

Regions. In this debate, it is being considered along with structural funding. Some hon. Members have tended to suggest that the sole responsibility of the Committee of the Regions would be the distribution of European funds, but its real purpose is to involve new and different levels of government in the framing of European legislation and policy. So in addition to the European Parliament and national governments and parliaments, the idea of the Committee of the Regions is to permit local and regional government across the Community to have its say in the framing of new European legislation. It may appear to right hon. and hon. Members particularly appropriate, given the responsibility of local and regional authorities for the implementation and enforcement of large parts of the European Community's legislation.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): The hon. Member has just made a very important point on local and regional interests, which do not tally entirely with elected representatives. Indeed, a wide spectrum of interests could well be represented in the Committee of the Regions. In addition, the problem with just taking elected representatives is how they are selected. The Western Isles might be represented by a Strathclyde-elected member, which might not go down too well. One can see the complications. A balance must be achieved and the proposals in the amendment do not strike that balance.

Mr. Hoon: I said "authorities", not "interests". I specifically used the word "authorities" to try to prevent the question asked by the hon. Gentleman. It appears to me that we are looking at a different approach to European legislation. The idea is to allow those who are ultimately responsible for the enforcement of the legislation some say in its final shape, so that when they come to enforcement they can, in the light of their practical experience, say that a particular idea is good or bad.

Unfortunately, article 198 does not spell out the specific areas of competence of the Committee of the Regions—it is necessary to look elsewhere—but as well as matters affecting regional policy, legislation in public health, education, culture, consumer protection and trans-European networks will be referred to the Committee of the Regions for a formal opinion. It is an opinion that must be given before the Council of Ministers can consider any draft legislation.

In other areas, although there is no obligation to consult, the Council may consult the Committee of the Regions, and in addition the Committee of the Regions can, if it considers it appropriate, decide to deliver a formal opinion on its own initiative—under article 198c—in cases where it considers such action appropriate. It seems likely that the Committee of the Regions will use that power extensively as its own competence develops.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): Is it not also possible that this Committee of the Regions might turn out to be one more way in which the European Community will be able to bypass the House? Article 130 says that, when the European Community wants specifically to extend its activities outside the funds, without reference back to the main framework, it will be able to do so by the unanimous decision of various bodies, including this committee. It is a way in which the Community can end up saying that it has authority to act in a particular way while leaving the House entirely out of it.

Mr. Hoon: With great respect, I believe that the hon. Member sees dangers where none exists. The Committee of the Regions is invited to give an opinion on legislation. What it has, therefore, is a delaying power similar to the delaying power presently enjoyed by the European Parliament. It can refuse to give an opinion and thus delay the process of legislation, but it cannot force the Council of Ministers to take a positive decision. That seems appropriate. The point that I am trying to make is that the Committee of the Regions will allow the European Community a greater spectrum of opinion by permitting people—who are, I hope, elected from local or regional government—to indicate the sorts of difficulty that they have in considering new proposals for European legislation, in order that those new proposals fully take account of their needs and concerns. It seems a wholly welcome and sensible development.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Before the hon. Member gets carried away too far with the great power of this new body, will he accept that the power of delay, which he has stressed as a great democratic development, is subject to the Commission, under article 198c, having the power to say that the maximum delay is four weeks? Will he agree that it is a load of codswallop and that what we are doing is creating something of which the Soviet Union and eastern Europe were full—useless workers' organisations with nothing to do but spend money on themselves and express opinions which can be wholly disregarded?

Mr. Hoon: I was not exaggerating the committee's powers. Indeed, I went out of my way to say how limited those powers were, but I wonder whether the local authorities in the hon. Gentleman's constituency would share his opinion. They very often have to enforce European legislation and they might welcome the opportunity of having a direct say in how the legislation develops. That is really all that the Committee of the Regions is designed to achieve and it seems to me an entirely sensible and not at all dangerous development. I am astonished at the difficulties that certain hon. Members see in relation to this proposal.

The reason why I have stressed the functions of the Committee of the Regions is that, in the Maastricht treaty, article 198a states that its members

> "shall be completely independent in the performance of their duties".

That makes it clear to me that membership of the committee would not be compatible with membership of a national Government. It should be possible for the Minister of State to be as categorical as he was in relation to local authorities in saying that the Government have no plans to nominate Ministers or, perhaps more significantly, their substitutes.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, under protocol 16, there is a requirement for the new Committee of the Regions to share a common organisational structure with the Economic and Social Committee? The Economic and Social Committee has nine areas or functions with which it is concerned and which do not coincide with the functions, as we understand it, of the Committee of the Regions. Furthermore, the arguments that he has just adduced, and in line with point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) that the nation state itself and its own status are at risk, are those directed to a Committee of the Regions which would, on his own argument, be independent and so form the nucleus of a new unitary state in Europe. In other words, does he accept that he is moving in the direction of acquiescing in the unitary vision of the European Community as it is being constructed?

Mr. Hoon: With great respect, I honestly feel that the answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is found in the terms of his question. By referring to the Economic and Social Committee, he is pointing out the way in which the European Community has a variety of sources of information about legislation, of which the Economic and Social Committee is one. It is possible for the Economic and Social Committee, representing business and the trade unions, for example, to put forward its point of view, and it does so within the areas of responsibility that it has to reflect those particular concerns. Similarly, the European Parliament has directly elected Members of the European Parliament to reflect the views of their constituents.

In exactly the same way, the Committee of the Regions will be able to reflect that degree of administration in each member state which we would think of as local authorities. As I see it, it is a way of decentralising decision making, not creating a unitary state. There will be a series of different institutions, each capable of giving an opinion on new European legislation, which will surely add to the quality of the legislation—something with which we should all be concerned.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Does my hon. Friend accept that it is a bit much for Conservative Members, who have consistently supported a Government who have been suppressing the national rights of nations within the United Kingdom, to whinge about the national rights of this Parliament being eroded? Does my hon. Friend agree that the Committee of the Regions is a way of enhancing the rights of regions and small nations within member states, such as the United Kingdom?

Mr. Hoon: I agree entirely with that. That is why I found it surprising that the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) saw the committee as a means of centralising the decision-making process of the European Community rather than the reverse.

5 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): May I point out to the hon. Gentleman that the requirement under article 198a that members

"shall be competely independent in the performance of their duties"

creates an ambiguity about their status within the member states? The European Court of Justice might ultimately interfere with that and lay down guidelines on how appointments should be made, for example, preventing direct Government appointees as we automatically assume.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Why?

Mr. Jenkin: If my hon. Friend is suggesting that he can give me an assurance about the future behaviour of the European Court, he is a wiser man than anyone else.

Mr. Hoon: The answer is that the European Court of Justice will interpret the treaty. It will start with the terms of the treaty and then give effect to it, which is why I quoted from that section. In the event of a member state being tempted to appoint to the Committee of the Regions someone who was not independent, it might lead to a challenge such as the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) mentioned, but only on the basis that the individual was not independent, say, of Government. If the Secretary of State for Wales continues in his ambition to be a member of the committee, that might be challenged on the basis of his lack of independence.

Similarly, it might interest the hon. Gentleman to know that there is talk in Greece of challenging the four appointees to whom I referred earlier, simply on the basis that they are Government-nominated administrators of the regions and therefore perhaps not as independent as they might be. Once again, that demonstrates the difficulty which the Minister of State has had with the advice and the information that he is given.

On funding, it appears that we have not concentrated sufficiently in the debate on the cohesion and the structural funds, specifically as they apply to the United Kingdom. By tending to concentrate on the Committee of the Regions, we have perhaps overlooked the important role played by the European Community in the redistribution of funds from the richer to the poorer areas of the Community.

I was disappointed that in earlier contributions some hon. Members appeared to challenge the very basis of the structural funds, arguing against any redistribution of wealth within the Community from richer to poorer nations and from richer to poorer regions. The justification for the redistribution is altruistic and ethical, but it is also economic and political. If the European Community is to develop and grow, and continue as a community, it must offer a consistent and coherent set of standards across the whole of its geographical area. It must aim as a priority to reduce regional disparities.

Moreover, if the more developed northern countries are to continue to have markets for their manufactured goods, they need to encourage and foster growth in the less-developed south of Europe.

Mr. Wilkinson: Why should it not be the priority of Her Majesty's Government to maximise the wealth of this country and this nation, through the structural funds and everything else? Is not it irresponsible to our electorate to export jobs to southern Europe and create industries to compete with our own in Portugal, Spain, Greece and so on?

Mr. Hoon: I sought to develop that argument. It is not simply a question of redistributing wealth within the United Kingdom, which I hope the hon. Member for Ruislip-North (Mr. Wilkinson) supports, as his question suggests, but equally of redistributing wealth across the Community. Redistribution is not just an ethical priority; it benefits industry in countries like the United Kingdom. Unless countries such as Portugal, Spain and Greece develop the wealth that we take for granted, their people will not be in a position to consume the manufactured goods that our industries want to produce. So there is a benefit to the United Kingdom, to its people and to its industry in allowing the European Community to develop consistently across its territory.

[Mr. Hoon]

The point that I want to make about the structural funds arises in article 123. There will be a change in the way in which the funds will operate as a result of the Maastricht treaty. Article 123 will facilitate workers' adaptation

"to industrial changes and to changes in production systems, in particular through vocational training and retraining."

That is a welcome development since it will allow local authorities to provide proper education and training for those hardest hit by the recession.

There will be few changes in objective 2 status, although it appears that the Commission is likely to permit greater flexibility in determining eligibility criteria. Objective 3 will be redefined to permit assistance to the long-term unemployed for the occupational integration of young people in particular. There will be a new objective 4, responding directly to the new and changed role of the European social fund regarding workers affected by industrial change throughout the Community. So there is a significant development for the European Commission in making funds available directly to assist those hardest hit by the recession.

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West): Does my hon. Friend agree that the effectiveness so far of funding in the regions has been largely impeded by Her Majesty's Government because there is no regional policy and because of the failure to provide matching funds?

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend anticipates my next point. Notwithstanding the availability of funds from the European Community, and a revision of the schemes available, the United Kingdom Government have demonstrated their marked reluctance to match the efforts of the Community.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I hope that I have got the hon. Gentleman right. The hon. Gentleman talks about objectives 1, 2, 3 and 4, and says that the Commission will do this, that and the other. How can that be the case? We have not even ratified the treaty yet.

Mr. Hoon: If the hon. Gentleman will listen, I will explain.

A revision of the structural funds is to commence on 1 January 1994. Since the European Commission correctly anticipates that the new rules under Maastricht will not be in place by the relevant time, it is producing a new system for 1 January 1994, to last for six years, without the treaty having been ratified. That is why the comments about the Committee of the Regions earlier in the debate were misplaced, because the committee will not have the opportunity to make specific comments about the review of the new arrangements for structural funding until the next but one review of the system. Therefore, the changes are being made under the existing rules rather than under what is likely. Obviously the Commission is taking into account the terms of the treaty as it frames the new programmes.

What is in considerable doubt is the extent to which the United Kingdom Government are willing to match the funds available from the European Community. Bruce Millan, the Regional Policy Commissioner, has indicated that Britain is at risk of losing up to £1 billion in European Community financial assistance to our most depressed regions because the Government are not prepared to authorise the relevant matching funds. Not a penny of the £1 billion available for 1992 and 1993 had been spent by the end of last year. That means that in total a package of about £2·5 billion of public expenditure has to be committed in the next 10 months. If the money is not committed in the next 10 months, there is a clear risk that it will be lost to the United Kingdom and will go to other European countries.

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): My hon. Friend is making an important point. Obviously, we all want more public expenditure. How does he equate the need for extra public expenditure with the other parts of the treaty which say that we must reduce our public expenditure to 3 per cent. in terms of financing?

Mr. Hoon: I always understood that my right hon. Friend was sympathetic to the responsibility of the Government to use their economic ability to generate employment. I am concentrating on those parts of the treaty and, indeed, the review of the structural funds which allow Governments in the European Community, in partnership with the Community itself, to redistribute the wealth of the Community in a way which I hope my right hon. Friend would support.

Mr. Davies: Perhaps my hon. Friend misunderstood my question. I certainly was not against more British Government public expenditure to match any European expenditure; I was merely pointing out that in another part of the treaty we are supposed to cut our public expenditure to reduce the deficit to 3 per cent. of gross national product. That seems to be a basic contradiction.

Mr. Hoon: The best way of dealing with my right hon. Friend's point is probably to wait until we get to the part of the debate which deals with that specific subject. Obviously, we are considering the whole package. We are not simply concentrating on bits here and there and pointing out apparent inconsistencies: we are seeking the whole package. The whole package presupposes a commitment by the United Kingdom Government and other Governments in the European Community to play their part in relieving the regions of the chronic poverty and unemployment from which they suffer at present.

Mr. Ian Taylor: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for being generous enough to give way to me a second time.

The answer to the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) is that the Community's budget is set for the next seven years. Therefore, what the Community does in terms of internal adjustment to the budget obviously represents a series of political judgments. It does not change the national commitment to reduce overall Government expenditure to the 3 per cent. ceiling over a period.

The hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon) is interested in trying to create jobs through structural expenditure. Does he recognise the constructive role which the European investment bank can have in juxtaposition with private capital? That is precisely what was agreed at the Edinburgh summit. The role of the European investment bank, in attracting private capital rather than putting a burden on taxpayers, is one to which the hon. Gentleman should pay tribute and which he should recognise.

Mr. Hoon: I agree with that entirely. I have no disagreement with the hon. Gentleman in making that point. However, what I disagree and have difficulty with is the attitude of the United Kingdom Government towards local authorities. The United Kingdom Government have consistently blocked the ability of local authorities to match the funds available from the European Community. In the past, that has led to the European Commission freezing the sums available under the RECHAR scheme for mining areas. That row should have been resolved last year, but it appears that the Government are still not allowing local authorities to play their full part in the process.

The Association of Metropolitan Authorities wrote to the European Commission complaining about the attitude of the United Kingdom Government towards additionality. The Regional Policy Commissioner replied:

> "I am indeed concerned by the accumulating evidence that there are difficulties in funding resource cover, which put at risk the take-up of E.R.D.F. grants and thus the implementation of the agreed programme."

There is a concern in the European Commission that the United Kingdom will not receive the funding for which it is eligible.

Local authorities have experienced considerable problems in securing European funding—not problems with the European Commission but with their own Government as a result of bureaucratic delays in Whitehall. Local authorities complain about complicated systems of administration of those funds in Whitehall, about central Government interfering in the regional programmes and insisting on prior vetting of certain payments and about not being allowed to make matching cover available in order to secure funds. They have made a series of comments on the sort of difficulties from which they suffer.

Beyond anything else, local authorities are saying that the Government's system of allocating public expenditure makes it extraordinarily difficult for them to plan in advance to secure appropriate funding. The reality of that, for which the Government are responsible, is that the United Kingdom is missing out on money which it would otherwise receive from the European Community.

That is ironic, considering that this debate has featured a number of Conservative Members complaining bitterly about the amount of European funding going to the poorest nations and regions of the European Community. If Conservative Members directed some of their complaints to those on the Government Front Bench, it might be a somewhat more accurate complaint to make. If the United Kingdom is missing out on money which would otherwise be available from the European Community, it might be more sensible for Conservative Members to complain to Ministers, instead of complaining about the money going to the poorest countries in the Community.

5.15 pm

Mrs. Gorman: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the structural funds, which will handle £23 billion, will have a terrible job keeping track of that money? For example, is he aware of the latest scandal in Greece, where they have fiddled £45 million of taxpayers' money by exaggerating their harvest, another fiddle in Rome where they have fiddled £22·7 million for cooking the statistics on durum wheat, another scandal about oil in Calabria and so on? Given those vast sums of money, how will we keep track of the fact that people—never mind our regions—will be fiddling like mad?

Mr. Hoon: I might be somewhat more persuaded by the hon. Lady's intervention and her examples if she had paid regard to what I said about the difficulties of local authorities in the United Kingdom securing European funding. That is the point that I am making. It is no good complaining about what is going on elsewhere in Greece or Portugal when the Government—whom from time to time the hon. Lady supports—are not making their best contribution in terms of getting funding from the European Community.

Mr. Macdonald: Might not the difficulties be somewhat eased after the ratification of the treaty? I do not know whether my hon. Friend has noticed that article 130b permits each national Government to pursue policies of economic and social cohesion through their national policies as well as in their contributions to the Community. After the treaty is ratified, there will be a constraint on the British Government to pursue regional policies and ones which improve the prospects of local authorities and make it possible for local authorities to challenge them in the European Court if they fail to live up to the treaty's obligations.

Mr. Hoon: That is right, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his assistance in that respect. Essentially, I am demonstrating that we could have a much simpler system if the United Kingdom Government allowed local authorities to carry through the decisions which they have already made with the European Commission in terms of funding specific projects. Local authorities have already agreed with Brussels the projects that I am describing where the money has not been spent. Unfortunately, because of the complexities of the system in Whitehall, authorisation has not always been received, so many local authorities are simply waiting for authorisation from Whitehall to go ahead with schemes that they have already agreed with Brussels.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): I am listening with great care to the hon. Gentleman's interesting speech, which undoubtedly reflects his experience in the European Parliament. Would not he be correct in answering my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) by saying that the reports of the Court of Auditors say repeatedly and with great emphasis that fraud occurs in all member states?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful for that observation.

Mr. Wilkinson: The hon. Gentleman takes Whitehall to task for not authorising, if I have his figures right, some £2·5 billion of British public expenditure in order to have the benefit of £1 billion from Brussels. Is it not the case that, of that £1 billion from Brussels, only about £200 or £300 million constitutes British money which went to Brussels in the first place? Therefore, it would be bad arithmetic and logic that, to get back £200 or £300 million of our own money, we would have to expend £2·5 billion which it is not necessary to expend at a time of economic stringency.

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman and I have a different perspective on whose money belongs to whom. The money which the European Community distributes is money which it is responsible for collecting directly. It is part of the system of the European Community. Clearly, it is possible to break that down and say which countries give

[Mr. Hoon]

which amount of money, but that is simply the difficulty that the hon. Gentleman has in coming to terms with the obligations that we have had as a member of the European Community since the beginning of 1973. The world has moved on.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hoon: I give way for one last time. I am trying to finish.

Mr. Shepherd: Will the hon. Gentleman return to the point made by the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies)? The treaty contends that we should depress public expenditure to meet certain criteria, while he advocates an increase in public expenditure. How does he reconcile those two arguments?

Mr. Hoon: I thought that I had said how I proposed to deal with that question. It is much more sensible to do it on that basis.

I began this speech some three weeks ago by complaining about the attitude of the United Kingdom Government to local authorities and their elected members in the context of appointments to the Committee of the Regions. The Minister of State poured scorn on those criticisms. I have concluded my speech tonight by demonstrating the practical attitude of the Government to local authorities, which have sought strenuously to secure funds from the European Community but have been consistently blocked in those efforts by our Government. That is a matter of great regret, but it is a practical demonstration of the Government's attitude to local authorities.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): This is an interesting opportunity to speak on the Committee of the Regions as we consider the Maastricht treaty. I am speaking to amendments which have been tabled in my name and those of my hon. Friends in Plaid Cymru and the Liberal Democrats. We make strong arguments in support of the Committee of the Regions and seek to expound our view on how the committee should develop.

It is important, first, that I put on record my principled stance that for a Scottish Nationalist or Welsh Nationalist or, indeed, Liberal Democrat, the Committee of the Regions will never be a substitute for the right of our nations to be represented independently within the European Community, with full access to the Council of Ministers and the Commission, where so many of the key decisions are taken.

As a member of the Scottish National party, I believe that we should have full independent representation within the Community. Having said that, we must talk clearly about a Committee of the Regions which will not regard Scotland or Wales as regions but deal with the regions of Wales and Scotland. That is what we seek in examining how the membership of the committee should be founded.

Some people say that the proposed Committee of the Regions should have merely a consultative role, and therefore dismiss some aspects of it. I have always believed that consultation is important in the political process. Others have said that the Committee of the Regions will take on a lobbying role. The hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon) said that the structural funds had already been altered. Therefore, the lobbying aspect of structural funds and various objectives have perhaps already been decided.

However, I have no doubt that ultimately the Committee of the Regions will play a substantial role in the allocation of the structural funds. I agree with the Minister of State that the committee will ultimately accrue to itself additional powers. I share his optimism that the committee has a great deal of potential. If Europe is not over-centralised or over-bureaucratic but has real meaning for people in every corner of the European Community —in the most far-flung island in the north of Scotland or a Greek island in the Aegean sea—people will have a sense of involvement. The Committee of the Regions has the potential to be meaningful to all of us.

The institutions of Europe will change in the next 10 years. I find it depressing to listen to some of the loyal imperialists and backwoodsmen and women on the Conservative Benches who seem afraid of change. Europe offers us a facility for change which is challenging and exciting. We should not take it too easily but we should be prepared to rise to the opportunity and ensure that our people play their full role.

We shall definitely see Europe expand in the next few years. In expanding Europe, we must ensure that the voices of all people are heard. It is possible that Norway, Austria and other countries will join our Community. As the insitutions evolve and develop, we must all be there to argue that the Council of Ministers, the Commission, the Parliament and the Committee of the Regions accrue to themselves additional powers but at the same time decentralise those powers.

When we consider the Committee of the Regions as it is contained in the treaty, one argument worries hon. Members on these Benches and, I know, the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie). We are worried about the distribution of the 24 seats which have been allocated to the United Kingdom. If we considered Scotland as a nation equal to Denmark, we could argue that it should have nine seats. If we considered Wales as equivalent to the Republic of Ireland, it, too, should have nine seats on the Committee of the Regions. If we considered Northern Ireland as the equivalent of Luxembourg, it should have six seats. That neatly adds up to 24 seats. The Minister might like to start an "independence for England" movement so that it can also have adequate representatives for the regions of England.

I make a serious point. The south-west and north-west of England are different and have regional variations; people who live there also have the right to be represented. But the 24 seats will have to be allocated for the length and breadth of the United Kingdom. There will be severe difficulty in allocating the seats. I make no secret of the fact that I believe that Scotland should have a minimum of eight seats. That would reflect the Scottish seats in the European Parliament and would make it possible to take account of the geographical variations.

Earlier today, in an exchange on the Floor of the House, I referred to the importance of objective 1 for the highlands and islands of Scotland, and asked where the boundaries will be drawn. Will Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Highland regional council or other boundaries be used? The highlands and islands have different economic and social needs from, for example, the central belt of Scotland, where what is left of our industry certainly creates specific needs. The borders of Scotland have different needs again. They are all different regions. The north-east of Scotland has a particular interest in the offshore oil and gas industry. In deciding how to allocate the seats, it will be important to take account of the geographic and economic needs of different regions.

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should not be sacrificed to the needs of Greater London. Greater London seems to have its full share of people who are prepared to argue their case elsewhere. I remind the Minister that the Secretary of State for Scotland said on 23 November 1992 that he would bid extremely high for seats for Scotland on the Committee of the Regions. I hope that that will ultimately be reflected in the allocation.

Another issue is the mechanism for appointing, nominating or electing the representatives on the Committee of the Regions. We have made it clear in our amendments that we would prefer direct elections. We believe that that is the fairest way. Direct elections would give a credibility and authority to our representatives on the Committee. I suspect that the Government will not accept the idea of direct elections. Perhaps that reflects the view of the Member of the European Parliament for Lothians, David Martin. He said that direct elections to the Committee of the Regions could give people ideas beyond their responsibilities, but that is not a proper attitude. I would prefer representatives from throughout the United Kingdom to be directly elected and accountable for their areas.

One of the difficulties is that the Government have not been able to come up with a principled outline of where they stand on the mechanism. The research paper from the House of Commons Library makes it clear that other countries have taken a principled outline, although they may not yet have settled the details of how they will make appointments.

In considering the mechanism for appointment and nomination of representatives to the Committee of the Regions, we should take account of geography, and there must be a geographical balance. Scottish representatives from the islands will identify with people from other islands elsewhere in the Community. Representatives from the central belt of Scotland will identify with other Community countries that have industrial interests. They will not solely argue the corner for Scotland, but will argue the case in specific spheres of policy which clearly relate to the geography of our communities.

5.30 pm

Secondly, there must be an element of proportionality. Four parties operate in the political spheres of Wales and Scotland, and members of those parties all stand for election to this Parliament, the European Parliament and to district and regional authorities. Much to my regret, we do not have proportional representation within the United Kingdom—or to be technically correct, within Great Britain—which would be extremely desirable.

When the Government produce any mechanism for deciding representation on the Committee of the Regions, they must take account of the proportion of votes cast for each political party at an election. In one of our amendments, we have attempted to link that proportionality to the European election which is due to take place next year. If we are not going to have direct elections to the Committee of the Regions, the votes cast at that election will be the most recent test of public opinion. I suggest that there must be an element of proportionality to reflect that. We must take a separate account of votes cast in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland—where they already have proportional representation for European elections—and in England.

Scottish nationalists are not prepared to accept the idea that there should be any quango-type appointments by the Secretary of State, whereby he can select the people whom he thinks would represent his interests as opposed to those of the people of Scotland.

On the amendment which stands in the name of the Official Opposition, I can understand why they look to local government as an appropriate body to represent us on the Committee of the Regions. My understanding, however, is that anyone who serves on that committee will have to commit themselves to a minimum of 140 days per year, and perhaps more. A substantial number of days is involved—even under the alternative suggestions—and I therefore believe that the people chosen to be on the committee——

Mr. Wilkinson: Quangos.

Mrs. Ewing: If Conservative backwoodsmen would be quiet, they might hear some information. It is difficult to speak against the background of rowdyism from the anti-Europeans across the Floor.

The importance that we attach to the Committee of the Regions will be demonstrated by the first people chosen to serve on it. They must not be part-timers, or people who are expected to represent their constituents in the local ward or local government while also having to take themselves off to Brussels and Strasbourg. They must be given full authority by being genuine representatives on the committee.

I think that the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) will agree that no one fought the last district or general elections in Scotland with any commitment in their manifestos that they would seek nomination to the Committee of the Regions if they were elected. European issues did not come into the last local government elections.

While there is an important role for local authorities on the committee, I do not necessarily think it correct that we should consider local authority representatives alone.

Mr. George Robertson: The hon. Lady has an argument, although she used so-called information from the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which as we now know is not always reliable, when she mentioned the work load that might be involved. Will she watch what she says as she develops her case? The amendment tabled in her name and that of her hon. Friends from the Scottish National party, which has been selected in the provisional selection for today, seeks to amend the Opposition amendment, but will leave in place the principle that members will be elected local government representatives. If she is arguing against that, she may have to reformulate the amendment that she and her colleagues have tabled and intend to press to a Division.

Mrs. Ewing: I would be interested to know whether the hon. Member for Hamilton accepts our amendment. We have tried to build an element of proportionality into it, recognising that we have four political parties in Scotland and that the political views of people in Scotland should be taken into account. If George Bolton can say that 630,000

[Mrs. Ewing]

people voting for the Scottish National party at the last election cannot be ignored, I do not think the hon. Member for Hamilton can challenge them too seriously on that matter.

I understand the Government's difficulties in trying to reach a democratic mechanism for the nomination, appointment or election of people to the Committee of the Regions. Through our amendment, we seek to link representation to proportionality and to public opinion in Scotland and the future of the committee, tying it in with the changes in institutions that will occur. I hope that, in his response, the Minister of State will fully recognise that those are key principles which cannot be ignored.

I have strong reservations about the Opposition amendment, because it links solely to local government. The Committee of the Regions goes well beyond that, and I hope that the Government will take that into account.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): If a week is a long time in politics, the last three weeks appear to have been an absolute eternity. I can tell the Minister of State that we have used the time wisely because we have studied carefully his remarks on 4 February when formulating our response on the Committee of the Regions, cohesion funds and the way in which structural funds should operate, especially from our prospective in Wales.

I wish to speak to the amendment standing in my name and that of my hon. Friends in Plaid Cymru. We have also tabled joint amendments with the Scottish National party.

As the Committee appreciates, the Committee of the Regions will be established by article 198a of the Maastricht treaty, where it is described as an "advisory" body to be set up in recognition of the fact that the regions of Europe have an important role to play in the way in which the European Community evolves.

It is important to stress that, in recent years, the role of the regions has been enhanced greatly outwith the formal Community institutions. The German länder, for example, already have a strong, but informal presence in Brussels. They have established offices there and are lobbying hard for Community funds for their regions, but there is no formal way in which they can participate in decision making. They are also lobbying hard for the Community institutions to be changed to reflect the growing importance of regional thinking in Europe.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I am listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman and I should like to ask a question for information, not for partisan purposes. Does he agree that Wales—it may also be true of Scotland—already co-operates with other European regions, in particular Catalonia and a region in France? That co-operation is proving productive. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that shows that it is difficult for any of us to anticipate what will come of the Committee of the Regions? It may turn out to be a body of some influence.

Mr. Jones: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for that information, because it demonstrates that there is a growing recognition that Wales, as a nation, as well as other European regions and nations, has a joint role to play in evolving the Community. I should like to remind the Minister, however, that the regions that currently have a relationship with Wales all have an elected form of government at regional level. The current democratic deficit prevalent in Wales needs to be addressed, even though we have to approach the question of the Committee of the Regions from a different perspective.

The word "regionalism", in common with "federalism", is much misunderstood and much maligned in Europe. I have no problem with the word "regionalism", because, in relation to Wales, it means the historic nations and regions of Europe. It is important to put on record the fact that use of the word "regionalism" does not in any way compromise the right of Wales to be regarded as a nation in its own right. When considering the Committee of the Regions, we must also recognise that the only way in which the democratic deficit in Wales can be overcome is by establishing a Welsh parliament.

We need to look at the words of the Maastricht treaty, which say that it is designed to create

> "an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe";

but it also states that it is designed

> "to bring decision making in certain areas and competences to below the level of the nation state."

It is designed to bring decision making closer to the people but that presupposes that a mechanism exists to make that happen. Such a mechanism is not available to the people of Wales.

In time, the two-way process of looking at government from a European level and a local level will erode the centralising force that is prevalent in the British system of government, where competences that were dealt with by local government until recently, for example, health, education and housing, have been transferred to the centre. We must get away from the idea that sovereignty is rigid. It is something to be shared where different decisions are taken at different levels, for different purposes at different times. That philosophy distinguishes my colleagues from some of the Conservative Benches.

Sir Teddy Taylor: In case Wales gets carried away by the prospect that the hon. Gentleman is offering, does he at least accept that the Committee of the Regions will have no power to do anything but talk, and that it will have no budget? Is there not a danger that the hon. Gentleman might get carried away with the potential of that committee when it is simply a kind of talking shop, exactly the same as that which existed in the Soviet Union?

Mr. Jones: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point, because the Committee of the Regions is an advisory body and, if it remains so, it will be nothing but a talking shop. I have sought to stress, however, that there is a growing recognition among those who are members of that committee that there is a valuable and growing role for the historic nations and regions of Europe in the decision-making process of the Community. It is the potential of that committee in which I am interested. It may be an advisory body now, but it has enormous potential.

5.45 pm

Let us remember that, five years ago, none of the European historic nations and regions had any influence or any role. Today, the German länder, the Catalans, the Basques and many other nations have offices in Brussels, and they are lobbying hard for their people. The establishment of the Committee of the Regions recognises their growing role. We want Wales to play its part in that process.

My party and I may be optimistic, but we have a view about how Europe should develop. We want, eventually, a second chamber in Europe to represent the regions and historic nations—a bicameral system—which will introduce the checks and balances that are necessary in any democratic system. Many believe—including many Conservative Members—that the Maastricht treaty is a centralising document. They believe that it will transfer power to an unelected and unaccountable Commission.

Mr. Denzil Davies: It will severely limit our powers.

Mr. Jones: I accept that the right hon. Gentleman and others believe that it will severely limit the ability of member states to decide their economic policy. I know that they fear the creation of an independent European central bank. However, the opponents of the treaty had to recognise on 4 February that the powers in that treaty are subject to a number of qualifications. The Community is well aware of the danger of it concentrating wealth and power in the core cities of Paris, Brussels, Frankfurt and the like.

It is important to recognise that the treaty is subject to checks and balances. I accept that a certain amount of power will be transferred to the centre, but it is also transferred back to the regions and that makes us confident that the Maastricht treaty is, on balance, absolutely correct.

Mr. Denzil Davies: I am listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman. He and I would agree that we need devolution of power within the United Kingdom. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman can now explain why he is so keen to centralise that power even further away when the argument has always been that we should go for decentralisation of power and devolution.

Mr. Jones: The right hon. Gentleman should note that the difference is that his concept of sovereignty belongs to the 19th century. It is totally outdated and has been shown to be ineffective. Within the European Community, we now have democratic systems that recognise that decisions may be taken at different levels for different purposes.

Sovereignty is not embodied in one place for ever—if it shifts in one way, it can shift in another. I accept that, in certain circumstances, power has been transferred to the centre, but there must also be a corresponding transfer of power back to the people of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The right hon. Gentleman should note that the Maastricht treaty is a good case for transferring that power back to those people, and that is why he should support it.

The treaty refers to a

> "Committee consisting of representatives of regional and local bodies".

it is absolutely clear that the choice of those words was deliberate. The original concept of membership should be that nominations or the committee's composition should not be in the hands of central Government but in the hands of regional and local bodies. The problem in the United Kingdom is that there are no regional bodies from which to choose members. The danger is that, although some may be elected local authority representatives—the Minister said that was a possibility—the remainder could be nominated and unelected.

I listened carefully to the Minister of State in the opening exchanges in this debate, and he kept his options open. That was good of him.

Mr. Donald Anderson: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Government will face a personnel problem in Wales, because the pool of Conservatives from which they can draw has been so reduced by the number of quango appointments that there will be no one left to go to Brussels?

Mr. Jones: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. He will recall the exchanges with the Secretary of State for Wales on that very point in Welsh questions four or five weeks ago.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I left the options open precisely because they are open. I hope that right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the Committee will give their ideas, because we are genuinely seeking to obtain the views of all shades of opinion in the Committee before beginning to consider how to proceed.

Mr. Jones: I am grateful to the Minister for reiterating the point that he made during our deliberations on 4 February. I remind the Committee of his precise words:

> "I am not prepared to commit Her Majesty's Government to a guarantee that the 24 members appointed to the Committee of the Regions will be elected local government councillors."

Answering an intervention later, he said:

> "There is a case for a mix—a case that I hope that the Committee will address."—[*Official Report*, 4 February 1993; Vol. 218, cols. 517, 530.]

I hope that means that the Minister is prepared to consider a method of selecting members that includes some local authority representatives—though he was adamant that they would not all be local government representatives. So far, that is all to which the Minister has committed the Government.

We will not support any Government move to allow the selection of committee members to be in the gift of the Secretary of State for Wales. That would be totally unacceptable. The Secretary of State already wields considerable powers of patronage in appointing Government supporters to numerous quangos in Wales.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): My hon. Friend touches on a most important point. The issue at stake is not who goes but who chooses. I was interested in an exchange between my hon. Friend and Labour's Front-Bench spokesman. A Labour amendment would provide exclusively for local government representatives, but it does not touch the issue of who chooses them. I was unable to detect from the response from the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) whether he supports our amendment to Labour's amendment, which would guarantee in Scotland at least a representative selection of local councillors on the committee. Is my hon. Friend any clearer as to Labour's position?

Mr. Jones: No, I am not. However, I am sure that Labour will have an opportunity to make it clear whether our amendment is acceptable.

Mr. George Robertson: As there will be no opportunity for a member of this Front Bench to re-enter the debate —to do so, given the number of right hon. and hon. Members who want to speak, would be against the general will of the Committee—I may say that our amendment was constructed with some care, to establish the principle that the pool from which the Committee of the Regions would be drawn will comprise local government representatives. It flies in the face of that principle for

[Mr. George Robertson]

Parliament then to lay down precisely who those individuals will be. Let the local authority representatives themselves make up their own minds.

Mr. Jones: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his response. The question remains who will choose the representatives. Unless the hon. Gentleman can clarify that, we will be no nearer to understanding Labour's position on the amendment to its amendment.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): Can the hon. Gentleman reassure me that his opposition to the Secretary of State for Wales choosing the representatives would be just as strong if the right hon. Gentleman selected a member of the hon. Gentleman's own party—perhaps someone who has been elevated to membership of another place?

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. Whoever the Secretary of State chooses, if that selection is in his gift, it will be no good to us. I remind the hon. Gentleman that many former Labour Members have been elevated to another place in recent years.

It is important that the choice of representatives reflects the political diversity of Wales. The hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) emphasised how crucial that is. Nothing would be worse that for the Secretary of State to nominate individuals from one political party or tradition, or from one part of Wales, that did not reflect its political diversity and the challenges that face various parts of it.

I make it clear to the Minister that we would not support a system whereby the choice of representatives is in the hands of the Secretary of State for Wales. Those chosen must reflect the political diversity of Wales. We made an interesting suggestion to the Minister of State —that those chosen must be answerable in some way to the people of Wales.

We put an interesting proposal to the Minister—a forum in Wales. I put this to the Minister as an interesting idea.

Mrs. Gorman: Another one.

Mr. Jones: I agree with the hon. Lady. Currently, the Welsh Grand Committee is nothing more than a talking shop. We want to make it something more, which is why we suggested to the Minister that the Welsh Grand Committee be revamped.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthy Tydfil and Rhymney): The hon. Gentleman is making very heavy weather of this, although I accept the principles that he is trying to establish. However, I remind him that the United Kingdom will have 24 members on the Committee of the Regions, of which between two and four will be elected or selected from Wales. It will at best have four members from Wales, and does not deserve quite the degree of constitutional import that the hon. Gentleman attaches to it.

Mr. Jones: I am very surprised at the hon. Gentleman's intervention, and the fact that he believes that Wales should have as few as two representatives.

Mr. Rowlands: No, I said that at worst——

Mr. Jones: Yes, that is the point that the hon. Gentleman made. I totally reject that argument. We believe that the Committee of the Regions will be an important body once it develops, and we must get it right from the beginning. Those selected to represent Wales and various parts of Wales should be answerable to the people of Wales in some form. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman accepts that point.

Like me, he knows that we are answerable to the electorate of Wales at every election. All Members of the European Parliament and local authority members are similarly answerable. What is wrong with asking members of the Committee of the Regions to be answerable in the same way?

We are saying that there should be a revamped Welsh Grant Committee, to which could be added MEPs and local authority representatives, and that the Committee of the Regions would have to account to that body for the way in which it represented Wales. Otherwise, once selected, its members would be answerable to no one but themselves.

6 pm

Wales should have a least four members on the Committee. We are not prepared to countenance fewer than that, as our amendment makes clear. The hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) said that, given the position of Ireland and other countries, we should be entitled to nine. We accept that we are not in the same position now, but we feel that we are entitled to at least four members. I hope that the Labour party will support us in that regard.

Mr. Mike Watson (Glasgow, Central): I am intrigued by the hon. Gentleman's argument. The hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) argued that there should be eight members representing Scotland, one for every European seat. I understand that there are also four European seats in Wales. The extension of that argument would lead to the establishment of 81 British seats on the Committee, which, surely, is nonsense. I am as anxious as my Scottish and Welsh colleagues for adequate Scottish and Welsh representation, but it is important to recognise that, on the basis of that argument, the English regions will also require adequate representation.

Mr. Jones: The hon. Gentleman must understand that, in a United Kingdom context, Wales will have no more than four representatives. Ireland and Denmark, for instance, are independent countries and entitled to a specific number of members. The hon. Gentleman is right: in a United Kingdom context, the ridiculous position that he has described would indeed result. That is why we are now asking for seats.

Finally, let me deal with structural funding. The Commission has announced that it is prepared to grant financial support to pilot schemes to promote combined transport initiatives. I hope that the Minister of State will examine that. We in Wales are very conscious of the need to ensure that structural funding is applied in a way that will reduce Wales's peripherality in the context of the Community. The support announced by the Commission would enable, for example, the undertaking of feasibility studies for the upgrading and possible electrification of the two main railway lines in Wales—the north Wales and south Wales lines. I hope that the Government will seek funds for those schemes.

Another important initiative is the Interreg initiative, which aims to promote inter-regional cross-border co-operation. The first Interreg scheme, introduced in 1991, approved 31 programmes, including links between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, and between Kent and the coast of France. According to our information, further funds would be available after December 1993, as it seems likely that an Interreg 2 will be negotiated during the next year, alongside the renegotiation of the structural funds.

One of the areas currently being considered for development under a possible Interreg 2 is the central corridor—and the southern corridor—linking Ireland and Wales. We ask the Government to throw their weight behind that plan, which would be of immense long-term benefit to the economies of north-west and south-west Wales. As I have said, it would also reduce our peripherality in the context of the Community.

I have detained the Committee too long. I appreciate that other hon. Members wish to speak, but I have given way several times to my hon. Friends. I hope that the Minister will respond positively to the contributions made by Scottish National and Plaid Cymru party Members, which I hope have themselves been positive.

Mrs. Gorman: It was very kind of you to call me, Mr. Lofthouse. I have sat through all 13 sittings of the Committee so far, and I have written eight little speechlets; now, at last, I have an opportunity to speak up—as much as anything, to speak up for the way in which the amendments affect my constituents in Billericay. That is what concerns me.

Many people have expressed grave concern about the social chapter; others have expressed concern about the central bank. However, these amendments—which deal with the social cohesion strategy in the Maastricht treaty —will also have grave consequences for my constituents if they are passed. When I was selected and subsequently elected as a Member of Parliament, my constituents made two things clear to me. First, they want a reduction in bureaucracy and Government intervention. They want fewer layers of government: we do not want county councils, let alone the latest proposal for a Committee of the Regions. All Opposition Members seem to be fighting for a share of the action in that regard. Secondly, we in Billericay do not want more taxes and waste of public funds—we want less.

I sometimes think that Members of Parliament—especially those who occupy the elevated lower Benches —have no idea where the money comes from: money that Members of Parliament themselves decide is to be spent. We all know that the European Community gets through £42 billion a year—or possibly £45 billion—in its budget, of which we contribute about £5 billion and get back £2·8 billion. In any event, we make a substantial net contribution. We contribute about £50 million every working week.

That is the kind of money that we were wasting in the 1970s when we had all those nationalised industries. We complained then that it was beyond our ability to sustain that waste, and we got rid of it: we turned it around. Now, we give as much money to the Community. If we proceed with the cohesion fund, and give the extra money for which Mr. Delors is calling, we shall end up spending four times this amount by 1999.

Mr. Michael Spicer (Worcestershire, South): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reminding the Committee of the net contribution that we make. Is not that the equivalent of about 100 national health service hospitals?

Mrs. Gorman: It certainly is. I dare say that it is also the equivalent of half a dozen channel tunnels.

My constituents want to know where the money is coming from for this wonderful idea of redistributing finance in the form of cohesion funds. I will tell them where it is coming from: it is coming from their back pockets. We draw our pay cheques, and benefit to some extent from the tax structure in this country; but loads of people out there are struggling to find the money to placate the VAT man and the income tax inspector. They must find the money to keep their businesses going—and here we are, blindly planning a vast new enterprise that will supply everyone, throughout the Community, with their wants at our expense.

Mr. Randall: I entirely support the hon. Lady's views about waste, but might not her opinions on regional policy be coloured by the fact that she represents a seat in the south-east? In such areas as Hull, which I represent, there is terrific deprivation and a desperate need for a regional policy. We need cohesion funds. Are we not bound to disagree? Until the recession, the south-east was one of the most opulent parts of the country, while other parts were very poor in comparison.

Mrs. Gorman: The hon. Gentleman's constituency was probably doing very nicely before we entered the European Community and gave away all our fishing rights. The Community was responsible for that.

The amendments deal largely with economic and social cohesion. The wording in the treaty of European union is:

> "In particular, the Community shall aim at reducing disparities between levels of development of the various regions".

What that means is transferring money from the better-off parts of Europe, which at present just about include this country, to the southern parts.

We all know that one cannot make the poor rich by making the rich poorer—Abraham Lincoln taught us that —yet that is what this policy is about. Shall we benefit from this wonderful cohesion fund? No, we shall not, because one must have a per capita income of 90 per cent. or less of the average of the Community as a whole. So all these other regions which are champing at the bit to get this money will benefit from it while we as a country will be forking out that kind of money. As has been said by my hon. Friends, time and again, we shall pay the other European countries for their factories—the noose that will hang our domestic industry.

Mr. Wilkinson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is making an extremely distinguished and important speech, for giving way. May I point out to her that Portugal, which was hitherto one of the poorest countries in the Community, has had a rate of growth of more than 4 per cent. a year for the past three years, while we have had a negative rate of growth. In other words, we have seen our unemployment rise and their employment increase, at our expense. From the point of view of the British taxpayer, that is not responsible.

Mrs. Gorman: I thank my hon. Friend for his contribution, and he will be pleased to know that our own

[Mrs. Gorman]

Chancellor is well aware of that. He warned us in a debate in the House on economic and monetary union in which he quoted Karl Otto Pöhl, the director of the Bundesbank. He described the German experience of trying to level out the income of the east and the west, as a drastic object lesson of the dangers that follow these glorious, euphemistic and utopian ideas of making everybody equal.

In fact, transferring funds on that scale can have devastating effects on the economy. The Chancellor made the comparison. He said that our average manual wage in this country is approaching £15,000 a year, while in Greece it is £4,500 and in Portugal £2,000. So transferring funds from our manual workers to bring these people up to much the same level will inevitably cause a drastic cut in the income of working people in this country.

Mr. Watson: The hon. Lady surely chose a most inappropriate example by quoting Karl Otto Pöhl. Is she aware that, in Germany, one of the functions of the länder through the Bundesrat is to achieve an economic sharing out of resources. They have been very successful in doing that. Is that not an example of how the poorer regions can be helped successfully by the richer regions?

Mrs. Gorman: I suggest that the hon. Member tells that to the people in west Germany, because they have a different view of what is happening, with taxes going up, inflation rising and all the other problems that come with one of these artificial schemes. Our own Chancellor said how much greater those strains and tensions will be if 12 very different states with different economies try to adapt themselves to a single standard. This is our own Chancellor warning us of the dangers inherent in this policy.

Who will get all this wonderful amount of money? Do we all remember that little shadow boxing match that went on in Edinburgh when Felipe González, the Premier of Spain, said that he would not sign the Maastricht treaty until he got some concessions. The concession he wanted was a guarantee of a very large amount of money for a massive hydrological plan in Spain. He wanted £17·7 billion for this scheme. We conceded at Edinburgh that Spain will get more than half that money from the cohesion fund.

The rain in Spain falls mainly on the gravy train. These people stand to benefit enormously. What will Spain use that money for? It will be used for more irrigation schemes. Spain already uses more water for irrigation than any other country in the European Community. It will grow more grapes and olives, and anything and everything to add to the butter mountains, the wine lakes and the olive mountains which we already have. We shall be corrupting and distorting the economy by allowing all this money to go to the so-called hard-up regions.

Mr. Randall: I thank the hon. Lady for giving way to me twice. Is she not aware that the British contribution to the cohesion fund is only 5 per cent., so that in that sense her constituents will not be that much affected? Abatement cannot be changed until the end of the century. I am not sure what she is so worried about.

6.15 pm

Mrs. Gorman: The hon. Member is making a point. I have heard Ministers assure us that by 1999 we shall add only another £200 million to the amount of money we give them, but we all know how these sums suffer slippage. There was a time when we were the second lowest in terms of economic growth and income and we got a substantial rebate. However, since we took in all these poorer countries, we are in the middle position and are not even likely to get the rebate we currently get under the common agricultural policy.

The structural fund budget is made by reducing the amount spent on CAP from 80 per cent. of the budget to 60 per cent. That will have a profound affect on whether or not we get the rebate and will also affect the amount of money we have to spend on our own citizens.

Mr. Barry Legg (Milton Keynes, South-West): I am not sure whether my hon. Friend is aware that, at the last meeting of the Committee about three weeks ago, it was agreed that £750 million would come from British taxpayers up to 1999 to fund the cohesion fund. I wonder whether she thinks that this amazing generosity is somewhat inappropriate when we are looking at running a budget deficit in this country of some £50 billion in the coming year.

Mrs. Gorman: My hon. Friend makes a splendid point. We are dealing with pie in the sky or money that apparently grows on trees, money which we all know we can manufacture by borrowing from international banks, until the point will come when they will step in and say, "Enough is enough." We cannot spend what we do not earn. If one does not invest one's money in one's own economy, the economy will not grow. That is the plain truth, and the people in Essex know that, even if Labour hon. Members do not.

Mr. Wilkinson: And in Middlesex.

Mrs. Gorman: And in Middlesex; and good Conservatives throughout the country know it. That is why they want a referendum and to have a say in the matter. That is why they are so concerned.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: I am listening carefully and attentively to the hon. Lady; she extended the same courtesy to me. She has given important reasons why the structural, regional, and cohesion funds should not be applied to the poorer regions of the Community, but would she explain how she would deal with regional disparity in the Community?

Mrs. Gorman: The hon. Gentleman has given me an opportunity to tell him my regional policy. I would not have one, because I believe that, left to itself, the free market will shift funds to where there is a good labour supply available and where the facilities merit it. When one starts directing money to regional funds, one gets the equivalent of peanut schemes—and we all know what happened to that money in Africa.

Mr. Iain Duncan-Smith (Chingford): Is not that the difference between the two sides of the Committee? We see redistribution taking place through the market, through mechanisms where people exercise their free choice, with companies getting their costs down by competing and bidding in the market place, which is free, and they therefore transfer the money back to their regions. That is the difference between the Opposition's attitude and ours.

Mrs. Gorman: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend, and I find it tragic that a Government and a party which have committed themselves to getting out of all these interfering schemes should be caught in the idea of getting involved in what is pure socialism.

Mr. Legg: Does my hon. Friend agree that the regional and cohesion funds are now being advocated because of the exchange rate mechanism and of the efforts to develop economic and monetary union? The effect of that is to create more unemployment in the regions. To balance the loss of the shock absorber of the currency, Jacques Delors and his colleagues are advocating that funds be transferred to these areas.

Mrs. Gorman: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. A great lady who used to sit not far below where my hon. Friend is sitting now constantly reminded us of that fact. Rather than establishing artificial monetary schemes, currency must be allowed to float and find its own level. That policy stood Britain in good stead throughout the 1980s and helped it to recover its economic respectability. If we try to buck that system, we shall experience grave difficulties.

The amendments will commit funds to the social chapter. Under the protocol, the Government have not committed themselves to the social chapter, but this group of amendments will commit us to funding that policy. How do Ministers reconcile that with our stated policy?

The European investment bank will get £7·6 billion of taxpayers' money to back schemes that are chosen by bureaucrats in Brussels. Most of them could not manage to back the loser of the donkey derby, let alone the winner, but this vast amount of money will be commited to schemes that are agreed by horse trading among members of the European Community late at night: "I will give this to you, you give that to me. I will get money for my hydro-electric scheme and you will get something in exchange."

Money will be allocated not according to market forces but by favours, which will have a distorting and corrupting effect. One of the lessons that we surely have learnt from handing vast amounts of aid to third-world countries is that such money goes into the pockets of the rich. It goes from the poor of the rich countries to the rich of the poor countries.

Spain and Portugal are examples of the devastation that such policy wreaks. I spend holidays on the Algarve, where vast tracts of what was beautiful countryside—the ecology which all the greenies want to save and which, apparently, is covered by the European policy—are scarred by roads that have been cut through areas where literally nothing happens. Quiet country villages with beautiful stands of eucalyptus and cork oak are being smashed down because Portugal is getting £2 million a day from the Community, and under these proposals it will get a lot more. The tourist industry is suffering because the Portuguese Government no longer invest in tourism; they are getting the gravy straight from the European Community.

Mr. Wilkinson: My hon. Friend is making a very serious point. She is striking at the illusion of cohesion within the Community. The only thing, surely, that British people do not want is for Britain to be turned into one great big Belgium, with motorway from end to end, little country and the sort of devastation, which she is so eloquently describing, that has been perpetrated in the Algarve.

Mrs. Gorman: My hon. Friend makes an admirable contribution. The Conservative party enhanced its reputation by embracing the doctrine that we should leave people to spend or invest their money as they see fit. Although mistakes will be made, they will be trivial and minor compared with the devastating mistakes that will flow from massive amounts of so-called public funds being manipulated and engineered by bureaucrats. That is what will happen under the treaty.

I want to say a couple of words about the Committee of the Regions. Are we not already seeing the spoils being fought over on the Opposition Benches: "You give us four more people and we may do a deal and vote with you on amendment No. 27; we might slip in the right Lobby if you give us a couple more seats"? This afternoon, I have witnessed the bones being handed to the dogs—give a dog a bone and he will come running home.

The Committee of the Regions could, at best, be a waste-of-time, quango-type talking shop, but at worst it could be a means by which the European Community will seek to bypass the wishes of hon. Members. I sometimes think that we have 650 turkeys in this place voting for Christmas. If these proposed organisations are set up, with all the money that they will take from our taxpayers—our working population; the very people whom Opposition Members seek to represent—we shall pay for it. All that lovely money will be distributed beyond our control to schemes approved by politicians and bureaucrats—the last people who can make such decisions and get them right. As we all know, by and large, regional aid in Britain has been a disaster. That is why we shifted our policy.

The Committee of the Regions could have a sinister purpose. It could be part of the demise of the House of Commons. I have sat through our 13 days of debate, and I oppose this wretched Maastricht treaty because I think that this is the place where my constituents expect me to represent their views. It is the only place where I can do so. This is supposed to be

"government of the people, by the people, and for the people"

here; not by delegation to Maastricht, Brussels or wherever. If we agree to that, we shall all soon be getting our P45s. The public will not pay us to sit on our backsides nodding things through in the afternoon.

That is the essence of the treaty—other people making our minds up for us. We should have discarded the treaty long ago. We are grown-up people; we do not need the crutch of Maastricht to sustain us as a nation. People outside do not expect that of us, and if the Labour party had any real feeling for working people or anybody else it would support the concept of the British people having a say.

It is not easy for Conservative Members like me to oppose the Government—we sacrifice more than most hon. Members by doing so—but we do so because the principle involved is robbing the British people of the right to spend the product of their labour on the things that they want. People in Essex are famous for their hard work and for pulling themselves up by their bootstraps, even though they are often traduced in the House of Commons and

[Mrs. Gorman]

insulted. They are the salt of the earth, and I know how hard they work to pay their taxes. They do not want to see Britain's income being shifted down the line to a lot of other countries.

Let those countries work their own way up and do what people in mine and other constituencies do—look after themselves, their own interests and those of their country. That is how we shall make progress.

Ms. Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): It is always a bit difficult to follow the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman). Although I did not agree with her views, I enjoyed the manner in which she delivered them.

I should like to speak briefly to amendment No. 273, which I tabled and which several of my hon. Friends support, on the composition of the Committee of the Regions. Before doing so, I should say that I am getting confused messages from Conservative Members about that committee. On the whole, the message so far has been that it is not important and that it is only a talking shop, but having listened to the hon. Member for Billericay, it now seems that it will lead to the demise of the House of Commons as we know it. I do not believe that that is correct, but nor do I think that the Committee of the Regions is a meaningless talking shop.

Amendment No. 273 seeks not a share of the action but balanced regional representation on the Committee of the Regions across the United Kingdom. Obviously, there must be representation from Scotland and Wales, but I should also like representations from each of the standard planning regions of England to ensure a regional balance.

That would mean having a representative—or possibly two—from each of the following regions: the north, the north-west, Yorkshire and Humberside, the east midlands, the west midlands, East Anglia, the south-east, which it is important should have a London dimension, and the south-west. It is important that this commitment to regional balance be built in. It is alarming that, so far in the debate, the Government have failed to give any assurance that there will be regional balance in the representation on the Committee of the Regions. I am glad that my amendment is being sponsored by Members from throughout the United Kingdom. I hope that this means that it will be considered favourably by other hon. Members if, as I hope will happen, the Committee is given a chance to vote on it.

6.30 pm

I was very alarmed by what the Minister said in introducing the debate on the Committee of the Regions. He seemed to take the view that the representation on the Committee might be restricted to Government appointees or business people. I have nothing at all against the notion that business people should be allowed to express their views very strongly in the European Communities, but they are already represented on other EC institutions and would therefore be getting a double dose of representation, whereas regional representatives and local authority representatives from the regions would be likely to miss out altogether.

That is a matter for great concern. The business community is already very well represented on the Economic and Social Committee of the European Communities and the business voice is heard in Europe through UNICE, the employers' organisation at European level. Indeed, the latter has proved to be a very effective lobby in the context of the European Commission. However, it would be highly inappropriate to have such representation on the Committee of the Regions, too. I hope that the Government will give this point very serious consideration.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that, if this country selects, rather than elects, members of the Committee of the Regions, the committee, when it chooses its bureau or executive consisting of 30 members, will not include anyone from the United Kingdom, as almost all members from other countries will be elected? In other words, by selecting, rather than electing, members, this country would be putting itself at a disadvantage in the Committee of the Regions.

Ms. Quin: That is a very important point. We would cause needless resentment by approaching our representation in the manner that the Government seem to be considering.

I was alarmed when the Minister of State, in response to an intervention from me some time ago, failed to deal with the need to respect the political make-up of each region and nation of the United Kingdom. I believe that my region is the only one in which the Labour party clearly obtained more than 50 per cent. of the vote. It would be quite wrong of the Government to undertake a frantic search for the few Conservatives who might be found in the northern region so that they could be put on the Committee of the Regions. That would be an insult to the region.

I urge the Government to take into account the political complexion of each region when deciding the representation on the committee. It is very worrying that the Government have failed to appreciate the need for regional balance. I hope that, before the end of the debate, they will give us some assurance on this point.

The Government have failed completely to understand the regionalisation process that is already going on in the United Kingdom, under their own nose. The district and county authorities in my region have come together voluntarily in an organisation called the Northern Regional Assembly of Local and District Authorities. That assembly would be a very suitable body to choose the northern region's representative on the Committee of the Regions. By making this point I am giving my response to a question that has been raised by a large number of Members during the debate.

My amendment is really a supplement to one tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson). It would be best, certainly in the short and medium term, to have local authority representation on this committee. If, ultimately, we move to a regionalised system of government in the United Kingdom as a whole, with devolved government in Scotland and Wales, those regional governments could choose their own representatives. It seems to me, however, that, in the interim, the most satisfactory method would be the one that has been proposed by my hon. Friend. At the same time, I hope that my hon. Friend will recognise the need, indicated in my amendment, to ensure that there is balanced representation from England, Scotland and Wales so that the best use may be made of this committee.

I should like to respond briefly to hon. Members who have said that the committee will be just a talking shop and will not, therefore, have a worthwhile role. The same was said of the European Parliament when it was set up, yet most people now realise that, even if it is a talking shop, many of the amendments on which it votes are incorporated in European Communities legislation. In my opinion, the Committee of the Regions will play a valuable role by putting forward ideas likely to be taken on board by the Commission in its draft directives. There will be a clear line of communication into the European institutions. That is something which must be stressed.

Mr. Wilkinson: How democratic does the hon. Lady think the European Parliament is? Do the majority of her constituents even know who their MEP is? Do they regularly go to his surgery? Does he receive 20, 30 or 40 letters a day, as we do? Is he as accessible as the hon. Lady and other Members of this Parliament are? Does not the hon. Lady agree that members of the European Parliament are seen by their constituents as being abroad and very remote? Surely it is pure imagination to think that the European Parliament can exercise any effective democratic control over the other institutions of the Community.

Ms. Quin: As I was a member of the European Parliament for 10 years, I hope that I am in a good position to respond to the hon. Gentleman. In many ways MEPs fulfil a role that is not fulfilled by any other body but may be fulfilled to a certain extent by the Committee of the Regions. The European constituencies are very large. They tend to comprise either regions or sub-regions. Very often members of the European Parliament look at the directives emanating from Brussels and evaluate their effect not just on the United Kingdom as a whole but on the parts of the United Kingdom that they happen to represent.

When I first went to the European Parliament, the details of the common fisheries policy were being negotiated. Although I opposed that policy, I realised how important it was to have representatives evaluating the details of the legislation to see how they affected not just British fishermen as a whole but fishermen in various areas of the United Kingdom, who might fish for different species, or at different times of the year, or on the basis of different regional or local traditions.

I therefore feel very strongly that regional and local issues should be considered seriously at European level. Although the House of Commons can do a great deal of worthwhile work in evaluating European legislation, there is a direct regional input which can be complementary to, and not in conflict with, what Parliament does. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that response to his point.

I do not believe that the Committee of the Regions is simply a matter of securing funds. In many ways, there has been far too much emphasis in this debate on the question of funds. I see the Committee of the Regions as making a contribution to the European policy-making process and introducing an element that would otherwise be overlooked or neglected. It should consider the regional impact of all European Community policies, not only those dealing with funds. It should consider not only what we can get out of Europe but what we can contribute to it.

The European Community is, of course, a Community of member states, but it is also a Community of nations and regions. We should stress that point and ensure that it is part and parcel of the European decision-making process, not something which has no place in a Europe where, at the end of the day, the main decisions are taken, as we know, by the Council of Ministers. We must stress that it is not only a Europe of nation states but a Europe of regions and localities. I hope that the amendment Nos. 13 and 273 will receive wide support.

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin), who gave an excellent and interesting explanation of her stance on this issue.

Although article 198 is thin in content, and may be regarded by many as being of little significance when compared with the weightier social chapter, it is an interesting concept. The potential exists for a Committee of the Regions to have substantial influence on the future direction of the Community, which I welcome. Although at this stage it will have only advisory and consultative status, it has the ability to become a force for good within the Community.

The Committee of the Regions will form a link between Europe's variously defined regions, from Germany's federal states to Scotland and Wales and the autonomous communities of Spain. It should also bridge the gap between those levels of government and the Community, which is at present dominated by the 12 member states. Of course, Scotland does not have its own Government, but perhaps more of that later.

When compared with Germany, the House, with its belief in centralisation and its own sovereignty, is no doubt uncomfortable with the idea of the Committee of the Regions, because there is no history of subsidiarity within the United Kingdom. The House has been unable to transfer powers to its component parts, so it can envisage no easy way of allocating seats. Although the Minister has explained that, it appears that that is why the Government have not yet given any idea of their thinking on this issue. *[Interruption.]*

Article 198—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Salmond: On a point of order, Mr. Lofthouse. It seems that some hon. Members who claim to be most interested in the Bill are the least interested in the debate —I am finding it very difficult to hear the hon. Lady, whom I very much want to hear.

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): It has not gone unnoticed.

Mrs. Michie: Article 198 has been welcomed with various degrees of enthusiasm or lack of it. The latter was noticeable in the Minister's cautious evidence to the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs on 19 January, but I think that he has since become a little more enthusiastic. He said that it was difficult to predict, but that the Committee could become an organisation of some importance and consequence. I am glad that he accepts that, and I endorse what he said.

However, in a speech at St. Andrews on 23 November, the Secretary of State for Scotland was quite positive. The hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) has already referred to it, but it is worth repeating. He said that it was an exciting initiative, which would strengthen beyond recognition the representation of the countries and regions of Europe which are represented at the top table by member states at the moment.

[Mrs. Michie]

It would be churlish to question the Secretary of State's keenness, although I have a suspicion that the Committee of the Regions will appear as part of the conclusions of the stocktaking exercise. His commitment will be proved by the number of seats that he manages to deliver for Scotland, which leads me to the composition of the Committee.

New clause 63 calls for Scotland to have at least eight of the 24 seats allocated to the United Kingdom. That would bring Scotland into line with its counterparts in Germany, where the Bundestag agreed to allocate 21 seats to the länder and with the autonomous communities of Spain, which are campaigning to take all 21 seats there.

6.45 pm

Some would argue that eight seats for Scotland would mean over-representation, but that is not so. As we have already heard, in population terms, over-representation is a principle of the European Community. *[Laughter.]* Hon. Members may laugh, but the obvious example is Luxembourg, which, with a population of 380,000, has a vote at the top table of nation states and an allocation of six seats on the Committee of the Regions. More representation for smaller units is also a good federalist principle.

The Secretary of State for Scotland agreed when he gave the assurance that he was bidding high. He also said that smaller units have invariably had more representation than the larger, in a bid to compensate for their smaller scale.

Article 198(a) refers to representatives of regional and local bodies being members of the committee. In the absence of a Scottish Parliament, the new clause states that the representatives

> "shall be elected members of Community, District or Regional councillors, elected by an electoral college or college of councillors".

It is essential that the Scottish representatives are democratically accountable to the people of Scotland. It would be wrong and unacceptable for the Secretary of State for Scotland to nominate them, especially if they were chosen from the multitude of quangos which have now been created there.

He should certainly not consider that they should all be members of the Conservative party.

Mr. Garel-Jones *indicated dissent.*

Mrs. Michie: I see that the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the right hon. Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones) is shaking his head, which I take as agreement that they would not all be members of the Conservative party.

There may be some raised eyebrows at my inclusion of community councillors. I deliberately included them because we do not yet know the outcome of the restructuring of local government. I like community councils and believe that they are a good concept. Some have worked well and others not at all, but that is because they have had no power although they should have had it. I hope that the Secretary of State will take that into account when considering reform of government in Scotland.

Suffice to say that some community councillors are extremely competent people. I could name many in my constituency who would have no problem in dealing with the Prime Minister of Bavaria or anyone else on the Committee of the Regions.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): A little earlier, the hon. Lady made some comments about the possibility of Conservatives being chosen to be members of this ghastly committee. Let me make it quite clear to her that, if I were eligible, if I were selected, if I were ordered to, I would not in any circumstances wish to be associated with it.

Mrs. Michie: That is an interesting observation from the hon. Gentleman. *[Interruption.]* I am hearing comments around me to the effect that perhaps he would not be asked to serve on the committee. But I make the point, because it has not been ruled out yet, that they may be selected or nominated by the Secretary of State.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson (Aberdeen, South): Will the hon. Lady tell the House how many community councils in Scotland she has visited touting her idea that they should be responsible in part for electing Scotland's representatives to the Committee of the Regions? Does she honestly believe that those often very genuine people who have gone into community councils to do something about pavements, roads and street lighting want that responsibility?

Mrs. Michie: I certainly do not say that they all want that responsibility. I will not name names, but I know people who would serve very well on this Committee of the Regions, and I know that the Secretary of State for Scotland knows them as well. They are elected community councillors and there is no reason why they should not be on the Committee of the Regions. The hon. Gentleman's allegation demeans people who are concerned with pavements.

A system of proportional representation is at the heart of my new clause. It is a constant source of embarrassment that the United Kingdom Government have persistently refused to bring us into line with our European partners by having a fair system for the European elections. Here is an opportunity to move away from the outdated and undemocratic first-past-the-post system. Proportional representation would allow a wide representation of political opinion and include independent councillors—although I have always wondered what those councillors are independent of.

I welcome the article in the Maastricht treaty, because I see it as a step, albeit a small one, towards Scotland moving closer to Europe. We need to be there. We have much in common with the national regions that will make up the committee and, because of our geographical position and peripherality, we need a more powerful role, to influence EC policy and decision making and to focus on underdeveloped areas for co-operation and assistance, particularly from the centre to the periphery.

Perhaps, if the Committee of the Regions had been in existence at the time, there might not have been what I hope is just a muddle about the question of objective 1 status, when it appeared to be announced from Brussels that my constituency of Argyll and Bute—and, indeed, that of the hon. Member for Moray—was being left out of the traditional highlands and islands areas. I am hoping very much that the Secretary of State will see to it that this is resolved by the Council of Ministers. I believe that, if the Committee of the Regions had been in being, this would not have happened.

Mr. John Butcher (Coventry, South-West): I am most grateful for the hon. Lady's courtesy in giving way. She is now, I think, implying that one of the criteria for representation, in line with the regional aid criteria, should be the relative prosperity or poverty of particular regions. If three English regions have lower per capita income than Scotland, and if the Welsh region has a lower per capita income than Scotland, does this mean that they too should have eight representatives each? If so, have we not run out of representatives to be distributed across the United Kingdom?

Mrs. Michie: That is an argument that should be put to the Government, not to Europe. As for Scotland being underdeveloped, certainly there are areas of Scotland that require assistance, and, like other hon. Members, I see nothing wrong in trying to get the assistance to where it is needed, whether it be in Scotland, Greece, Portugal or Wales. [HON. MEMBERS: "Or England. Or Merseyside."] Well, fine in England, but England has its Government here. [HON. MEMBERS: "So has Scotland."] We will come to that; do we indeed? But certainly England has its Government here, and it ought to be able to support the regions that hon. Members are talking about.

Judging by what has been said by hon. Members—some of whom have been described as backwoodsmen, although I would not call them that—it sounds as if England does not want to be at the heart of Europe, but I believe that Scotland does. Good grief, is Scotland to lose simply because there is an attitude in the Committee against closer co-operation and being at the heart of Europe? I hope that that will not be the case, and that we will ratify the Maastricht treaty.

Mrs. Gorman: It troubles me that the Scots seem to have the attitude that they are victims of this place. Surely the hon. Lady is aware that there are more Scottish people sitting in the House representing either Scottish or English constituencies than there are members of any other single group in the country. They should be pleased about that. If all the power goes to Europe and to the committee on which the hon. Lady is madly trying to get extra seats, this place will become impotent, and the Scots here with it.

Mrs. Michie: I believe that the hon. Lady does not understand that the Scots want to have their own parliament to look after their own affairs. They do not want to be here; they want to have a parliament of Scotland looking after their own affairs. That, I hope, answers the hon. Lady's question. It would be no problem to be in Scotland looking after our own affairs, rather than here. It is the right of every country, every nation, to look after its own affairs. That should not be denied to the nation of Scotland, and it is denied in this place. That is what the Scottish people find it so hard to take.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): I thank the hon. Lady for giving way, because I believe that her contribution and that of the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) have touched on a very sensitive point. I have listened to the terms "nation", "state" and "nationality" being used right through this debate, not just today but previously. Is there not something very worrying here?

We can easily define Welsh nationalism as something that is looking out towards Europe, which wants to be part of it. The same goes for Scottish nationalism and for Northern Ireland's nationalism as expressed throughout constitutional politics—an outward-going thing. But English nationalism? Think of the term Sinn Fein, which means in English "ourselves alone". That is the type of nationalism that we are hearing from some of the people on the Conservative Benches: narrow, introverted and refusing to play its role in the world.

Mrs. Michie: The hon. Gentleman makes the point very well, and I can follow that.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East) *rose*——

Mrs. Michie: I would just like to develop this point, because it follows on from what the hon. Gentleman said.

Mr. Leighton: Will the hon. Lady give way on this point?

Mrs. Michie: In a minute, please.

Mr. Leighton *rose*——

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. If the hon. Lady does not resume her seat, the hon. Gentleman must resume his.

Mrs. Michie: As I said, Scotland needs its voice to be heard—and listened to—as a nation. That is something which the House of Commons has singularly failed to do. In Scotland we have a different political tradition. Here in the House of Commons, Members of Parliament believe in the sovereignty of Parliament, and that is fine, if that is what they want to do. But in Scotland we believe in the sovereignty of the people; we believe that the people have the right to determine how they will be governed.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): Does the hon. Lady understand the frustration of many English Members listening to her, knowing that they represent constituencies with 75,000 or 80,000 electors—mine has nearly 84,000—and that not one Scottish seat has anything like that number? Most Scottish Members represent electorates half that size. If we are talking about over-representation, Scottish seats have a lot to answer for.

7 pm

Mrs. Michie: All I can say to the hon. Lady is that the Members of Parliament representing English seats can always outvote any other block of Members, and that they continually outvote the majority of Scottish Members in the House. I am sorry that some of the constituencies in England have problems, but that is the Government's problem, Parliament's problem, or the problem of the hon. Lady who looks after her constituents. It is not an excuse——

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. It seems that we are now going very wide of the group of amendments. No doubt the hon. Lady feels that she has been provoked, but perhaps she could now draw her remarks into the scope of the grouping before us.

Mrs. Michie: Thank you, Dame Janet. Perhaps I was led further that I should have been by some of the interventions.

Mr. Leighton: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Michie: No, I really should carry on—but I did say that I would give way to the hon. Gentleman. I shall give way for the last time.

Mr. Leighton: I have listened carefully to the hon. Lady's speech, and she said a moment ago that Scottish Members of Parliament did not want to come here. Does she really mean that she does not want to be here? Presumably she wants to go somewhere else. Is that her party's official policy?

Mrs. Michie: The official policy of the Liberal Democratic party is to have a federal United Kingdom, and that includes a Scottish Parliament looking after its own affairs. I have come here, and it is pleasant to meet you all here, but——

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. As the hon. Lady is here, she must abide by the rules of the Committee.

Mrs. Michie: I hope that you will accept, Dame Janet, that I was trying to reply to the intervention by the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton).

I believe that Scotland will get a better hearing on the continent in the Committee of the Regions than it gets in the House. The Minister would find it easier to nominate representatives to serve on that Committee if we already had the federal United Kingdom that I described. Its members could then be more easily drawn from Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland, as they are drawn from the regions of Germany.

There is no doubt that a truly democratic European Community needs to be accountable to the interests of all the countries that lie within its boundaries. That includes countries such as Scotland and Wales. We in the Liberal Democratic party want to see a strengthened and more democratic European Parliament. I believe that there, and through the Committee of the Regions, Scotland in particular will find a voice, albeit a small voice as yet, in the Community.

Allies will be found there among the peoples on the geographic periphery of the EC and from the centre, and among other ancient and historic nations with which we shall be able to co-operate and find common interests, not least cultural interests. For the time being, the Committee of the Regions gives Scotland a voice. That can only be good for our country.

Mr. Garel-Jones: This has been an interesting and useful debate for Ministers to listen to.

Mr. Leighton: On a point of order, Dame Janet. The Minister says that this "has been" an interesting debate. I would say that the debate "is" interesting. Why is the Minister using the past tense, as though the debate is closing?

The Second Deputy Chairman: As I have had occasion to point out before, whoever is in charge of the Committee is not responsible for the accuracy of what is said.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I used the phrase "has been" in the sense that I shall now refer to the points that have been raised. As the hon. Member for Newham, North-East will be aware, it is not a matter for me when the group of amendments will cease to be debated. I am simply intervening at a time that seems convenient for me and for the Committee.

As the Committee will be aware, the lead amendment in the group, amendment No. 13, was moved as a probing amendment——

Mr. Bill Walker: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Garel-Jones: I should begin my speech before taking interventions—but I shall give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Walker: I trust that when he responds to the points that have arisen, my right hon. Friend will take careful note of the way in which separatist elements in Scotland see the Committee as a vehicle for breaking up the United Kingdom.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I have, of course, taken note of that fact, and my hon. Friend can rest assured that I shall deal with it.

The Committee is indebted to the Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen for giving us the opportunity to debate both cohesion and the Committee of the Regions. I shall begin with amendment No. 28, on the Committee of the Regions, because that is the subject about which most, although not all, hon. Members have spoken.

I do not want to resume, if I can avoid doing so, the exchanges that I had with the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) about what other member states have done. The hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon) said that my choice of illustrations was selective. Indeed it was—the only two member states to which I referred were those that have actually selected their membership. I simply said—and I reiterate now—that in neither of those countries were all the nominees elected local government representatives.

I reassure the Opposition, and the rest of the Committee, that the Government have made no decision whatever on either the distribution or the composition of the Committee of the Regions. I may inadvertently have misled some Opposition Members, but I am not in a position to say even that the Government reject the concept that we may end up with elected local government representatives. I ask the Committee to reject the amendment, if there is a Division on it, because enough interesting and important suggestions have been made from both sides of the Committee and from all the parties represented here for there to be meat for a proper consultation process.

I utterly reject the idea that the Government have it in mind to pack the Committee of the Regions with Conservatives. I hope that we are not seeking to be frivolous, or to make debating points across the Chamber. If we are not, every Member of the Committee will know that there are proper ways for us to consult each other, both between political parties and, if that seems appropriate, between regional interests. That is what we intend to do.

Mr. George Robertson: We listened with great care when the Minister said that the Government still have an open mind on the matter. But of course we have listened with enormous care to him in the past, too, and we have learnt that all is not always as it seems.

I shall ask the right hon. Gentleman a question: can we take it that, if the Committee votes for amendment No. 28, the Government will accept that decision and will not use some legal trickery to vote down or ignore the voice of Parliament?

Mr. Garel-Jones: The hon. Member and all of us at times find it difficult to resist making clever debating points. Let me say two things to him. First, it goes without saying that, if the Committee votes for his amendment, the Government will accept the will of the Committee in this matter. It also goes without saying that, when it became apparent to the Government that the legal advice—I accept that the hon. Gentleman will come back to this —which I gave the Committee in good faith was not correct, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary came immediately to the House——

Mr. George Robertson: He did not.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Yes he did, and he apologised to the House.

This is one of the amendments on which it is indeed the case that, if the Government's view did not prevail, the Government would of course accept the will of the Committee. It also means, I hope, that we can have a serious and proper debate where we listen to each other. I assure the Committee that the Government have made no decisions whatever on this matter.

Mr. Salmond: Amendment No. 28 says nothing about political balance. Theoretically we could have 20 local councillors who were Conservatives. What many of us would like to hear is some elaboration of the Minister of State's point that there will be a proper political balance proportionate to support of the parties in the various parts and nations of the United Kingdom.

Sir Roger Moate (Faversham) *rose*——

Mr. Garel-Jones: If I may, Dame Janet, I will give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham. Then I would like to come to the meat of the debate and answer the point made by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond).

Sir Roger Moate: When my right hon. Friend said that the Government would accept the will of the Committee if the amendment were carried, may I urge him to be more cautious? Presumably he meant the will of Parliament as a whole. There would be a Report stage, would there not, and proceedings in another place, which would allow us to reverse such an ill-judged decision?

Mr. Garel-Jones: I do not anticipate the defeat of the Government on this matter, because I have listened carefully to what all my hon. Friends have said and I think that I have sensed in other quarters of the Committee some reluctance to tie the Government down—or, rather, tie the country down—in this matter. I would now like, if I may, to come to the principal points that have been made in the debate.

In essence, we are looking at a Committee of the Regions which, as the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) said, could be important. I would not care to anticipate how the Committee of the Regions may or may not develop. The hon. Lady and the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones), who speaks for Plaid Cymru, made points which many of my hon. Friends picked up. They are separatists. I do not think that they would deny it. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Perhaps I shall stand corrected, but they have a view about the United Kingdom which I do not share and which I think that nobody on the Government side shares.

Having said that, however, I think that the Committee of the Regions, like so much else in the Community, depends on what the political parties and the participants in it choose to make of it. Our intention is that the United Kingdom should send people of the highest quality possible to the Committee of the Regions, and I hope that they will play a constructive role in it.

Mr. Gunnell *rose*——

Mr. Garel-Jones: I wish to make a bit more progress and address some of the arguments. Then I will give way to the hon. Gentleman.

The Committee will, I hope, play an important consultative role—the House will recall that the Committee of the Regions is a consultative body—and the information and feedback that will come in from the regions to the Commission and to the Council will be of consequence.

But the two issues that must be addressed are, first, the breakdown of the 24 members of the Committee and, secondly, its composition. The hon. Member for Moray —the point was picked up immediately by my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher)— made the point extremely well. She put it to the Committee that there was a case, at any rate, for Scotland to have nine members. She went on to say that, if Scotland had nine members, Wales should have nine and Northern Ireland, like Luxembourg, should have six members. She acknowledged that that would account for all 24 members of the Committee of the Regions. I was pleased to hear some of my hon. Friends asking, as I asked myself, what about England? What about England indeed?

The hon. Lady was making the point to be helpful to the Committee, to demonstrate what a difficulty we face and how we need to bear these matters in mind in our discussions, but let me stand the hon. Lady's point on its head. It will not have escaped her notice that, on a proportional basis, England—my constituents—might be able to claim 20 of the 24 seats, leaving us two for Scotland, one for Wales and one for Northern Ireland.

Mrs. Ewing: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way, because he appreciated that I was making, essentially, a fairly facetious point in that regard. But do we not have to look seriously at the difference between a United Kingdom argument and a European argument, because we are talking about a European committee and not a United Kingdom one?

7.15 pm

Mr. Garel-Jones: I hope that I made it clear to the Committee, for those hon. Members who have just come in, that the hon. Lady was making the point to be helpful to the Committee and to illustrate how difficult it will be to crack the problem of distribution. I simply make the point, as an English Member, to the separatist Members here that I am a Welshman representing an English seat —and my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) is a Scotsman representing an English seat. So I suspect—it would be unfair otherwise—that the lion's share of the members must go to England. Equally, even

[Mr. Garel-Jones]

English Members sitting behind me, whose voices were, rightly, raised in defence of England and the English regions, would recognise that there needs to be some tilting towards Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Marlow: To a certain extent I agree with my right hon. Friend, but whereas one can make a case within the United Kingdom that Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, in numbers of constituents, should be slightly over-represented, for various reasons that we all know about, when it comes to a European institution which is trying to achieve regional representation throughout the European Community, there is no argument whatever that Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland should be more heavily represented than the regions of England—none at all.

Mr. Garel-Jones: These are matters in which the opinions expressed in the Committee must carry weight. I am sure that most of my hon. Friends will agree that the Committee of the Regions, which is, I understand, a subject of great interest in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, is not one that has been on the front page of the *Watford Observer* over the past 12 months—nor probably the *Northampton Times*.

Mr. Marlow: I assure my right hon. Friend that if Scotland had three times the representation of my constituents, it would be all over the front page and the back.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I detect, unusually in these debates, a consensus between my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) and myself and perhaps a consensus in the House, too. Not all the seats on the Committee of the Regions will be allocated to Scotland, to Wales and to Northern Ireland; nor can it be the case that England will get 20 of the 24 seats. We have the mechanisms—our political system in Britain is quite sophisticated—for discussions among ourselves to try to find a sensible balance that enables the regions and England to be fairly represented.

If we can solve that difficult problem, the second point is the composition of the Committee of the Regions. Various difficulties and points have been raised, particularly by the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones), or Anglesey, as we would say on this side of the border. He spoke of the methods of nomination and about who chooses. Again, I assure hon. Members that the Government will listen to the ideas flowing from all quarters of the Committee. Of course, there is political diversity in parts of the United Kingdom. As hon. Members have pointed out, people live in a four-party system and there will have to be some effort to take that into account, if possible.

The hon. Member for Ynys Môn made two interesting and novel suggestions. The first, in regard to the Principality, was that the Welsh representatives on the Committee of the Regions should be answerable to a form of revamped Welsh Grand Committee. That suggestion is new to me, and it would need to be discussed. He also made the interesting suggestion that the Interreg programme might be used to assist Wales, as it were, in a structural manner. That idea is for discussion as well.

The principal point that I put to the Committee is that while I will ask hon. Members to reject the amendment, I do so not because we do not recognise that a substantial——

Mr. Gunnell *rose*——

Mr. Garel-Jones: I am sorry; I promised the hon. Gentleman that I would give way.

Mr. Gunnell: May I again make the point that the Committee of the Regions will have a total membership of 189? It cannot function, even as a consultative committee, with 189 members without developing its own executive or bureau. My understanding is that the protocol will go for a bureau of 30, to be elected by the 189 members. I think the Minister accepts that the majority of nations will send elected members. If we do not send elected members, what likelihood is there that the 189 will choose our non-elected members to go on the bureau? By having non-elected members, surely we will not be effective in the operation of the committee.

Mr. Garel-Jones: As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, the two countries that have so far nominated have not nominated all their people as elected representatives. Seven of the 12 Danish appointees will be Queen's commissioners, appointed by the Crown. Those people play the role of mayors or burgemeesters in their areas, but they are not elected. The Government do not reject the proposition that there could be, or almost certainly will be, some elected local government representatives on the Committee of the Regions. For all I know, they may all be elected local government representatives.

Given the complexities that have emerged, and the balances that we must seek, especially in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, but in England, too, so that it is properly represented, it would be unwise of the Committee to fetter our joint hands by approving the amendment. When the amendment is reached, I shall ask the Committee to reject it.

Mr. Gunnell: The right hon. Gentleman has cited Denmark. We already know that from Germany there will be at least 21 members representing regional authorities; from Italy there will be at least 22 representing regional authorities, and from Spain 21 more representing regional authorities. The argument in other European countries is about the balance between regional authorities and municipalities, not between elected and non-elected members.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The assertions of the hon. Gentleman cannot yet be backed. Of the two countries which have completed the process of nomination, neither has nominated solely on the basis of elected authorities. He talked about Spain and asserted that the autonomies would be represented. In Spain there is a strong dispute on the distribution of the 21 seats between the 17 autonomies or regions and the municipalities; that dispute has not been resolved. Reportedly, the Spanish Government may nominate elected officials or, in the case of the autonomies, appointed officials from the regional governments.

We may end up where the Opposition amendment seeks to bring us, but all that I am suggesting—I do not think it is controversial—is that it would be unwise at this stage to approve the amendment. Rather we should have proper discussion of the kind that we are used to in this country.

Mr. Mallon: I thank the Minister for giving way, because I probably will not get an opportunity later to make this point. Earlier in the debate, when we were discussing nationalism in its various forms, Welsh, English and Scottish, I referred to the Irish term Sinn Fein and its literal definition. It means "ourselves alone". In retrospect, that may have caused offence to some hon. Members who were arguing from a different point of view. It was insensitive to use the term in that way. I still feel that that type of nationalism, which is introverted and introspective, leads to problems. I ask hon. Members, and especially the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), to accept that I was less than sensitive in putting in that way.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Before I move to discuss briefly the points raised by hon. Members on cohesion——

Mrs. Gorman: Before my right hon. Friend leaves the point, will he make it clear to the Committee whether those who serve on the Committee of the Regions will receive remuneration? If they are to receive only their expenses, will he tell the Committee how those expenses are to be controlled? If they are to be selected from among people already elected to public office, how will their duties be tied in and co-ordinated with the duties which they already have in this country? Our electors already find it unacceptable that so much of their money is gobbled up by this bureaucracy.

Mr. Garel-Jones: My hon. Friend should speak to those who serve on the Economic and Social Committee, where the work is similar and equally valuable. If I am corrected by my officials, I will ensure that the Committee is aware of it, but I gather that the expenses to be paid to members of the Committee of the Regions will be similar to those enjoyed by the members of the Economic and Social Committee.

In the last few months, we have lost some valuable members of that committee who were unable to meet the burdens of the work. I do not agree with my hon. Friend that the amount of work done, and the potential for feeding regional points of view into the councils of the Community, is an undue burden to ask our taxpayers to bear. I agreed with the hon. Member for Moray when she said that the geography of the matter needs to be taken into account. I certainly agree with the principal point of her remarks, which was that proper consultation must take place before any final decisions are made.

Finally, I should like to say a few words about cohesion, which was referred to by some hon. Members.

Sir Roger Moate: I am sorry to interrupt again, but my right hon. Friend said "finally", so he has left the question of the Committee itself. Before he leaves that matter, perhaps he could address some of the many points which have been made in the debate on the principle of the Committee of the Regions. He will be aware that the Committee has been welcomed by—as he calls them—the separatists and the nationalists, for obvious reasons, and by the federalists and the socialists for their reasons.

Is not my right hon. Friend worried that such a proposal from Conservative Members is attracting such support, when it is clear that, philosophically and constitutionally, the Committee of the Regions is intended to bypass this Westminster Parliament and create a structure that relates the regions directly to Brussels? Is not that the reason why the Committee is so welcomed? Does he not feel a sense of embarrassment or even shame that we should be proposing something of that sort?

Mr. Garel-Jones: My hon. Friend will not be surprised to know that my view and the view of the Conservative party about the way in which the Committee of the Regions will develop—I hasten to tell them that the setting up of the Committee was welcomed by Her Majesty's Government—will prevail, just as the views of the party to which he and I belong have prevailed for quite some time. That is why we sit on this side of the Committee and Opposition Members sit on the other side of the Committee.

I urge my hon. Friend not to believe—as one would expect the Welsh National party and the Scottish Nationalist party to believe—that this will be some sort of Trojan horse which will insert all those separatist dreams into the life blood of the Community. I assure him that that is not part of the agenda of the Spanish Government, the French Government or the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany.

The Secretary of State for Wales and the hon. Member for Ynys Môn recognise that. The regions in the United Kingdom have already taken an important initiative which brings Wales into contact with other regions in the Community. That is our agenda for the Committee of the Regions. I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Sir R. Moate) that our agenda in this, as in so many other matters, will prevail over the agenda of the Labour party.

I shall now turn to the cohesion fund. I simply remind the Committee that cohesion has been an explicit Community goal since 1986. As the Committee will be aware, the roots of cohesion go back much further than that. The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) reminded us of that in his intervention in the debate.

Several hon. Members and hon. Friends asked why the cohesion fund is directed towards countries and not regions. The cohesion effort takes place at regional, national and Community level. The cohesion fund will provide support for projects of general interest to the Community in transport infrastructures and the environment in the least prosperous states while they are under the strict budgetary restraints which are required by the convergence process.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

7.30 pm

Mr. Garel-Jones: I shall give way in a moment.

I remind the Committee that the whole of Greece, Portugal and the Irish Republic and most of Spain are already classified as objective 1 regions. I have checked the figures which I gave the Committee as to how much the United Kingdom and other member states are contributing to the cohesion fund and I am glad to say that they are accurate.

The United Kingdom is the fifth largest contributor to the cohesion fund. Germany will contribute about 30 per cent., France 20 per cent., Italy 20 per cent., Spain 10 per cent. and the United Kingdom 5 per cent. The United Kingdom contribution is only slightly larger than that of Holland.

Mr. Gill: My right hon. Friend will not be unaware of the current interest in railways. It has been said that, when the trans-European railway network is completed—it will be defective in the United Kingdom but completed on the continent by and large—it will be possible to get from Frankfurt to Messina in a much shorter time than it will be possible to get from Frankfurt to Glasgow.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that some of our constituents might have a view about that, and might question why the United Kingdom is contributing to cohesion funds which will create such facilities in countries in other parts of Europe out of our taxpayers' money when those facilities which we consider we so badly need will not be available in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Garel-Jones: I am sorry that my hon. Friend continues to examine these matters in what I regard as an exceedingly narrow way. He intervened previously to make a similar point. I think my answer to him then was that, since the United Kingdom has more transnational companies than any other country in the Community, the improvement to the trans-European network—albeit, as he would see it, building roads for the Greeks and the Portuguese—redounds to the benefit of our companies, which are big investors in all four cohesion fund recipient countries.

Sir Teddy Taylor: The Minister will be aware that, in terms of the gross national product per capita, Wales could well have qualified in its own right for cohesion funds—although, obviously, we do not qualify when the gross national product per capita is taken on the United Kingdom basis. Given that the attempts to get objective 1 status for Wales appear from the announcements in the newspapers today to have failed, can the Minister in any way press, through the institutions of the European Community, to see whether the transnational links to which my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) referred a moment ago can be improved by virtue of the cohesion funds in a way which would benefit the railway services running through north and south Wales linking London to Ireland?

Mr. Garel-Jones: My hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) made some interesting suggestions in that area. I have given an undertaking that we will not only examine them but, if there is any way forward on that line, we will certainly press them.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Is the Minister saying that Britain will qualify for aid from the cohesion fund? I am sorry; I misunderstood him. I thought that he was saying that to the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones).

Mr. Garel-Jones: I do not think that he was saying that; my hon. Friend must have misheard him.

Finally, I shall refer to the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash), who is not in his place. I will not detain the Committee. My hon. Friend made three points which were all wrong, and I shall say why. First, he said that the European investment bank never issued any press releases. The bank issued a press release in January announcing that Sir Brian Unwin, the chairman of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise, had been made president of the bank.

My hon. Friend then said that Italy got 40 per cent. of all receipts. That is also wrong. The actual figure is 24 per cent. The United Kingdom is the third largest beneficiary, with 15 per cent. of the total lending, with Spain second at 19 per cent. Finally, my hon. Friend said that Britain would be paying £7·24 billion. That reflects a misunderstanding of the bank's capital structure. We are committed to contributing £102 million between now and 1998.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 288, Noes 259.

Division No. 161] **[7.37 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Alton, David
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ruclif)*
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Dafis, Cynog
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*

Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maclean, David
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Salmond, Alex
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Andrew
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wigley, Dafydd
Willetts, David
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Andrew MacKay.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Butcher, John
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Cash, William
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cran, James
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Sir George
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Gill, Christopher
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Hendron, Dr Joe
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Knapman, Roger
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie

McAllion, John
Macdonald, Calum
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Mallon, Seamus
Marek, Dr John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tipping, Paddy
Trimble, David
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Alan Meale and
Mr. Jon Owen Jones.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Question put accordingly, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 26, Noes 281.

Division No. 162] **[at 7.50 pm**

AYES

Beggs, Roy
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Cash, William
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cryer, Bob
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Kilfedder, Sir James
Knapman, Roger
Lewis, Terry
McAllion, John
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Trimble, David
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Harry Barnes and
Mr. Dennis Skinner.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Alton, David
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ruclif)*
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Dafis, Cynog
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui

Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Lynne, Ms Liz
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Salmond, Alex
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Andrew
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wigley, Dafydd
Willetts, David
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): I beg to move amendment No. 16, in page 1, line 9, after 'II', insert '(except Title XVII on page 40 of Cm 1934)'.

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Janet Fookes): With this, it will be convenient also to discuss the following: Amendment No. 194, in page 1, line 9, after 'II', insert 'except Article 3(q)'.

Amendment No. 233, in page 1, line 9, after 'II', insert 'except Article 130x(2)'.

Amendment No. 241, in page 1, line 9, after 'II', insert 'except Article 130w'.

Amendment No. 242, in page 1, line 9, after 'II', insert 'except Article 130x(1)'.

Amendment No. 389, in page 1, line 9, after 'II', insert 'except Article 130u as referred to in Article G on page 40 of Command Paper number 1934'.

Amendment No. 390, in page 1, line 9, after 'II', insert 'except Article 130v as referred to in Article G on page 41 of Command Paper number 1934'.

Amendment No. 391, in page 1, line 9, after 'II', insert 'except Article 130x as referred to in Article G on page 41 of Command Paper number 1934'.

Amendment No. 392, in page 1, line 9, after 'II', insert 'except Article 130y as referred to in Article G on page 41 of Command Paper number 1934'.

New clause 60—*Development co-operation*—

'Her Majesty's Government shall report to the House of Commons annually on the implementation of the objectives of article 130u, including the campaign against world poverty, respect for human rights, and compliance with the United Nations, having regard to the co-ordination and consultation required by Article 130x.'.

New clause 66—*Development Co-operation Annual Report*—

'Her Majesty's Government shall make an Annual Report to Parliament on the operation, including income programme and activities, of the Development Co-operation as set out in Articles 130u-y of the Treaty on European Union, which shall include—

(a) a report on the activities of the European Investment Bank in respect of Development Co-operation and the criteria adopted by them in the preceding year for their financial operation relating to these Articles,
(b) the steps taken by the various official bodies of the European Community or Union in respect of co-ordination of national development policy, and
(c) initiatives taken by the Commission and its activities in relation to the initiation or conclusion of agreements with third parties on behalf of the European Community.'.

8 pm

Mr. Meacher: Amendment No. 16 is a probing amendment and relates, together with the associated amendments and new clauses, to article 17 of Command Paper 1934 and EC policy on development co-operation. This is an important issue because of the damaging interaction between EC aid policy and Britain's own aid contributions. I shall spell out why.

The EC has decided that its aid to Asia, Latin America and Europe and its food aid should go up by 60 per cent. in real terms by 1999. That decision, which was made at the Edinburgh summit in December, would have been good news in normal circumstances, but the British Government are not proposing to increase their aid budget to pay for their part of that increase. The total aid programme is planned to fall in real terms in 1994-95.

On that basis, the EC increase will be funded by large cuts elsewhere in the British aid programme, with the EC share of British aid rising perhaps to as much as 40 per cent. That may mean that, by 1999, Britain's own bilateral aid will, in real terms, be equivalent only to three quarters of its 1990 level. That would also mean that severe cuts would be made to aid given through other multilateral channels such as the United Nations. African countries, in economic crisis and in desperate need of balance of payment support, would be most hard hit by cuts in aid.

[Mr. Meacher]

Projects in low-priority countries would also be hit, for example, the well regarded British agricultural project in Bolivia.

It is significant that the policy of switching aid contributions to the EC is a volte-face. EC aid has regularly been criticised, not least by the Minister for Overseas Development. By contrast, Britain's own bilateral aid programme is well regarded, as Ministers so often tell us, and receives support, for example, in the most recent review of British aid by the OECD Development Assistance Committee.

An increase in EC aid is, of course, welcome, but only if it is an increase and not merely a reallocation at the expense of the poor. The evidence clearly suggests that the latter will occur.

The EC aid comes from two pockets. Almost all aid to Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, the poorest regions, comes from the European development fund, which is negotiated on a multi-year basis under the Lomé convention. The rest of the aid, including food aid, is called EC external spending and comes from the EC budget.

In 1990-91, EC external spending, which excludes Lomé aid, took only 9 per cent. of the Overseas Development Administration's budget. By 1999, it could be 29 per cent., unless the Government increase the aid budget faster than currently planned. If one adds the Lomé aid, the total EC share of the British aid budget would then rise from 18 per cent. in 1990-91 to about 40 per cent. in 1999. That is a big increase but its effect obviously depends on what is cut. Perhaps the Minister will tell us what the Government intend to do.

Even if the share of other multilateral aid, such as that provided by the International Development Association of the World bank and UNICEF, were cut by one third, Britain's own bilateral aid would have to fall from 60 per cent. in 1990-91 to around 45 per cent. of the total. That, in turn, would mean that Britain's bilateral aid in 1999 would, in real terms, be equivalent to about three quarters of its level at the start of this decade.

I would be the first to recognise that the cuts could be shared on a different basis and I hope that the Minister will say how he believes that that will be done. But, however it is done, the effect is dire. The Committee should concentrate on why there has been a switch so that the EC provides a much bigger share of Britain's aid policy. There is a lingering suspicion that it has little to do with aid policy.

When the deal was agreed at the Edinburgh summit, the Government were under pressure from their EC partners to increase spending in a number of areas. With the Maastricht debate in Parliament in its current fairly balanced state—I put it as sensitively as I can—the Government were under equal pressure to minimise any increase in the net British payments to the EC.

It just so happens, by an accounting quirk, that that overseas aid contribution is not included in the total net payments to the EC, which is reported annually to the United Kingdom Parliament in the public expenditure White Paper. One must ask whether that aid increase was agreed as an increase that was easy to hide. It would be interesting to hear the Minister's reply. I would simply say that it is also an expensive type of EC spending for Britain, because that money is not subject to any rebate from the British rebate mechanism which was secured by Baroness Thatcher.

Despite the drawbacks for Britain's aid programme generally, the British Government's policy is firmly set on shifting aid more and more into an EC context. The Council of Ministers resolution on development policy of 18 November 1992, under the British presidency, centred on increasing co-ordination between EC member states' aid policies for the first time—a significant development. That is disturbing when, as I said, the EC's aid record has been severely criticised, not least by the Minister herself, for several good reasons.

The quality of EC aid—with certain notable exceptions —does not have a good reputation. British non-governmental organisations in particular have difficulty securing emergency money from the EC, and its funds very little rehabilitation—the essential work after a disaster or conflict that is often most important in preventing further conflict.

The same criticism is directed at ECHO, the Community's recently created Humanitarian Office. It is flawed by its definition of emergency aid as being independent of development processes, as well as by its notorious lack of consultation with local organisations in developing countries. Both limitations make it an inappropriate model for the kind of humanitarian intervention that is so desperately needed. The suspicion persists that the establishment of ECHO has more to do with extending EC competence than any enhancement of EC aid policy.

There are other major criticisms of current EC aid policy. The European development fund continues to devote too high a proportion of its budget to capital-intensive projects rather than to projects aimed at improving the productive capacity of poor people. The implementation of EDF programmes is often slow and notoriously inefficient and bureaucratic, in most cases. While I do not dispute the principle behind the Stabex fund, it has not been able to compensate for the collapse of commodity prices in the 1980s.

The importance of that can hardly be overstated. The price of tea, coffee and cocoa fell by an average 11 per cent. a year in the 1980s, with stunning impoverishing effects on 48 out of 55 African countries that depend on those three commodities for more than half their total export earnings.

Another criticism is that much EC aid focuses on assisting infrastructure development rather than human development, such as primary education, health care and community action. Food aid is also used as a channel to flush down common agricultural policy food mountains, and for that reason the proportion of total EC aid that is food aid is far too high. There continues to be an imbalance in aid to the poorest countries of Africa, compared with those of Asia.

Mr. Cryer: My hon. Friend's remarks reflect entirely the EC's general policy towards Lomé convention countries. The Community's aim is not to advance them but to keep them impoverished, as primary producing countries. Although their raw agricultural products are allowed into the EC without tariff, as soon as a Lomé country develops an agricultural industry in which food is processed and packaged, or refined in some other way—an essential move for any country wanting to improve its infrastructure and agricultural industry—the EC slaps on tariffs to protect preferentially its own domestic agricultural industries.

Mr. Meacher: My hon. Friend makes a good point, and I shall refer later to the high tariff levels imposed on agricultural products in general. The EC tariff on cocoa is very low, at about 3 per cent., but once that commodity is processed, the tariff is about 16 per cent. Such a policy discriminates against countries attempting to escape from the poverty caused by mono-dependence on single primary commodities.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): It is important that the Committee understands the hon. Gentleman's meaning, because he no doubt represents the Opposition's view on this important amendment. Is the hon. Gentleman saying that he is unhappy for the Community to provide so much food aid, or that it is merely too high a proportion of the total cost of food aid? I believe that we should provide more food aid, albeit that I am also sympathetic to the view that we should increase other forms of aid to developing countries. I trust that the hon. Gentleman is not suggesting that the level of food aid to people starving in many parts of the world should be reduced.

8.15 pm

Mr. Meacher: Of course I am not saying that, and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to clarify my comments. At this very moment, many countries are in a dire state of emergency, with starvation rife in many parts of Africa. I am merely arguing that the proportion of EC aid that takes the form of food aid is too high, and reflects EC interests in reducing food mountains. That policy is not primarily concerned with developing countries.

The biggest criticism of all is that the common agricultural policy of offloading huge surplus supplies from EC food mountains on to world markets does far more to destabilise the commodity prices of developing countries and to undermine their fundamental economic interest than the whole of the EC aid programme does to assist those countries.

This stringent critique of EC aid policy is not mitigated by the anodyne language of the first paragraph of article 130x:

> "The Community and the Member States shall co-ordinate their policies on development co-operation and shall consult each other on their aid programmes".

That is too vague and generalised to be of any value. Either the Bill or the treaty—and perhaps it is not appropriate for the Bill—should contain sharper, more precise commitments of the kind found in the White Paper "Horizon 2000".

First and foremost is the commitment to devoting 0·7 per cent. of gross national product to aid, plus a statement of intention to move beyond that. It would be highly embarrassing for the British Government to press for that in view of their lamentable record of cutting aid by nearly half as a proportion of GNP—from 0·51 per cent. in 1979 to 0·3 per cent. today—but still such a commitment should be sought.

Moreover, there should be a statement that aid for central and eastern Europe should not divert money, time or expertise from work with the poorest countries. The EC increased the share of its external assistance budget to eastern Europe from 38 per cent. in 1992 to 42 per cent. in the current year, and it seems likely to continue that trend. At the same time, the United Kingdom's aid budget for developing countries has been frozen for the next two succeeding years, and that is unacceptable.

Mr. Randall: I am a little confused. Article 130x says that the Community and member states should co-ordinate their policies and develop aid programmes in a co-operative way, based on joint action and so on. That is very laudable, but my hon. Friend seems to be saying that he wants the policies to be built into the treaty. Although what he says makes sense to me, I wonder whether it is appropriate for that level of policy detail to be incorporated in a treaty document of this kind.

Mr. Meacher: I agree. I said that it might well not be appropriate to incorporate such detail in the protocol or the text of the treaty. I am trying to explain that this section of the treaty reflects—or should reflect—the contents of the EC White Paper "Horizon 2000". I am commenting on what I consider to be the deficiencies and inadequacies of that. It is one thing to co-ordinate policies, but, if the policies involved are deficient—or, indeed, thoroughly inadequate—in important respects, and if their objectives are unclear or insufficiently high, co-ordination of those policies will be far from sufficient, even if the wording of the text is anodyne.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): Successive studies carried out by the Commission itself have recognised that a failure to co-ordinate has prevented the effective use of the aid that is there. I am thinking particularly of something that costs nothing—the way in which accounts are done for food aid. I do not mean emergency food aid; it is important to distinguish between that and other types of aid. It is also important, however, to co-ordinate how such aid is accounted for between the United Nations, the various bilateral agreements and the Community. As I know only too well, the resources of countries that genuinely benefit from Community aid are being overstrained.

Mr. Meacher: My hon. Friend has made a good point. We believe that there should be regular and systematic independent evaluation of EC projects and programmes —in respect of food aid, and in other respects—with specific tests in the form of social and environmental audits. That should be combined with a commitment to transparency and accountability in EC aid, in policy development as well as its application—again, at both EC and member state level. That is why we tabled new clause 60: we wanted to remedy the lack of accountability to the House of Commons, and to ensure that EC aid policies were fully understood in detail and could be assessed by the House.

Although the treaty specifically mentions a poverty focus as an important aim of the aid programme, in reality the commitment will be undermined because of a lack of sufficient staff—particularly trained experts—to monitor EC aid in Brussels and the regions of the world. I think that that is the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) was making. He is not alone in remarking on the confusion and lack of co-ordination between Directorate General 8 and DG11; both directorates have relatively few staff.

Mr. Cryer: My hon. Friend may not agree with me, but I think that we should put the EC into context. The EC is

[Mr. Cryer]

no friend of the poor countries of the world; indeed, it connives at their exploitation. Moreover, when emergency food aid is supplied to particularly dire areas of the world, the Community resolutely refuses to get any from its stockpiles, or to have emergency strategic stockpiles from the huge food mountains created by the absurd common agricultural policy, because everyone knows that certain areas will be in danger. Instead, the Community uses EC money to buy food on world markets.

On several occasions, I have tried to encourage Commissioners to have stockpiles of food, and to pay for their storage in strategic areas where such pressures exist. Of course, the Commission has resolutely refused, because it wants to pay the money for storing food to wealthy farmers in the Community rather than to poor countries that might benefit.

Mr. Meacher: My hon. Friend may be surprised to learn that I am extremely sympathetic to his view. I feel strongly that EC food mountains should be used at times of extreme starvation to provide food at very low, perhaps virtually nil, cost. It is astonishing that they cannot be used at a time when up to half a million people have starved to death in Somalia. Having visited the area, I know that that starvation is partly due to an inability to distribute food, but it is also due to extreme delay in its availability. Certainly vastly greater quantities could have been made available much earlier, at an extremely low cost. It seems extraordinary, and perverse, that food mountains can be allowed to accumulate when people in desperate need, dying of starvation, are denied that advantage.

Mr. Enright: May I draw my hon. Friend's attention to an important point—one that is difficult to grasp, and certainly has not been grasped by the majority of the British public? If we simply shift our surpluses, we shall put peasant farmers out of business. That is wrong. We should do what the Community is doing in some of the poorest countries—I am thinking particularly of Guinea Bissau. We should encourage the local farmer to build up his stock, and to buy locally. In many cases, it is impossible to store food, as was suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer), and many of the surpluses that we produce—particularly powdered milk—are totally unsuitable for use in such countries.

Mr. Meacher: I am grateful for the opportunity to expand on this point. I stand by what I said in regard to areas where starvation is rife, but I take my hon. Friend's point: of course we should not offload supplies on countries with a moderately flourishing local agriculture. Of course we want to support local farmers. I was thinking exclusively of countries where, as a result of civil war and armies crossing their territory two or three times—as happened in south and south-west Somalia—farmers have not sown any seed, and hundreds of thousands of people are unable to obtain access to food. In such circumstances, it is extraordinary that the EC has not taken the opportunity to make some of that food available.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: No.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: It follows from that point.

Mr. Meacher: I am sure it does, but we have already discussed the point, and it is only one aspect of the general policy. [HON. MEMBERS: "She is leaving now."] I was trying to analyse—*[Interruption.]*

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. The Committee has become somewhat noisy, and it is difficult to hear what the hon. Gentleman is saying.

Mr. Meacher: Thank you, Dame Janet. I hope that the remainder of the Committee will stay to listen to my analysis of other aspects of EC aid policy.

We think that there should be a statement on response to emergencies. There is no mention of emergency action or co-ordination in the treaty—or, indeed, in the White Paper—although we are lurching from crisis to crisis, in Europe as well as in developing countries. That, too, is a major point. In the last week or two, the Foreign Secretary has rightly said that a proliferation of crises—crises of ethnic nationalism, and regional conflicts—is erupting across the globe.

8.30 pm

The principle of humanitarian intervention is one where I believe the EC, alongside the United Nations, should be seeking to make its contribution both in establishing the political parameters as well as administrative and military logistics.

Perhaps the major weakness, however, of article 130x is its extremely limited perspective on the concept of development co-operation in general. Aid is only a small part of development co-operation. Much more important is trade. According to UNCTAD, the value of developing countries' exports is 17 times greater than the total aid that they receive.

The developing world's share of global GDP has fallen in recent years from 22 per cent. in 1980 to 18 per cent. in 1988, largely as a result of two factors, the collapse in commodity prices and the rise in western protectionism. The EC is the world's biggest trading block. It accounts for 37 per cent. of world trade and one third of its imports and exports are with the third world. It is therefore in a position to make a substantial contribution to the developing world, and I submit that at present it is failing to do so.

A second great omission from EC policy on development co-operation concerns the whole issue of debt reduction. More than a third of the commercial debt of the 17 highly indebted countries, such as Argentina and Mexico, is to EC companies. The fall in commodity prices in the 1980s has been so great that it is now estimated that 42 per cent. of the developing world's debt is the result of deteriorating terms of trade. That is a staggering statistic. Servicing that debt accounts for as much as a third of the foreign exchange earned by African and Latin American exports.

Apart from the Trinidad terms on official debt, proposed by Britain and which I think we all support, but which apply to a minimal part of the debt of the least-developed countries, the EC has not played an active part in proposing debt reduction initiatives.

If the commitments made at Maastricht and Rio are to be translated into action, certain fundamental objectives must be incorporated. One is putting the poor first. With more than a billion people in the world now unable to afford the bare essentials of life, the first aim of EC development policy should be to reduce poverty. Addressing poverty is a key element in achieving sustainable development, yet at present only 7 per cent. of the bilateral aid of the richest countries in OECD goes into primary health care or basic education and safe water programmes; 41 per cent. of aid is directed at high or middle-income countries and 50 to 55 per cent. of EC aid, which is worth about $10 billion, is tied to the purchase of goods from the aid donor.

That is much more about satisfying the interests of donor countries than about satisfying the interests of the poorest in the southern world. If poor countries are to break out of the cycle of poverty, they must be able to sell their goods in EC markets to gain resources for development, yet over the last decade there has been a considerable growth in western protectionism and it is the developing countries which have suffered most.

Studies show that non-tariff barriers raised by industrial countries more often discriminate against goods from developing countries than they do against goods from industrial countries. World bank figures show that the overall share of exports in developing countries facing non-tariff barriers is roughly 20 per cent., and that is twice the share for exports from the industrialised countries.

The worst affected are third-world agricultural exports and more than a quarter of these face non-tariff barriers. It is estimated that the cost to developing countries of northern protectionist policies amount to $100 billion a year. That is far more than the total of EC aid policies. Third-world countries also have had their own production undercut by the dumping of subsidised agricultural goods on world markets.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The hon. Member is making these points as if they were some kind of backdrop and interesting factual analyses against which other things can be discussed. He is actually making a fundamental attack on the institutions, the policy and philosophy of the EC. That is what the EC is about—the CAP and protectionism of trade and farming. This is a fundamental attack. How can he support the whole momentum of the EC when he is making this kind of attack on its very essence?

Mr. Meacher: I am glad to answer that. My views about the impact of the CAP, the unloading of surpluses on third world countries and the effect on prices are well understood, and shared, I think, in many and most parts of the Committee. The effect and the enormously damaging way it undermines any good that EC policies do is iniquitous. It is of course not EC aid policies as against UK aid policies. UK aid policies are not entirely free from a lot of these criticisms. UK aid policy, in a number of respects, is better than EC aid policy for the reasons that I have given, but I am not suggesting that EC aid policy is something to be decried, but something to be enormously improved and linked also with different policies on trade and on debt relief. That is as much an attack on the United Kingdom, France and Germany in their bilateral relations with third-world countries as it is on the EC.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South) *rose*——

Mr. Meacher: Since it is my hon. Friend, and I am sure that he would like to have a place in this debate, I give way to him, but this is the last time.

Mr. Spearing: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is surely approaching the pith of this debate. Does he agree with me that this treaty means the end of British aid policy as such and the advancement—and its takeover—by the overseas aid policy of the European union?

Mr. Meacher: No, I do not believe that that is a fair conclusion. It is certainly not the end of United Kingdom bilateral aid policy. I am saying that it leads to a diminution. Despite the low level of United Kingdom aid, the fact that it has been cut and the criticisms that Labour hon. Members have so often made, we believe that it has a real value but that it needs to be linked with trade reform and debt relief. I have also made the point that it will lead to a significant reduction of that aid in the interests of EC aid which is, in our view, of significantly less value. We think the balance is wrong and would like to see it changed. Those are precisely the criticisms that I have made, but I do not think that it leads to the end of the United Kingdom aid policy.

It is because we have all these stringent reservations that I have tried to explain about EC aid policy in principle and in operation, that we have tabled new clause 60. It requires the Government to report to the House annually on the implementation of the objectives of article 130u, including the campaign against world poverty, respect for human rights and compliance with the United Nations, having regard to the co-ordination and consultation required by article 130x.

Where more and more British aid is being fed through EC channels—I agree that it is something we deplore—this new clause is the minimum in terms of accountability that can be properly demanded, but it puts in place a check that is urgently needed.

I shall be asking my right hon. and hon Friends to support it in the Lobby tonight and I hope that it will carry support on all sides of the Committee.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): Speaking on the 13th day of the debate, one feels a little like a schoolboy from the fifth form, who has burst in on a pillow fight in the sixth form, only to find that the real battle is outside on the playing field.

I oppose the amendment because I find it illogical to delete from the treaty the first chance that we have had of codifying overseas aid and development policy in statute. Far from handing powers to a federal union, as the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) suggested, we have an opportunity to influence the debate that perhaps we have never had before.

I believe that many of the world's problems are caused by over-population and by the population growing out of control. I shall describe the nature of the problem, why it matters and how the treaty can help. In 1930, the population of the globe was just 2 billion. By 1975, it had grown to 4 billion and by the year 2000 it is estimated that it will reach 6 billion, having passed 5 billion in the mid-1980s. The simple reason for this sudden spiralling of the population is that the death rate has declined as a result of the introduction of modern medicine. That has set up what is known as population momentum, which means that tomorrow's parents have been born and that the population of the world will continue to grow.

The population of the continent of Africa is doubling every 23 years, and the result is a downward spiral in its economic growth. If a country's population grows by, say,

[Mr. Richard Ottaway]

3 per cent. per annum, its economy must grow by 3 per cent. per annum just to stand still. If it fails to do so, the result, quite simply, is poverty.

Why should we be concerned about population growth? Why does it bother us, here in a country where the population is stable at about 50 million? The first reason is that the growing population, particularly in Africa and along the area south of the Sahara desert, is causing deforestation. Mobile tribes who cannot find wood for fuel cut down trees. Other countries are removing the rain forest as a result of the ever-increasing demand for the income that that produces.

The second reason why population growth has an impact on us is the global pollution that it is now causing. It is estimated that, by the year 2025, developing countries will emit about 44 per cent. of the world's CO_2 output. The economic drive of China, which has just arrived in the top 10 exporting nations, is based on coal-fired energy. Its coal-fired power stations have none of the sophisticated desulphurisation equipment that ours have and are emitting neat CO_2 into the atmosphere.

The third reason is that environmental decline is having an impact on global warming. No less an expert than Sir Crispin Tickell, backed by environmental experts such as Dr. David Bellamy, believes that by the year 2025 we shall witness a 1·5 deg. rise in temperature as a result of the erosion of the ozone layer and CO_2 emissions. That will have an impact on patterns of disease and of climate. Cholera outbreaks in Peru might be explained by the 1 deg rise in the temperature off the coast of Peru, which has allowed the vaccilus to burst into light.

The fourth reason why we should be concerned about population growth is that it increases immigration tensions. It is estimated that there are 17 million political refugees and about 10 million environmental refugees in the world and that is probably an underestimate. The pressure will be felt in southern Europe. In 1945, about two thirds of the population around the Mediterranean shores was in southern Europe, but such has been the population growth in northern Africa that two thirds of the population in the Mediterranean now live on the northern African shore. They are all trying to get over into Europe, which will inevitably create tensions in southern Europe. We shall have to raise barriers as they seek to enter Europe.

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): What barriers?

Mr. Ottaway: Exactly.

8.45 pm

The fifth reason is the erosion of renewable resources. It is estimated that in 1988 the annual fish catch exceeded sustainable yields and that the oceans can no longer provide the fish that the world requires. No fewer than 39 developing countries have insufficient water for their requirements. In his excellent book, "The Third Revolution", Paul Harrison said that there are three factors at work in the environment: population, or the number of people involved; consumption, or the amount that those people consume; and technology, which decides how much space and resources are used. They all interact.

The question is, what are we going to do about it? I believe that action on population is the most promising avenue. Stabilising the world's population will offer slower growth and slower environmental impact. By slowing growth, we lower infant mortality and persuade mothers to have fewer children. We must impress on developing countries the economic benefits of lower population growth. In the 1980s, the incomes of the 50 per cent. of countries with slower population growth rose 2·5 per cent. per annum faster than the 50 per cent. of countries with faster population growth.

What is needed is action on a global scale. It is imperative that we increase funding for global family planning programmes, I am a great supporter of the programmes of the Overseas Development Administration. It has an unparalleled record of success in boosting population programmes, and the growth in population programmes in the past 14 years probably far exceeds that in other public expenditure programmes. It starts from a low base indeed, and we should be seeking to make a positive contribution to the World bank's family planning programme, which estimates that it will cost $10 billion a year to stabilise the world's population growth early in the next century. In global terms, $10 billion a year is a relatively insignificant sum. I argue that a better purpose could not be found for that expenditure.

That money should be given to the United Nations fund for population activities, the International Planned Parenthood Federation and non-governmental organisations that specialise in the subject. They want to get down to the brass tacks of providing sex education and contraception on demand to developing countries. There is an unmet demand for family planning services. It is estimated that 300 million people cannot get the contraception that they require. If all OECD countries spent 4 per cent. of their aid budgets on family planning policies, it would raise about $2 billion a year, which, coupled with the existing family planning budgets of developing countries, would make a total of $5 billion dollars a year—halfway towards the target at which we are aiming.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: The Committee is well aware of my hon. Friend's commitment in this area and of his interest in aid and in limiting the world's population. I have been listening extremely carefully to his well-structured and well-prepared speech, but it seems to me that he has not paid any attention to the cultures of various countries that have population problems—problems as he sees them. I am thinking of religious problems and the traditions of countries. It is very easy to talk about making more contraceptives available and about providing more people to flog international parenthood ideas, but I must ask my hon. Friend whether he accepts that countries have different cultures and traditions and that his simple approach is not always the best one.

Mr. Ottaway: My hon. Friend recognises my commitment in this area, and I recognise his opposition. I would never for one moment advocate anything other than a voluntary programme. My hon. Friend is right to say that we have to recognise people's cultures. However, he should realise that almost every developing country now recognises the need for the introduction of family planning to stabilise population. I deliberately use the word "stabilise" rather than "limit". What my hon. Friend has said implies some mandatory, oppressive regime.

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): The hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton), when he was describing the hon. Gentleman's remarks, talked about a simple approach. That is a view which is not held by many hon. Members, who genuinely accept the reality of the problem and support the voluntary approach that the hon. Gentleman is suggesting.

Mr. Ottaway: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's comment. I believe that his view is shared by the overwhelming majority of hon. Members.

Two problems are experienced in the introduction of these programmes. There is some short-termism in the overseas aid provided under development programmes. It is very easy just to provide more tractors and food, but a long-term approach involves considering how many people want to use these facilities. That is a subject that most governments are unwilling to address. It is a politically sensitive issue in respect of which they are usually unwilling to bite the bullet.

Historically, the opposition to these programmes has come from two sources. First, over the past 12 years—the Reagan-Bush era—there has been opposition from the United States Government. Regrettably, in the United States there has been some confusion between the abortion issue and the population issue. The United States Administration, under Presidents Reagan and Bush, took the view that money provided for family planning programmes could go to abortion programmes, to which they were ideologically opposed. Thus, regrettably, they withheld funds from the United Nations and the International Planned Parenthood Federation. It is to the credit of the British Government that this country leaped to the aid of the IPPF in the mid-1980s and provided it with a home after the United States withdrew its funding.

However, I congratulate President Clinton on his victory. If I were a United States citizen, I should not have voted for him, but I wish him well in the next four years. In any case, he is reversing that policy. On this front, opposition from the United States Administration has probably fallen away, and that gives us much hope for the United Nations conference on population which is to take place in Cairo in 1994. I hope that on that occasion there will be a more positive response from the United States than was evident at the earth summit in Rio.

The second type of opposition is that from the Roman Catholic Church. It is the type of opposition to which my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield referred. I do not criticise the Roman Catholic Church for this stand. It is a fact of life; it is what the church believes. I believe that opposition to artificial methods of family planning exists only at the top of the church. The vast majority of Roman Catholics would probably support the use of artificial methods of family planning. The Church supports natural rhythm methods; it is only techniques and methods about which we are talking.

How does all this relate to the treaty? *[Laughter.]* I hope, in the last minute, to demonstrate that the treaty probably has more impact in this area than in any other area being discussed in this debate.

At the Council of Ministers, support for European population programmes has been blocked primarily by the Roman Catholic countries of France, Italy and Spain. That is why the European Community has a poor track record on population policies. Whatever one may think about qualified majority voting, that block is now going to disappear. We shall now be able to have co-ordinated EC programmes on family planning. The initiative on this issue is most likely to come from Europe, so I believe that, by rejecting this amendment, we shall be taking a lead on a fundamental issue.

Mr. Randall: My contribution will be very short. I should like to refer the Committee to the aims of development co-operation, which are set out in paragraph 1 of article 130u. My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) referred primarily to article 130x, which deals with co-ordination of EC policies on development co-operation and how consultation should take place. To my mind, the objectives set out in article 130u are very commendable. The article says:

> "Community policy in the sphere of development co-operation, which shall be complementary to the policies pursued by the Member States, shall foster:
> —. . . sustainable economic and social development . . . , and more particularly for the most disadvantaged . . . ;
> —the smooth and gradual integration of the developing countries into the world economy;
> —the campaign against poverty in the developing countries."

These are extraordinarily laudable objectives.

As the EC becomes more unified as an institution, its role in the world context must become more focused. We have seen the cuts in aid programmes through the United Nations. The United Nations does terrific work. Many people tend to think of that organisation as only sorting out war situations, but its role in the health, hygiene and other development work in the world is remarkable. I regret very much that over the past 10 years the Conservative Government's contribution, as a proportion of GNP, to the United Nations has been deplorably bad.

Now that the European Community is probably the biggest and most sophisticated trading bloc in the world, and is certainly extraordinarily healthy, its contribution must be co-ordinated and effective. I should like the European Community—or the European union—to stand out as a beacon in the world. It should stand out as a rich bloc unquestionably, but also as a magnanimous unit which aims to improve the lot of the poorer countries.

Mr. Spearing *rose*——

Mrs. Currie *rose*——

Mr. Randall: I give way first to my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing).

Mr. Spearing: As my hon. Friend knows, I agree in principle with much of what he is saying, but will he amend his earlier description of the admirable objectives as the objectives of the Community? Article 130u states only that the member states shall "foster" these objectives, and article 130v states that they shall be taken account of. As he knows from other spheres, there is a great difference between that and making them the objectives on which policy is predicated.

Mr. Randall: Not having taken part in the construction of the Maastricht treaty, I believe that the wording and intensity of the sentences is appropriate, bearing in mind that we are talking about complementary action among member states. There will be co-operation, so I am not perhaps as worried about the weakness of the wording as my hon. Friend who exercises his terrific brain on these matters.

9 pm

Mrs. Currie: I want to take up a point made earlier by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall). He said that the European Community, being a rich area, should be making a contribution to the rest of the world. I am sure that many of my colleagues would agree with that. But if the hon. Gentleman has any influence with the new President of the United States, might it not be wise to say the same to the Americans and to tell them to pay their contributions to the United Nations?

Mr. Randall: The hon. Lady raises an interesting point. In the next few months, many of us in the House of Commons and in the country will be watching to see how the new President performs because we are worried about isolationism and we know that the American economy is in a dreadful state——

The Chairman: Order. The hon. Gentleman is sufficiently experienced not to be tempted to follow that train of thought. I regret having to bring him to order, but will he return to the amendment?

Mr. Randall: I shall refrain from describing the backcloth to European policy, which I believe is necessary to put the issue in context. I shall not describe how President Clinton might perform.

Expectations of the European Community are unquestionably very high because of its growing richness and wealth. As we said earlier, the Community will attempt to raise the standards of its poorer countries, but the key is to do all that we can in the world at large.

The question of aid and development must rest on the economic development of the poorer countries. My wife and I have worked with Oxfam for many years. It is clear from a number of cases in which we have been involved that the development of water and sewerage systems to ensure good health as a first step is a prerequisite to economic development. Such systems are often preceded by aid programmes. Article 130u states that member states shall deal first with the "most disadvantaged" countries. I welcome that priority.

Somalia is a very good example because it reveals the terrific difficulties in attempting to tackle such problems. A war there has prevented agencies from carrying out their work, but the ending of the cold war is important to world aid. One of the main problems for aid and development was the sale of arms, which has held up the economic development of many countries. In Somalia, it prevented the agencies from even getting to various parts of the country. It is commendable that we can now divert money from arms into the economic development of such countries. It also provides a greater justification for using Community money when we know that it will not be frittered away on arms.

Finally, I want to say a word about trade. I believe that trade with poorer countries is vital. The future of Europe can and must be a very exciting one, but we must ensure that there is an opportunity for trade to take place. As I said earlier, article 130u talks about the smooth and gradual integration of developing countries into the world economy. For that to happen, trade must be allowed to take place. It is the easiest thing in the world to stifle that trade by introducing very high tariffs. I hope that we will ensure that we are fair to those countries and will allow trade to take place.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): I am most grateful to the hon. Member for giving way, particularly as he has intimated that he is coming to the end of his admirable speech, with which I believe many of us agree. Is there not a bit of a contradiction, however, in suggesting that the European Community should do all it can to assist developing countries and to assist in freeing trade with developing countries, while at the same time hedging the European Community round with a wall of tariffs and restrictions?

Mr. Randall: That is the very point that I was making. It seems to me that, if we were to introduce a barrier of tariffs—this is the point that was made about the United States, where one sees that happening—the effect on poorer countries could be very serious indeed.

The Maastricht treaty is not a policy document. In my view, it is a framework for decision making. I hope very much that when it comes to developing policies they will fit in the the objectives here. I will personally be very happy with that and I hope that it will lead to the alleviation of poverty and a better world in which there is an opportunity for development and greater prosperity in those countries. The Community could serve as a beacon, and I welcome the whole thing in principle.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): I am very pleased to intervene at this stage.

There was a moment in the speech of the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) in moving the amendment, and indeed in the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway), when I thought for one glorious moment that Maastricht was all over, the debates were finished and we had nothing more to conclude in the Committee stage of the Bill; that we were back to the old debates on aid policy and the arguments which the hon. Member for Oldham, West has advanced before on the levels of aid and all those matters that I debated with his predecessor on many occasions. Sadly, I have never debated with him in a discussion which the Opposition might have launched.

We were saved from that situation by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall), but even he, I am afraid, drifted into general aid policy, although I agree with much of what he said about the provisions that we are discussing tonight.

I recognise that this is a probing amendment and, for that reason, I am grateful to the hon. Member for Oldham, West for giving us the opportunity to debate this area of the treaty—the five articles in title XVII on development co-operation.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West was the first to put his finger on one important feature of the hon. Member for Oldham, West's speech.

It would be quite wrong to have built into any treaty or into our legislation the policies that anybody on which Britain had influence was to administer. It would be a constraint on future action, apart from anything else, because no doubt it would require amendment to change policies, and it would lead to great inflexibility. I heartily agree with the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West that that would be quite wrong.

That brings me to what the hon. Member for Oldham, West said about emergency action. Of course emergency action is high on the United Kingdom's agenda in its relationship with the EC, and high on our own agenda of aid policy. It was debated at the Development Council under the United Kingdom presidency, and it will be debated again at the next Development Council. There will be a meeting of senior officials of European Community member states next week to discuss the subject. It is of course covered implicitly by title XVII, but there is no need for the explicit reference that the hon. Gentleman seemed to want. That would be wrong. I saw the hon. Gentleman nodding earlier when I said that it was wrong to specify aid policy within the treaty or within the legislation, but that was the inference that one must draw from what he said.

Mr. Meacher: I did not say that the treaty should include the detail of aid policy. If we are talking about the co-ordination of aid policy with the EC, it is important to be clear what we are co-ordinating. I was commenting on the nature of those policies; I did not propose that they should all be in the treaty.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I shall say more about co-ordination in due course.

I judge that the hon. Gentleman's speech was enormously coloured by hostility to the whole idea of a European Community development policy, and to the idea of the incorporation by implication of those articles into the Maastricht treaty and into our legislation.

Mr. Meacher *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but he was enormously sympathetic to his hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer). My hon. Friend the Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer) made that point most forcefully.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West was sympathetic to the criticisms expressed, and those who listened to his speech with care will draw the inference that he showed hostility to the European Community. It was a perfectly honourable hostility—a disagreement with the success of the policies that we have been implementing in the EC over many years. The hon. Gentleman denies it, but many hon. Members had that impression. We all felt it, and my hon. Friend the Member for Worcestershire, South accurately drew attention to it.

Before dealing with other aspects of the hon. Gentleman's speech, I shall say something about the five articles under consideration; I think that the Committee would like an explanation. The first important point is that, in the five articles, development policy is specifically included in the scope of the treaty of Rome for the first time. I see the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) nodding, and I suspect that that is a rather ominous nod. I want to dispel the ominous nature of that nod. Development policy is specifically included, but the hon. Member for Newham, South should note that the text reflects a long-established practice.

We are incorporating into the treaty, and legislating for, long-established practice. For the first time we are setting out the objectives of the Community's development policy as it has been arrived at over the years. Those objectives include the promotion of sustainable development, poverty alleviation, especially for the poorest countries, the underlying principles of democracy——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: May I finish? I shall give way in a minute.

As I was saying, those objectives include the underlying principles of democracy, human rights and good government in development co-operation.

Before I give way to my hon. Friend, I want to emphasise the fact that will strike any observer of British development policy as I read that list out. The list is remarkable in that most of the objectives have been part of British development policy over the years; they reflect our British development policies, and as such they demonstrate part of the British achievement in the EC in influencing policy in the direction in which Britain wishes it to move.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will my hon. Friend accept, from someone who served on the development committee of the European Parliament and was present at Lomé I, that these are the sort of things that we want to have codified? It is much better for it to be properly set out rather than haphazard, as it has too often been.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I agree with her.

Mr. Spearing: The hon. Gentleman referred to what I think he called an ominous nod. May I take him up on that? As a former member of the Select Committee on Overseas Development, when it existed, and the Sub-Committee on Foreign Affairs, I would concur with what he said about the description of the British aid policy in what he termed the objectives in this treaty. But does he not recall my exchanges with my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall)? Alas, these are not objectives; they are matters which are to be "taken into account." Although I agree with him that they may have been done in co-operation at European Community level until now, putting them into the terms of the treaty means that there are some obligations rather than free co-operation, as has been the practice up to now.

9.15 pm

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I will say something more about co-operation in due course, but what the hon. Member must recall is that the actions of the Community heretofore in development policy have been based on article 235 of the treaty of Rome, the catch-all article which I am sure he has criticised on many occasions because it catches all: if there is no power to do what one wants, one uses article 235 to do it. This is a specific set of requirements and objectives.

Mr. Spearing: They are not objectives.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Whatever word the hon. Member likes to use, they set certain guidelines, and it is not a catch-all power.

Mr. Randall: Has the Minister noted, in article 130w, the words

> "shall adopt the measures necessary to further the objectives referred to in Article 130u"?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Yes, that is absolutely right, and the word "objectives" is therefore appropriate. I am grateful to the hon. Member.

[Mr. Lennox-Boyd]

Community policy is complementary to that of member states. That comes in the first sentence of the first article that we are discussing. Hon. Members who were present in the Standing Committee on European Legislation, where we debated these matters in December, will recall that we had a rather extensive debate. Member states retain their right to determine their own development policies in conjunction with the provisions on complementarity.

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): It is a question of words and what they mean. On the one hand, the Minister is talking about the policies of the European Community being complementary to the policies of member states, yet there it is in the treaty in article 130x:

> "The Community and the Member States shall co-ordinate their policies on development co-operation".

How is it possible to do the two things?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The hon. Member made that point in Committee. I was amazed that he made it then. I find nothing difficult in it and it does not seem confusing to my mind. It seems logical that, if the United Kingdom has policies and the Community has policies, there should be consultation, mutual discussion and co-ordination to ensure that there is no wasted or duplicated effort. That seems to me an intelligent basis for going about this matter. I do not understand the hon. Member's doubt. It confused me in December, and it confuses me now.

There are two themes of co-ordination and consultation between the Community and member states which are vital if we are to gain the maximum benefit from national and Community development activities. At the same time, the treaty makes it clear that member states have the freedom to act internationally in any way they want; their freedom to act internationally is unaffected by these articles.

Article 130y states explicitly that the Community and member states should co-operate with third countries and international organisations, without prejudice to member states' competence to negotiate in international bodies and conclude international agreements. Where it is in the United Kingdom's best interests, we will work with our partners to take action together in order to strengthen our influence internationally.

In the Foreign Office, I see this constantly as a matter of joint European Community demarche and joint agreement. That means that, where we consider it necessary to take action in support of good government —an area with which I and other Ministers in the Foreign Office have been involved—we do so in a manner which maximises pressure, for example, on the protection of human rights or investment in sustainable development policy. But if it is not in the United Kingdom's best interests to do so, we will not take joint action.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: My hon. Friend is making a constructive speech and is seeking to deal with the questions. In making the Government's contribution to this important debate, will he say whether, in order to achieve what he is setting out to do, he will be willing to accept Opposition new clause 60 or new clause 66, which would ensure that the Foreign Office and the Government report back to the House on precisely what is being done within Europe in the area we are debating?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: My hon. Friend is anticipating a later passage in my speech. I shall refer to that, but I should like to make progress on another matter first.

Article 130v is most important and is relevant to some of the contributions which have been made. Under that article, the Community can take account of development policy objectives when it establishes policies in other areas which are likely to affect developing countries. Obviously, there would be little point in agreeing the objectives underlying the Community's development policy if at the same time those principles were ignored when determining action in other areas which would affect the very country that we are seeking to help. To take a recent and important example, about which I shall say more later, it would be ridiculous to seek to harmonise internal Community arrangements on bananas without considering the impact on third world exporters.

From the beginning, the Community has maintained wide-ranging and comprehensive development activities. It is only now that those activities are being placed upon a specific basis, establishing the objectives which should guide policy. Past and present Governments have worked hard to ensure that those objectives fully reflect our development co-operation priorities.

I shall turn to some of the specific points which have been made.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): My hon. Friend will not be able to reply to a question which I have not been able to put to him because I have not been called in the debate. Does he recognise that the protocols in the treaty on France and Portugal show that those two countries are insisting on monetary and financial arrangements which will tie the overseas territories and ex-colonies more tightly to the metropole?

Do the Government know that, for example, Madeira has a rapidly growing offshore banking business which is subsidised by both Lisbon and Brussels? Do they know how the CFA zone works to ensure that French industry has a steady supply of cheap raw materials, notably from west Africa—uranium, iron ore, bauxite, phosphates and so on? Can he tell us his understanding of what it means?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I am afraid that I cannot go into all that this evening because it is not relevant to the five articles. The areas in which the territoire outre-mer of France and other overseas territories gained development aid are areas——

Mr. Meacher: The pronunciation was middle English.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: It most certainly was not, but I assumed that the hon. Member for Oldham, West spoke fluent French. I took it for granted that he would not come to the subject if he did not speak fluent French after an expensive, middle-class, public school education. Let us come back to the debate.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): On a point of order, Mr. Morris. During my brief career in Parliament I have been called to order twice: once for speaking in Welsh, and once for speaking in middle English. I was reminded that the only language allowed in the Chamber, quite wrongly, is English; but that is the rule under which we operate.

The Chairman: The hon. Gentleman is not entirely correct. There are occasions when Norman French is entirely appropriate. I imagine that that is what the Minister was quoting.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I should have said "territories outer mer" or something like that. That would have been better.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West was kind enough to concede that the United Kingdom aid programme had a high reputation—I heartily agree with that—in terms of substance, if not in terms of volume. The OECD drew attention to that. The hon. Gentleman should give credit because the OECD gave EC aid a good report. The hon. Gentleman should listen to this, because he criticised strongly the European Community's aid programme. The OECD development committee gave EC aid a good report and accepted that it was focused on the poorest countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa.

It is true that the OECD made some criticisms. We keep a close watch because the European Community is spending our money. European Community spending has improved recently and the Development Council keeps a close watch.

The matter of trade is an area on which Conservative Members would give a most hearty endorsement of the comments of the hon. Member for Oldham, West. It may surprise Conservative Members that they would be in the position to do that. We accept entirely the enormous importance of trade. A new GATT deal will be worth about US$90 billion per year to the developing countries. That estimate has been made by, I think, the OECD or perhaps by those responsible for GATT negotiations, but a large figure has certainly been given to me.

The Lomé convention is not simply an aid convention. It is important to remember that it is also a trade convention. It provides for considerable access to European Community markets for goods from African, Caribbean and Pacific countries, especially agricultural exports. As I said earlier, the banana protocol has shown its worth for African, Caribbean and Pacific countries in negotiations on the single market for bananas.

Mr. Meacher: Opposition Members certainly accept that, overall, GATT is to the advantage of developing countries, although its effect is patchy. Does the Minister accept that, if GATT were implemented, the lowering of tariffs under the current Uruguay round would reduce the relative value of the concessions under the Lomé convention? Will he give the House a commitment that he will argue for a restoration of the relative advantage of lower tariffs under the Lomé convention?

9.30 pm

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I should like to think about that point, so I shall write to the hon. Gentleman. I shall not try to answer it on the hoof this evening. It does not have much to do with the five articles, in any case.

The allegation has been made that food aid is used to shift CAP mountains. That is a serious allegation. Britain has paid close attention to European Community food aid. The food aid regulation under the 1986 United Kingdom presidency changed the aid from supply-led food aid—in other words, based on shifting food mountains—to demand-led food aid—in other words, related to the needs of recipient countries. EC food aid is definitely not dictated by the CAP now.

We are working hard to ensure that food aid is increasingly directed at emergencies and less at the long term. That is right, because, if one is not careful, one causes harm to local economies. However, an important point to bear in mind about EC food mountains is that the products are rarely appropriate types of food. For example, milk products are not suited to local diets. We must take great care not to undermine local production.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will my hon. Friend give way on the point about milk?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: All right.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Not only is milk not suitable for the local diet, but it can be absolutely dangerous. Mothers, thinking that they are doing their children a favour, often make up the milk—if they can get hold of it—twice as strong as it should be, and use unboiled water.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: My hon. Friend is right. It is often incorrectly used by mothers who do not know how to take advantage of it.

Evaluation of EC aid is important, especially in the context of the outrageous attack on the EC aid programme made by the hon. Member for Oldham, West. I agree about the importance of evaluation. There are regular meetings between the Commission and evaluation experts from the member states. The Lomé convention and the Asia/Latin American regulation provide for evaluation and environmental impact assessments.

I shall make one more remark about the five articles and then refer to the volumes of aid. The importance of linking EC aid policy with other policies is enshrined in the articles. It is enormously important. I agree with the points that have been raised. Article 130v provides precisely for such a link. It says that the Community shall take account of development policy objectives

"in the policies that it implements which are likely to affect developing countries."

The conclusions on development policy which were agreed under the 1986 United Kingdom presidency provide for the Commission to report to member states this year on what it is doing about development policy in considering its policies on trade and agriculture. The hon. Member for Oldham, West mentioned the enormous importance of trade. I have mentioned the enormous importance of trade in Lomé as well as aid. Article 130v will enable those two matters to be closely tied together.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West made some rough and totally unwarranted allegations at the start of his speech. It is important for the Committee to realise that his party's policy to increase British aid to 0·7 per cent. of gross domestic product within five years would result in a further £2·4 billion of public expenditure. I hope that the hon. Gentleman realises the implications of subscribing to such a policy, the great difficulties that would arise if we were to increase aid to such a significant level during the next five years, and the enormous burden it would place on the economy.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West asked me to say what areas of British domestic policy we would seek to cut to meet the increased aid that we should be paying to the European Community. First, we do not know what our aid levels will be after the current expenditure triennium, so we cannot possibly answer that question. We do not have a crystal ball. We know what the increase for the

[Mr. Lennox-Boyd]

European Community's external budget will be, but it remains to be seen what the United Kindom programme total will be.

If the hon. Member for Oldham, West is going to question me, I must retort with similar questions: what areas of public expenditure would he cut to implement his policy, or would he add that expenditure to the public sector borrowing requirement or taxation?

We have agreed to meet that objective when we can and have substantially increased our aid programme. In 1991-92, it was 3 per cent. more in real terms than a year earlier. Britain's external assistance programme, covering aid to developing countries, assistance to the countries of eastern Europe and former Soviet Union and global environmental assistance, will rise by 10 per cent. in cash terms during the survey period, 1993-94 to 1995-96, and 1 per cent. in real terms. We are facing a period of great national difficulty, as the hon. Gentleman must concede, with the current levels of public borrowing. The aid budget emerged remarkably well from the last public expenditure negotiations.

The high quality of our aid must also be considered. In 1991, we had the sixth largest aid programme. Britain leads the way in debt relief, with the institution of the Trinidad terms, and earlier the Toronto terms. We launched the Trinidad terms in 1990, and 14 countries—11 in Africa—have benefited so far. We have relieved developing countries of more than £1 million of aid debt burden and recently announced our agreement to write off £56 million of Zambia's aid debt, provided that its reform programme stays on track.

In addition, the United Kingdom has one of the largest direct private investment standards in developing countries. It is consistently about half the European Community's total. According to our estimate for 1991, there was direct private investment of £3,000 million.

This debate is not about aid, but it has been coloured by aid considerations, and the United Kingdom and the Government have an enormously creditable record. I hope that the five articles will be incorporated into the legislation. I am glad that the hon. Member for Oldham, West has said that he will withdraw his amendment, because it would be totally inappropriate to force it to a Division.

Mr. John Denham (Southampton, Itchen): The need for co-ordination in the EC's development policy is an inescapable consequence of the single European market. Now that we have that market, there is no practical purpose in trying to maintain the basis of European co-operation at a bilateral and unco-ordinated level.

I should like to consider article 130v, because the critical test of the treaty, in practice, is the extent to which the development and aid policies, and their objectives, are reflected in the other policies pursued by the EC. In truth, little can be achieved ultimately by the best possible aid policy if other policies pursued by the EC, as an economic unit, do not reflect the imperative needs of the developing world. That issue raises the biggest question about our policies.

A number of hon. Members have already referred to the impact of the EC on the third world. It is an enormous trading block within the world economy and an enormous economic unit, and those are its most important features in relation to the third world. The extent to which the EC is able to contribute to economic growth in the third world, and how it contributes to it, are as critical to the third world as the EC's trading policies. Choices will be made about how the European economy develops; some may bring positive benefits to the third world, others could bring negative ones. The test of the new institutions is whether the needs of the third world are taken fully into account.

I shall highlight a number of areas in which problems have arisen in integrating the needs of the developing world in line with EC considerations. Debt policy is one of the most obvious problems. Over the past three years we have witnessed the fiasco of the EC's failure to cancel less than 0·6 per cent. of third-world debt payments owed to its financial institutions.

An EC Commissioner led an attempt to get that debt cancelled, but it was blocked, in large part by the simple fact that EC member states do not and will not co-ordinate their debt policy effectively. Before I entered the House I did a number of rough calculations and convinced myself that the cost of the air fares and hotel bills incurred in those three years of failed negotiations were almost certainly greater than the debt service payments that the EC was attempting to cancel from the third world. That failure was complete because, although the EC gives the Commission competence to negotiate the EC's external trade policy, it has absolutely resisted any similar co-ordination on debt policy and international financial policy, to the great detriment of the third world.

I am afraid that we witnessed a similar failure to implement the Trinidad terms. What is now being implemented under their guise falls far short of the objectives set out by the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, now the Prime Minister, when he launched those terms. They were meant to provide a five-year period in which 30 developing countries would have made no debt service payments on their bilateral debts. Unfortunately, the way in which those terms have been implemented has resulted in far less than that to which our Government aspired. That failure is again due to the fact that we met resistance from other Paris Club members, many of them also EC member states. That failure is also due to the fact that there is no co-ordinated debt policy in the EC.

Although the EC has harmonised legislation to provide a single European financial market for the banks, no attempt has been made to provide a European strategy to reduce commercial bank debt. This country and the EC cannot go on trying to ride two horses for ever. It is no good the United Kingdom trying to conduct its trade policy within the EC while conducting its international financial policy through the Group of Seven and the International Monetary Fund. If we are to move towards a stronger and more coherent Europe, the focus of much decision making must lie within Community institutions rather than be spread around world institutions, as it is at present.

9.45 pm

As to trade policy, I do not believe that the Commission or many member states ever instructed European negotiators in the GATT talks to give the needs of the developing world a high priority. I refer to one or two specific examples. One was the banana issue. Earlier this afternoon, we were visited by the Latin American banana lobbyists, but the real debate will develop tonight, with lobbyists on both sides of the Committee interested in the Windward islands. Immense effort went into that one issue, to defend the market for five tiny countries. Similar efforts should have been made throughout the GATT talks to protect the interests of developing countries in respect of intellectual property rights, protection of infant industries, and agriculture.

There is a great clash between the Community and the United States of America over farm subsidies. Third-world agricultural producers see it as a battle between two enormous, subsidising agricultural blocks fighting over their right to dump exports on the third world. It is ironic that, over 10 years when the USA and Europe have, in one form or another, been subsidising agriculture to a massive extent, the World bank and the International Monetary Fund, which are effectively controlled by the United States and Europe, have forbidden third-world country after third-world country to subsidise its own agricultural production—forcing the market open to dumped food from Europe and the United States.

Until the Community implements the sense of article 130b properly, so that the concerns of agriculturalists in the developing world are fully taken into account in CAP and GATT negotiations, that part of the treaty cannot realise its full potential.

If the European Community moves steadily, as I believe it should, towards monetary convergence and monetary union, the question of who represents economic interests and institutions such as the IMF and the World bank must be faced. At present, British bilateral and European Community development policies are overshadowed by the activities of the IMF and the World bank. One finds in any country in which there is a Community or British bilateral aid programme an IMF or World bank structural adjustment programme, and that determines the country's economic possibilities, social spending, public expenditure and agricultural policy. The British bilateral or Community aid programme has to work in an economic context set by another institution.

The World bank is experiencing increasing failure. The proportion of policies and projects that work has halved, with failures rising from 15 to 40 per cent. over 10 years. World bank projects fail partly due to their design, because they are conceived in Washington for countries far away, and partly because they operate in a context of too little debt relief, aid and capital flow. That means that they are doomed to failure.

Mr. Watson: Does my hon. Friend agree that this country and others are ploughing millions of pounds into the International Development Fund, which is the World bank's concessionary lending wing, and that greater accountability is essential? Should not that be provided as a matter of urgency?

Mr. Denham: I entirely agree. Accountability can be developed in two ways. One is a matter of great concern to me and other hon. Members—that Parliament should enjoy greater accountability with the Government's representatives in the World bank, which is why I support my hon. Friend's amendment. I think that, even in the European context, it will be important to have a level of national parliamentary accountability as well as European parliamentary accountability. As we all know, the Maastricht treaty does not go far enough in addressing the democratic deficit in Europe and strengthening the powers of the European Parliament.

Mr. Cash: Given that what the hon. Gentleman has said about accountability in the bank is correct, is his view shared by all Opposition Members? Would they be capable of pressing the matter to a vote when the time comes?

Mr. Denham: I assume that the hon. Gentleman is referring to the World bank itself. Certainly, those on the Opposition Front Bench share my view that there should be much greater accountability in its operations.

Mr. Spearing: My hon. Friend's speech shows great knowledge and insight. In regard to accountability, has he noticed that neither my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) nor the Minister has mentioned new clause 66, which goes even further than new clause 60 in terms of parliamentary accountability? Does my hon. Friend go as far as supporting new clause 66?

Mr. Denham: My hon. Friend may ask that question, but I will not be drawn on the issue. Let me answer in a rather roundabout way. As my hon. Friend will have gathered, my view is that the Maastricht treaty needs to be ratified so that some of the issues that I have mentioned can become possibilities that we can work towards.

Mr. Spearing: New clause 66 would not stop that.

Mr. Denham: I shall study the new clause, and we shall see what happens when the time comes to vote.

There is a second way in which accountability and influence could be exercised over the activities of the World bank—through better co-ordination of the financial contribution made by the European Community and individual Community countries to programmes co-ordinated by the bank. The dominant economic influence on the economic policy of sub-Saharan Africa is the World bank co-ordinated special programme for Africa. At least 15 per cent. of the funds for that programme come either from the Community or from the United Kingdom bilateral aid programme.

I do not have all the figures, but I guess that, if all the other European Community contributions were added together, perhaps 30 to 40 per cent. would turn out to come from European sources rather than from the World bank. That would be a powerful lever to alter and improve the adjustment policies imposed by the World bank, if only Europe got its act togther. At present, the Commission is understaffed, under-resourced and badly supported, and has not the political clout to influence those wider policies. If we wish to alter the economic context in which sub-Saharan Africa is developing, better co-ordination of the European development co-operation and aid programmes is essential.

I do not believe that we have the option to move backwards in regard to development co-operation. A move back towards bilateral programmes alone would take us back to what is all too real now: far too many people are driving around Africa and other parts of the world in their four-wheel-drive Japanese vehicles, trying to implement unco-ordinated aid programmes. The potential for co-ordination of our activities presents a challenge—an opportunity that must be grasped.

Mr. Lester: It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham), whose knowledge and objectivity are an asset to the Committee. It will not surprise him to learn that I agreed with much of what he said, although I am not sure that support for the new clause is as fundamental as the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) suggests.

I believe that an important element of the Maastricht treaty is the fact that, for the first time, development co-operation is included in the treaty of Rome. I agree very much with the philosophy of the hon. Members for Itchen and for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall). I felt that the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) played the game on domestic points and used the chance of making what might have been a more statesmanlike speech as a vehicle for having a go at aid levels and revealing his own genuine prejudice about the European scene.

I should have thought that any programme which increased aid to the developing world, by whatever means, was something that this Committee should welcome, particularly when it builds on the best practice of our own ODA, which has been very well established and has laid down the sort of objectives that are now spelt out in article 130u, all of which, I imagine, most hon. Members on both sides would support.

Mr. Cash: Has my hon. Friend read the recent Court of Auditors report, and is he aware of the severe criticisms that have been levelled at the way in which the Commission is organising its aid?

Mr. Lester: I have not read the Court of Auditors report, but I try to lift my eyes a little further and to look a little more objectively at what Europe is about rather than nit-picking remarks about accountants, which can always be dealt with. I cannot imagine that anyone could not recognise the intellectual argument facing the world scene in terms of the increased necessity of closer co-operation, spelling out the aims, as has already been mentioned, which take us forward in this critical question of how we transfer resources to the developing world in the most effective way. My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) talked about one aspect —population.

Whether one approaches it from a moral or a practical position, the reality is that, unless we transfer those resources in such a way as to improve the standards and the opportunites of people in all the surrounding countries of Europe, there will be enormous immigration pressure from the Maghreb and from eastern and central Europe. Simply passing laws about immigration will be of no assistance. We cannot have a barbed wire fence or a new Berlin wall to resist that pressure. It is essential that we recognise the value of Europe in transferring resources. There is no question but that the intellectual concept that 12 or more countries working together to build and create opportunities in developing countries is far more effective than the bits-and-pieces system which we have had up to now.

I am a great supporter of our bilateral programmes. I recognise their importance in every respect and their quality, especially when it comes to countries in which we have a special interest. That concept is taken into account by our agreement on this treaty.

Too many of us who have followed this subject for many years have seen what happens when people bid up. I have been at the river in Gambia, a long way from Banjul, and I have seen the bidding for tractors: tractors in a tiny community where there is not even a mechanic but six different makes of European tractors without a single spare part other than a saddle because one guy—who was used to horses—when asked what spare parts he wanted, ordered 50 seats for the tractor as a follow-up spare part.

That is what has happened where countries bilaterally say "What do you want?" They reply, "Tractors," and everybody supplies tractors, but nobody looks objectively at what the tractors are to be used for. Nobody looks objectively at how best one could co-ordinate an agricultural policy for Gambia so that all 12 countries in the Community could agree an overall pattern with the country and with other international organisations to ensure that there was genuine assistance and that there were roads and proper drainage and a single make of tractor and trained people to keep those tractors in the field. That would make a real contribution.

Already we have seen, in terms of common standards on human rights and good government, how an aspect of British policy which was spelt out by our Foreign Secretary about two years ago has been accepted under this treaty. It is an example for all EC countries, working both bilaterally and together. That is a major step forward and one way in which we see the benefits of all that the treaty is trying to achieve.

I am aware that there is to be a vote soon, so I shall conclude by saying that it is not beyond the imagination of any hon. Member to realise that the treaty is the way forward to achieving the essential transfer of resources to developing countries that depend on the European Community and its strength.

Mr. Watson: Like other hon. Members who have spoken in this debate, I welcome the fact that development co-operation is written into the treaty of Rome for the first time. Articles 130u to 130x cover considerable areas of much importance.

The hon. Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) was a little unkind to my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher). His opening remarks dealt with United Kingdom aid policy, although we are dealing with the Maastricht treaty.

It being Ten o'clock, THE CHAIRMAN *left the Chair to report Progress and ask leave to sit again.*

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business),

That, at this day's sitting, the European Communities (Amendment) Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. MacKay.]*

The Committee divided: Ayes 288, Noes 262.

Division No. 163] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.

Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ruclif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Dafis, Cynog
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Lynne, Ms Liz
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Salmond, Alex
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Andrew
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wigley, Dafydd
Willetts, David
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Butcher, John
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Cash, William
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann

Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cran, James
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Sir George
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Gill, Christopher
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Hendron, Dr Joe
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Knapman, Roger
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Mallon, Seamus
Marek, Dr John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tipping, Paddy
Trimble, David
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Alan Meale and
Mr. Gordon McMaster.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Question again proposed, That the amendment be made.

10.15 pm

Mr. Watson: I am gratified by that vote of confidence, even though it has come from rather strange quarters. I will resume my comments in respect of the EC aid budget, which, as a result of the proposals at the Edinburgh summit, is scheduled to increase by some some 60 per cent. between now and 1999.

My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West was quite correct in pointing out—he was not trying to score cheap points, because he was talking accurately—that the United Kingdom Government are not prepared to fund their part of that increase other than within their existing aid budget. That means a substantial drop in aid, particularly in 1994 and 1995. It underscores to some extent the commitment—*[Interruption.]*

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I ask hon. Members to be a little quieter so that we can hear the hon. Member make his important speech.

Mr. Watson: Thank you, Mr. Morris. I was saying that to offset the United Kingdom's contribution to the EC aid budget there will be cuts in other areas. That was certainly not intended at the Edinburgh summit by the other EC member countries. It is selling short the many recipients of United Kingdom aid and also the agencies that are vital components in ensuring that that aid is delivered through the various programmes in underdeveloped countries.

In an earlier part of this debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) said that, should the treaty be ratified, this could be the end of the United Kingdom aid policy and the start of an overall EC aid policy. I do not necessarily agree with that. I do not think that an EC aid policy is anything but a good thing, or that this is necessarily the end of a United Kingdom aid policy. Certainly, those of us who will continue to contribute to debates in the House on this very important matter will do our best to see that it is not.

It is only the United Kingdom, as I said, that is cutting its aid contribution; the other EC countries are not and there is no call to do so. It is likely that the Government bowed to pressure from their own party, particularly from hon. Gentlemen present today, to minimise any increase in payments to the EC. We know, of course, that the Government are in some difficulty in carrying all their Members with them on this important matter. As a result, those countries which are dependent on United Kingdom aid are likely to lose out, particularly in 1994 and 1995.

We must also stress that following the opening up of eastern and central Europe 42 per cent. of United Kingdom aid is going to those areas, while aid for developing countries has been frozen. Those two events must be considered in similar terms, because they affect the way in which overall United Kingdom aid is disbursed and allocated. We must ask what message is sent to the poorest nations of the world when their aid from the United Kingdom is to be frozen for two years and then cut.

On the previous set of amendments we discussed, among other things, the cohesion fund and attempts by EC Member countries to help their own poorer members and redistribute some of the wealth within the EC so as to ensure that the richer nations to some extent came to the assistance of the poorer nations. That is an aim to which even our Government, however reluctantly, have subscribed. They may argue—indeed they have argued—about the extent to which the Delors 2 package should be implemented and how much they should contribute to it, but it is fair to say that they accept the need for a cohesion fund and some redistribution of wealth.

Why should the Government then be prepared to reduce, with the minimum fuss and publicity, the aid that we make available to the poorest countries in the underdeveloped world? Those countries are often struggling desperately to feed their people. I stress the word "poverty"—a word that emerges all too rarely in our aid debates. I should like the Government aid programme to be evaluated to show how much poverty had been alleviated as a result of the many millions of pounds spent. With the current methods of reporting on the Overseas Development Administration's programmes and policies it is not possible to establish definitively what effect aid has had on poverty. It is time that that was clearly spelt out. The ability to address the increasing problems of poverty must underscore all aid programmes.

I welcome article 130u of the treaty, which says that

> "the sustainable economic and social development of the developing countries, and more particularly the most disadvantaged among them"

shall be among the aims of the development co-operation under title XVII.

The means by which the EC gives aid specifically to the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries, which are excluded from the aid figures that I mentioned earlier, are assisted by the Lomé convention agreements. Lomé IV came into being in September 1991 and will last until 2000. That is the first of the 10-year Lomé programmes; the previous three lasted for only five years each.

However, it is fortunate that there will be a mid-term review of Lóme IV, in view of ever-changing world events, especially in eastern and central Europe and in other parts of the world. It is important that there be a review to take account of changing priorities, not the least of which, as I said earlier, is the vast amount of money being sucked into eastern and central Europe. I welcome the fact that the 1983 figure for EC aid to eastern and central Europe has been frozen at 38 per cent. of total aid—the same as the 1992 figure. I do not minimise the problems that those nations face, but it is equally wrong to suggest that simply because those problems have emerged over the past three or four years we should give lower priority or less attention to the developing countries.

At the first meeting of the African, Caribbean and Pacific—ACP—countries following the agreement on Lóme IV, several problem areas were identified. The ACP countries are worried by the way in which EC aid is likely to develop and how that will affect them.

I am aware of article 130w, paragraph 3, which says that nothing within the treaty or in the terms of that article will affect aid to the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries. But that has not allayed those countries' fears and they remain dubious. They clearly stated at meetings between the ACP countries and the EC Council of Ministers, especially in August 1992, that they were in a state of "suspended animation", as they tried to work out where they fell in the new scheme of things.

The drought and famine which threaten human tragedy on a scale never before seen on the African continent made the feeling of despair even more apparent in the tone of many of the African, Caribbean and Pacific contributions at that meeting. Other events also affect their judgments in

[Mr. Watson]

those matters, not least the protracted GATT negotiations. The ACP states believe that the current multilateral negotiations on GATT will, as they see it, erode their preferences in the Community market and the outcome of the Uruguay round will be unbalanced and to their disadvantage, particularly in agricultural and tropical products.

Several hon. Members, in what has been a good debate and one in which there has been a large measure of agreement, have mentioned the negotiations in respect of bananas. At the meeting to which I referred there was a real fear that the Caribbean countries would lose out on that, but since then there has been an agreement which seems to offer them the protection that they sought, and it is to be welcomed. However, the ACP countries are now, despite Lóme, and as a result of the Maastricht treaty recommendations in respect of article 130, asking where they stand and what will be the next threat to the aid that they desperately need and have come to depend on over the years.

So we must give some consideration to the Lomé convention and its effect on those countries. As far as possible, I want a contribution from this country which will ensure sustainable development. Not nearly enough attention has been given to the need to develop sustainable trade patterns, allowing countries to attain a level of economic independence and to reduce what is in many cases a crippling debt burden which makes them net contributors to the financing countries and organisations such as the World bank and the International Monetary Fund. It is a problem that must be faced and overcome if there is to be meaningful development.

Another aspect is that when developing countries seek to export manufactured goods, rather than just raw commodities, they become subject to tariff and trade barriers, often within the European Community, which prevent them from gaining access to European markets. While the raw goods are welcomed, whether it be bananas, sugar, cocoa or whatever, manufactured goods or goods made from these raw commodities are not acceptable and are not given that sort of access. Again this seems to be at odds with what the treaty says. Article 130u talks of fostering

> "the smooth and gradual integration of the developing countries into the world economy".

How can that happen when there are restrictions on finding markets for manufactured goods in Europe? It will take a sea change of opinion, not just in the European Community but in the IMF and the World bank as well, to bring about that sort of progress.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) outlined the problems in the World bank at present and the effect that its structural adjustment programmes have on the economies of developing countries, often forcing them to concentrate on one specific commodity. When the world price for the commodity slumps, the economy of the country is hit disastrously, and it often appears that the World bank has no back-up plan to assist a country in such a situation.

I do not want to add anything to what the hon. Member for Croydon, South said on population other than to say that, like him, I am a member of the all-party group on population and development and I know that there are crucial issues to be examined. Like others, I am sensitive to aspects, particularly in relation to the Roman Catholic church, of the population programmes throughout the world, but they are problems that will not go away and they are integral to any meaningful way of dealing with countries which are saddled with debt and poverty and whose populations are increasing out of all control. A country cannot begin to build any kind of sustainable economy when it cannot even feed its people.

There are fine words and good intentions in articles 130u to 130x and I would like to think that they will be carried forward effectively. The Government have not given the best indication that that is likely to be the case by refusing to commit their aid levels to increase at an equal pace with European Community aid levels in general, projected to 1999. I do not know whether the Minister intends to speak again in the debate, but if he gets the opportunity to intervene, I invite him to comment specifically on why our aid levels will be allowed to fall behind EC levels. That can only mean that the money will be coming from other sources. That does a disservice to the countries which we have an obligation to assist and which we have assisted for many years. It seriously underscores the good intentions of this part of the treaty.

10.30 pm

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: We have had a wide-ranging debate. I congratulate you, Mr. Morris, on allowing such a broad debate on these amendments, under title XVII, which relate to development co-operation and not specifically to overseas aid. I wish to make a brief contribution because I am interested in the subject which has a major impact not only upon this country in respect of some of our industries but upon many countries overseas with which we wish to trade, and with which historically we have had good and close co-operation and relationships.

The hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) made a well-informed speech. However, he appeared to believe that in future development co-operation and overseas aid in particular would be almost entirely a responsibility of the European Community. He is misguided in that. In direct remarks to the Minister he referred to article 130v which says:

> "The Community shall take account of the objectives referred to in Article 130u".

The hon. Gentleman said that Europe had objectives. If we refer back to the previous article, we find, as my hon. Friend the Minister said in his informed speech, that the Community "shall foster" a number of objectives. Having objectives and fostering objectives are two totally different things. It is important to highlight that point at this stage.

The information that the hon. Member for Itchen gave to the Committee was helpful. He showed an informed and almost objective outlook which was valuable, although I disagree with his ultimate conclusion, as no doubt my hon. Friend the Minister would accept.

Earlier in the debate we had interventions from my hon. Friend the Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer) and the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux), the leader of the Official Ulster Unionist party, who pointed out that there was conflict between overseas co-operation, development co-operation and the tradition of the European Community. Although I am a believer in the single market, I do not wish to go down the path to further integration which under Maastricht, currency convergence and a single currency would lead inevitably to a federal structure of one form or another.

The right hon. Member for Lagan Valley rightly pointed out that historically the European Community looks inward, not outward. How will that bring down the tariff barrier which so many hon. Members on both sides of the Committee have outlined as one of the problems that face the developing world in dealing with the Community? Unfortunately, my hon. Friend the Member for Worcestershire, South has just left his place, but he and the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley put their finger on the issue which should be at the heart of our debate on this group of amendments on development co-operation. I shall remind the Committee that all of us—or the overwhelming majority—want to see a satisfactory outcome to the GATT talks, the negotiation of the Uruguay round and the agreement of a new GATT treaty as soon as possible. That is important to all those countries —some of them have been specifically mentioned in the debate—which will be affected by this title and development co-operation within the European Community.

The country which practically put a kybosh on the possibility of a GATT treaty and agreement with the United States was one of the founding members of the Community. Of course, I refer to France. When it comes down to national interest, the country which stands out for its interests most vociferously, strongly and forcibly is France.

I must pose this question, although it is not entirely relevant to the amendments which are being debated: why are the ailing and aging President of France, Mr. Mitterrand, and the French Government, who do not have much longer to go, taking such a strong line on this matter? They do so because they have a lot of farmers. In the coming election, farmers will play an important part in who is elected to govern France.

Mr. Cash: Does my hon. Friend know that the protocol on France relating to development co-operation is an interesting document? I think that the Minister nods because he knows what I am about to say. The protocol contains some extremely generous provisions which benefit France and are, by implication, at our expense. The CFA zone ensures that French industry has a steady supply of cheap raw materials, notably from west Africa, including uranium, iron ore, bauxite, phosphates and so on. In other words, we are taken for a massive ride as usual under the treaty.

Mr. Winterton: I can only say, Dame Janet, that my hon. Friend will undoubtedly seek to catch your eye to speak in the debate. I can add little to what he said except to say—as so many hon. Members do when there has been a relevant, important and helpful intervention—that I entirely endorse what he said.

France is at the heart of the European movement and has combined its brigade with Germany to form a defence unit within the European Community. In a fundamental part of what we are debating tonight, we have a country which seeks merely to stand up for its interests and not honour the treaty and the spirit behind it.

I hope that there is an early settlement of the GATT round and that the GATT treaty can be negotiated. I only hope that France, which superficially professes to be so European, will see the sense of agreeing to a treaty which brings benefit far beyond the European Community and which is of great importance to the developing countries of the world.

I move on to another matter which formed the major part of the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway). During an intervention in his speech, I said that I was aware that he had made a major contribution to the matter of the world's population and population control and that it was one of his major interests in the House. I am not sure what relevance his speech had, although it must have been relevant because the Chairman did not rule it out of order. It certainly related to overseas aid but I am not sure what it had to do with development co-operation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South referred to the International Planned Parenthood Federation. I intervened to say that, while indeed we wanted to help the third world in many ways, my hon. Friend had not shown any understanding of the differing cultures and traditions of the countries on which he wished to place what I would understand to be a western form of population control. I hope that he appreciates that in many of the countries traditions and religious and cultural beliefs make some of what he said unacceptable. He qualified his remarks by saying that he would not seek to impose such systems on the countries. It is important that we should not upset or destroy the balance of traditions in such countries because, by doing so, we would make no positive contribution to peaceful progress and development in those countries.

Sir Russell Johnston: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Winterton: I am tempted not to give way but I have great regard for the hon. Gentleman on the Liberal Democrat Bench. He and I have many common interests and I am happy to give way on a matter about which I know that he agrees more with my hon. Friend the Minister than with me.

Sir Russell Johnston: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way and the graceful way in which he did so. Would he exclude persuasion in respect of the matter on which we disagree?

Mr. Winterton: The hon. Gentleman tempts me to go into a definition of the word "persuasion". Various regimes which have operated in the world have used the word "persuasion". That persuasion became rather evil, wicked and totalitarian. Perhaps he might say that the word that I would choose to use in its place—"education" —could also be so defined. But I should prefer to say that by example and education we could seek to lead countries which have population problems—which, sadly, lead to starvation and all the poverty that goes with it—to accept some of the customs and traditions to which we have grown accustomed in the western world.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I understand the point that has been made. The hon. Gentleman referred to starvation. Is not the other side of the equation the concept of continued exploitation? When one links it with his comments about GATT, I am mindful of a person from one of those countries who told me, "We have no pension

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

scheme. Our children are our pension rights." Should not that aspect have a bearing on the role which the countries of the developed world should play?

Mr. Winterton: I am tempted to—in fact, I can—call the hon. Gentleman my hon. Friend. We have known each other for many years and have a great many common interests. My hon. Friend raises important issues on which I find myself in agreement. We seek to raise the living standards of countries. We do not seek to change their customs and traditions.

The last point that I want to make in this brief speech is about agriculture. My hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) is often known as "Mr. Bananas" because of his interest in the West Indies and the islands which are the major suppliers of bananas to Europe and the United Kingdom. Other hon. Members have spoken about other aspects of agriculture. *[Interruption.]* Is my hon. Friend the Minister seeking to intervene?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Not yet.

10.45 pm

Mr. Winterton: I thought that I had the Minister's interest, and if I had provoked him to intervene I would have been delighted to give way.

Agriculture has featured markedly and forcibly in the debate, but no contributor has mentioned the fact that so often when western countries—sadly, including the United Kingdom—have given aid, they have sought to move people from the countryside into towns or cities. In so doing, they create more problems than those which the aid, infrastructure and education sought to solve.

Through aid we should help countries to help themselves. As my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State said in his fairly positive response to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) who moved the amendment, the United Kingdom has a pretty good record on overseas aid, although we have not reached the United Nations' target figure. In other ways, particularly through private investment, this country has set a very good example.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): The European Community, in its reform of the common agricultural policy, has adopted a policy that will lead people away from the land in European countries. If the EC thinks that that is the right treatment for its own people, does the hon. Gentleman not think that it will try to force that policy on those countries over which it wants to exercise influence?

Mr. Winterton: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. Perhaps that is the very argument that I am seeking to build into my case.

I believe that it is wrong that overseas aid and development co-operation should seek in any way to disturb the natural situation in many countries because in doing so it creates more problems than it solves. It is wrong to move people from the countryside where there is stability and work, although, sadly, that is not true in countries such as Somalia, where there is civil war and poverty and everything else that goes with it, and starvation resulting from drought. We all know of the great problems that have beset the Horn of Africa in recent years.

United Kingdom aid has in the main been excellent. I am worried that by adding an additional competence to the European Community and writing it into the treaty —which is an extension of the treaty of Rome and the Single Act—so that overseas development co-operation and aid become a genuine part of the Community's competence we may well reduce our ability to do what we believe to be right and what in the main has been right.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I sense that my hon. Friend is about to conclude his remarks. He expressed an interest in new clauses 60 and 66 and I would like him to give them further consideration. He drew attention to them with approval, but said that it is not desirable to incorporate new aid matters into the treaty. I suggest to him that it is not desirable to incorporate into the procedures of this House, by legislation, a procedure that is normally determined by the House. That is what new clause 60 would do. It would determine a procedure of the House by legislation, which is a strange thing to do, as I am sure that my hon. Friend would agree, not least because it would give the House of Lords an opportunity to determine our procedure by its scrutiny of the legislation that we send there.

Does he not agree that the amendment is unnecessary because we have terrific opportunities to review Government aid policy? We have monthly statements of Community business, the Scrutiny Committees, regular debates on development activities and reports to the House of the six-monthly Community Development Ministers meetings. Would he like to comment on all of those?

Mr. Winterton: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend because he has anticipated my final point. In an intervention in an earlier speech, I expressed the hope that my hon. Friend the Minister would refer to new clauses 60 and 66, with which I expressed some sympathy. I must tell my hon. Friend that I did so purely on the basis that I believe that the Government will seek to force the treaty through the House and that it will be ratified. I was hoping to build into the Bill a safeguard whereby the House, which is being deprived of many of its rights, functions and authorities, would still have something to do, because new clause 60 states:

> "Her Majesty's Government shall report to the House of Commons annually on the implementation of the objectives of article 130u".

At least that would give the House an opportunity to debate that report.

If the Bill does not become an Act and we do not ratify, I shall not in any way be interested in new clauses 60 and 66. It was interesting to note that, when my hon. Friend the Minister responded to the hon. Member for Oldham, West, he said that he assumed that this was a probing amendment. I understood from the hon. Gentleman's speech that he intended to urge his hon. Friends and those Conservative Members who might sympathise with him to vote for at least one of the amendments in the group and, I presume, given that he made specific reference to it, new clause 60. No doubt the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington), who is sitting on the Opposition Front Bench, will make the Opposition's position clear before the end of the debate.

I believe that the amendments are more important than the attendance in the Committee might suggest. We have heard a number of well-informed and constructive contributions to the debate. I hope that the assurances given by my hon. Friend the Minister about continuing to have and to follow our own overseas aid programme represents Government policy. I accept that should we act in co-operation with other European countries, the effect of overseas aid can no doubt be more constructive and positive.

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): The hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) has made his known speech opposing federalism in Europe, and, considering the lateness of the hour, I shall spare the Committee my known speech stating the opposite view. The hon. Gentleman referred to the supposed Europeanism of the French. I do not think that that was terribly helpful. I shall also refrain from commenting on that.

I do not claim the knowledge of the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells), whose connection with development co-operation is long established, or of others who have spoken. I shall be brief.

We should remember that, after all, we are talking about a probing amendment—with all respect to the hon. Member for Macclesfield. Perhaps the Opposition will place some emphasis on new clause 60, but it is not all that exciting. It states that the Government

> "shall report to the House of Commons annually on the implementation of the objectives of Article 130u, including the campaign against world poverty, respect for human rights, and compliance with the United Nations, having regard to the co-ordination and consultation required by Article 130x."

I do not regard that proposal as very exciting. In fact, it seems perfectly reasonable that the House should have an opportunity to examine such matters from time to time. I do not know why anyone should get particularly excited about it.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Does not the hon. Gentleman agree that it would be helpful for the Committee to have the discipline once a year of examining the EC's action in respect of co-operation and aid? As the hon. Gentleman knows, a horrible amount of money—more than £1,000 million this year—is spent on dumping high-tar tobacco in the third world, and a vast sum on dumping a large amount of food on the world market at a very low price, thereby impoverishing third world countries. Would it not be useful to examine all the consequences of such policies annually?

Sir Russell Johnston: I suggest to the hon. Gentleman —with whom I have crossed swords so often—that the likelihood of the House of Commons not dealing with Community issues more than once a year is not all that credible. It deals with the EC almost weekly, and will continue to do so. If the hon. Gentleman is pressing for annual debates about particular issues, I would certainly not be opposed to that.

This is essentially an aspirational and declaratory section of the treaty. It is not about policy but about four basic provisions. The first is that the Council, acting in accordance with article 189c, will devise development and aid measures.

The second is that development co-operation objectives should be reached in the light of other Community measures—which touches on the point made by the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor). Although I have often defended the CAP's genesis, I would not contradict the hon. Gentleman and others when they argue that it ultimately had non-beneficial consequences for Britain and developing countries. Nevertheless, the second principle acknowledges that account must be taken of that aspect, and is embodied in the approach to decisions.

The third provision is the co-ordination of policy between the Community and member states, including international organisations, and the fourth is co-operation, within their respective spheres of competence, between the Community and member states on the one hand and other countries and relevant international organisations on the other.

I do not entirely agree with the Minister's assertion that those objectives reflect British influence. They may do in part, but, with respect, I grow terribly weary of successive Ministers—not only the Under-Secretary of State—saying that everything good that ever happens is due to the influence of Her Majesty's Government. Our record of development co-operation is not all that hot, and we cannot claim that principles enunciated in the treaty are due to our record, influence or pressure. Let us face it: the criticism of European Community policy in this area—such as exists—is not so very different from criticism of the Government's policy. As has already been observed, we have not only failed to achieve the United Nations target but appear to have failed even to try to achieve it.

I know that there are good arguments for saying that the quality of our aid is good, and that our organisation is good—in some cases, better than that of others. I do not dispute that. I think that, not only directly through the Overseas Development Adminstration but through the non-governmental organisations, we do a lot of good work. Quantitively, however, we do not do as well as other countries which, in theory, have less capacity to perform. I think we should be a bit more humble, and not constantly say how wonderful we are.

11 pm

A positive aspect of the treaty is its reaffirmation that the Community, as an institution, has an interest in playing—and a desire to play—a major role in development co-operation throughout the developing world. I think that, in fairness, the Community has played its part in that over the past 30 years. Improvements have been made in, for instance, life expectancy, the rate of infant mortality, literacy and access to drinking water: all those simple, basic things have improved to some extent, and I think that the Community can claim some credit for that. The most notable feature is the Lomé agreement, to which the Community, acting collectively, made an important contribution.

Progress is not as good as I would like; it is not as good as many other hon. Members would like. It has, however, been positive, and, although it is often criticised, I think that the Community's partnership with the developing world has played, and is still playing, an important part. That is not confined to the African, Caribbean and Pacific states; it extends to ACP Latin American and Asia. Let us look at the statistics. EC aid to ACP states between 1990 and 1995 represents 11 billion ecus; EC aid to eastern Europe since 1990 represents 450 million ecus; EC aid to Latin America and Asia in 1991 amounted to 1·9 billion ecus. It should be recognised that the Community is making an effective and constructive contribution to a very difficult area of need.

I agree very much with the hon. Members who have said that access to the industrialised countries' markets is an essential prerequisite for the development of the underdeveloped countries. That is fundamental, and it is particularly true within the narrower confine of Europe, given the position of the newly democratised countries. It is all very well to be nice to the Visigrad countries, for example, but unless they are allowed to sell what they produce, all this is nothing but words—and not very effective words.

I also think that the Community needs to ensure more coherence between its approach to development and its approach to other Community policies, such as the CAP—as was pointed out by the hon. Member for Southend, East. I do not dispute that; it is a serious problem. The Community's development policy is, ultimately, a fundamentally co-operative venture, in which the Community's role must be to help the people of the developing countries to find and develop their own aspirations. In that, considerable effort is being made and considerable expertise is being shown. I hope that this country will continue to play a constructive role in a very difficult endeavour, but that is something that the European Community must continue to contribute to.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling) *rose in his place and claimed to move*, That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question That the amendment be made, *put accordingly and negatived.*

Mr. Spearing: On a point of order, Dame Janet. We may be moving towards reporting progress. If that is moved, can you confirm that it is a debatable motion? Secondly, you will have observed that there are two new clauses on the amendment paper selected by the Chair. They are new clause 60, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) referred, and new clause 66, tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) and some of his hon. Friends. I think that sufficient indication has been given that if I were able to catch your eye, I would wish to speak to that. Reference to that new clause has been made, principally, by the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) and by the Under-Secretary of State.

I have not been afforded the opportunity to speak to that new clause, for it may, of course, if the case is good enough, be put to the vote later in the debate. But you, Dame Janet, have accepted the closure motion and that has meant that it has not been possible to speak.

I seek your advice as to the extent to which this matter can be addressed when and if progress is reported.

The Second Deputy Chairman: I can confirm that the motion about reporting progress is debatable.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Chairman do report progress and ask leave to sit again.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

Mr. Spearing: The behaviour of the Government on this parliamentary matter is despicable and undemocratic.

We have had a number of controversies about closures. I do not question your judgment, Dame Janet, but I question the good faith of the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. He knows full well that the debate that we have just partly concluded is not about overseas aid. Many hon. Members believe that we have been talking about overseas aid: we have not. That is not included in the treaty or any of the amendments.

The Minister knows that there is a united proposal for a single foreign policy, of which overseas development and aid is a part. I want to ask the Minister—*[Interruption.]*

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. There is too much noise; the hon. Gentleman is entitled to his say.

Mr. Spearing: I am grateful, Dame Janet.

The Government have misled the Committee, or, putting it more charitably, have suppressed information that they know the Committee should have received.

I have a 64-page document from the Community, No. 6718/92, which was published in September 1992 entitled—*[Interruption]* This is going on the record, so hon. Members may talk if they like.

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. I remind the Committee again that we should have a reasonable amount of silence.

Mr. Spearing: I am grateful, Dame Janet.

Document No. 6718/92 is a communication from the Commission to the Council and Parliament on the subject of

> "Development Co-operation Policy in the Run-up to 2000 . . . The consequences of the Maastricht Treaty."

It is a public document and it was published by the Commission in September 1992. It has been deposited in the Vote Office. It was the subject of a memorandum from Baroness Chalker of Wallasey, which she deposited in September 1992. The document makes it amply clear that a working party is discussing proposals to implement the treaty. It was meeting on 18 November last year with a view to forming a resolution. I put it to the Committee, particularly the Foreign Office Minister who spoke on overseas development today——

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but he is now going well beyond the scope of the debate. If he does not wish the Committee to adjourn, he should explain why he wants to go on to the next set of amendments, instead of which he is harking back to the previous set.

Mr. Spearing: I shall correct that, Dame Janet, if you will keep me in line.

I want to know why the Government have not supplied the Committee with information to which it is entitled. Their failure to do so can be interpreted as suppression of material. Before we agree to report progress, the Minister should explain himself in respect of this matter. Or, if he does not know what happened at the Development Committee, perhaps his right hon. Friend does. It was the Development Committee that discussed the matter.

Secondly, the Minister should tell the Committee why he says that it would be improper for it to require the Government, consequent upon any Act, to table statements and reports. The Minister pretends that that would amount to interference in the procedures of the Commons. But there are many Acts of Parliament that require the Government to do just that. It is not just misleading but entirely wrong and indicative of arrogant contempt for Parliament—indeed, for democracy as a whole—for a Minister of the Crown, in an attempt to reply to a matter that has not been dealt with, to claim that the Government are not accountable and that they do not need to produce reports that the Committee requires under statute.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will now give an explanation of the matters with which I have just dealt. I hope that he has a good answer; I can think of none.

11.15 pm

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): Having been present for about two hours of the earlier part of the debate, may I concur with the remarks of the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing). There were times when, as I read article 130u, I wondered whether I had come to the right premises. I intend no reflection on any earlier occupant of the Chair when I say that the debate ranged very widely but dealt almost exclusively with the matter of overseas aid. But it is quite clear that paragraph 1 of article 130u is about development co-operation, about the economic and social development of developing countries——

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the right hon. Gentleman, but I must make it absolutely clear that we cannot have a rerun of a previous debate. Otherwise, there would be no point in having curtailment of debate by way of a closure. Closure brings debate to an end.

Mr. Molyneaux: I am grateful for your guidance, Dame Janet. The purpose of my remarks is to explain that, in my humble opinion, because that vital information was withheld, or was not made available, the earlier part—in fact, the greater part—of the debate was completely out of order. The Committee was debating entirely the wrong subject.

Question put and agreed to.

Committee report progress; to sit again tomorrow.

Independent Living Fund

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

11.17 pm

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): This inevitably has to be a short debate, but it is one of crucial importance to many thousands of the most severely disabled people in Britain today. The independent living fund came into existence to deal with the extremely worrying consequences of the Government's decision to end the special allowances that were available to help disabled people to remain in the community under the supplementary benefits system. By reference to case after case, we demonstrated that if new help was not quickly made available, more and more severely disabled people then living independently in their own homes would have to go into institutional care, almost certainly at far greater cost to the taxpayer than that of enabling them to continue to live at home. Then, as now, the issue was the undoubted and incontestable right of disabled people to live in their own homes instead of being shut away in long-stay institutions.

From the outset, the Disablement Income Group—DIG—worked with the then Department of Health and Social Security to make the independent living fund an effective means of achieving its purpose. What the ILF proved beyond any question was the very urgent and essential need to repair the gap created by the ending of the supplementary benefits system, but last November the fund was closed to new applicants, with reserved rights for existing recipients of help.

From 1 April, there will be new arrangements. Two bodies will then be established. The first will continue to pay severely disabled people who applied to the ILF before 26 November last. The second body will pay, from 1 April 1993, new applicants who are of working age and whose costs of care at home exceed those of residential care. Local authorities will then be expected to provide domiciliary services equivalent to what they would have spent on residential nursing care and the ILF will be responsible for topping this up.

Help for new applicants will be subjected to a ceiling of £500 per week. That is totally unrealistic. No individual should be forced into institutional care against his wishes, and the ceiling of £500 will result in the Government having to spend more, not less, taxpayers' money.

The Greater London Association for Disabled People recently rang four residential homes at random in four different London boroughs. Their charges were £510, £605 upwards, £800 and £925 per week. Those figures speak for themselves. "Too Little—Too Late", based on research by the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation and the Disability Alliance, spells out the consequences of the announcement of the original ILF's closure last November.

In a letter about this debate from Peter Large of DIG, who has won the respect of both sides of the House, he tells me:

> "We have been so worried by developments—or sometimes the lack of developments—that we wrote to the Prime Minister expressing grave concern. I have to say that his reply did not reassure us. We remain deeply worried about the prospects for severely disabled people".

He goes on to say:

[Mr. Alfred Morris]

> "There are now even worries about future payments to existing beneficiaries . . . There is great concern that payment mechanisms will not be ready. You might seek from the Minister a categorical assurance that no existing beneficiaries will have to wait for payment after 31 March when the ILF ends.
>
> You can imagine our distress to see the threat of the ILF being throttled to death."

From an acknowledged expert in the ILF's work, himself a severely disabled person, that is very strong criticism in regard to the future of the fund.

When he announced the closure of the original ILF to new applicants, the right hon. Gentleman said on 24 November that the new fund would ensure

> "a continuation of one of the most significant features of the ILF—an element of cash payments to individual disabled people to control provision of part of their care."

He revealed on 2 December how "pitiably small"—I use Peter Large's words—that element would be when he said:

> "A total of £4 million—on a UK basis—will be made available in 1993-94 to enable the new fund to provide cash payments to new applicants from the most severely disabled people of working age."

Government figures are that 1,500 people each year will qualify for cash payments. This compares very disturbingly with the 22,500 the ILF will have given cash payments to this year. Moreover, as a percentage of an individual's overall package it will be very small.

To quote the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, the Association of County Councils, the Association of Directors of Social Services and organisations of disabled people in a joint statement:

> "This makes a nonsense of the Government's recognition of the importance of cash payments and will lead to muddled personal assistance provision for severely disabled people."

Even more pressing than the question about existing beneficiaries after 31 March is what is to happen to severely disabled people who ask the ILF for help between now and 1 April? For the Minister to reply that they must look to their local authorities would be to ignore the reality that many do not have adequate resources and do not give sufficient priority to the needs of severely disabled people.

Another very important question is whether the £117 million available for existing claimants will be enough to ensure that anyone whose condition deteriorates, or whose costs increase, will receive increased help; or will they have to wait for other claimants to die to secure help with their higher costs? That would be a major scandal, yet the fact is that £117 million looks certain to be significantly less than will be needed.

The director's job specification suggests that the ILF's successor body

> "will decide whether its help is the most appropriate."

How will this be decided? Will some existing beneficiaries be referred to their local authorities when they seek more help? Will some be sent into institutions? Is this how the budget will be met, or will more money be made available? And how will reassessment of needs be made if someone's condition deteriorates?

Will the successor body be run by the same staff who now manage the ILF? The answer to that question appears to be no. The current director is to be replaced; so too may some other senior staff. Existing DIG-nominated ILF trustees have not been approached about future service. They have both wide experience and expertise, but is it going to be used?

When will the new trust deeds be published? Meanwhile, can we be assured that there will be no change in the conditions for using ILF payments and, more especially, no change that would restrict beneficiaries in making their own arrangements for buying-in care of their choice? That is also a very important question. Still further questions are these: How will disabled people secure benefits from the new agency? Will they have to apply to their local authority or will the authority apply for the award on their behalf? Will the award be made to the disabled person or the local authority? In regard to the local authority's contribution in services to help a disabled person to live independently at home, will the value of the authority's service be assessed on the basis of hours or pounds?

We already know that, if the director of the ILF's successor body decides against making an award, there will be no right of appeal.

The Spinal Injuries Association argues cogently that a system of direct payments from local authorities to individual disabled people is essential. Their case is strongly endorsed by many highly respected organisations and individuals, including the hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe), who I am very glad to see in the Chamber this evening. The Association of Metropolitan Authorities, the Association of County Councils and the Association of Directors of Social Services—all deeply knowledgeable about the delivery of services—want local authorities to be empowered to make direct payments.

The Minister himself said in the foreword to a very recent evaluation of personal assistance schemes in Greenwich that

> "as well as being cost effective, such schemes offer disabled people a greater degree of independence when compared with traditional forms of provision."

Organisations working to help severely disabled people now want him to live up to that foreword.

The Minister will know of my association, as an honorary officer, with the Alzheimer's Disease Society, in whose humane work I take pride. The society says:

> "The sudden announcement that the fund would stop receiving applications after 25 November was a major shock."

The Minister was told by the society that the gap between the closure of the fund and launching the successor body would

> "entail great hardship for prospective applicants who contact us daily about the demands of caring for a person with Alzheimer's disease."

Much hardship has already been inflicted on carers and severely disabled people alike. If the Minister wants that confirmed, he should speak to Jill Pitkeathley of the Carers National Association.

We know that the successor body will not accept people over working age, and that is seen as wholly unwarranted discrimination against elderly people of high dependency. Is it too late for the Minister to reconsider his decision to exclude them?

If Peter Large cannot answer the questions I have posed in this debate, I can think of no one else who would even attempt to do so on the basis of available information. Already there are thousands of disabled people who lack essential help in consequence of the Minister's announcement in November. They include many who have been denied help from the ILF due to delays in the Benefits Agency's processing of their claims for the higher rates of disability living allowance and attendance allowance. In addition to the hardship that they are suffering, they bear a profound sense of injustice as victims, they argue, of the Government's own failure. With wide-ranging support from right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House, I most strongly urge the Minister to address the hardship that they suffer and the injustice that they feel, in a clear and positive response to all the concerns of severely disabled people I have sought to articulate in this debate.

They insist that the Government must very urgently review their decisions which are seen as having been dictated by the Treasury, not by a genuine resolve to promote independent living and full social equality for severely disabled people.

11.30 pm

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): I am most grateful to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) for allowing me to intervene briefly in the debate. Far from trying to cover the extensive ground that the right hon. Gentleman has already covered with such expertise, I shall make one simple point. It is a point with which my right hon. Friend the Minister is already familiar, and I suspect that, when the Treasury is not listening, he is supportive.

There is a small number of severely disabled people —it is easy to draw up a statutorily tight definition of them —who have been in the habit of receiving direct payments in cash so that they can hire and fire and make their own arrangements for their caring staff. That is immensely valuable to them. It allows, for example, a very severely disabled lady who came to the House not long ago to look after her parents, who require sporadic and unpredictable attention. It allows a number of severely disabled people to make the kind of flexible arrangements that allow them to hold down a job and to travel to and from meetings and conferences—again, those demands are unpredictable.

I am deeply anxious that the new arrangements, however they are set up, may make that difficult to continue. Severely disabled people have already said to me how anxious they are about the possibility that, in addition to their care manager, who has every right to know the details of their condition, there will be an intermediate body, too, to help them to make their own arrangements, so that another body will know all about their condition. If the new body is not to know all about people's condition, what is the point of the additional expense, confusion and difficulty involved in introducing an intermediate body?

I believe that it would coincide precisely with all the principles that the community care reforms were intended to secure—such as independence of choice and self-determination—for direct payments in cash to be made to a small, defined number of severely disabled people. I hope that my right hon. Friend will be able to look sympathetically upon that idea.

11.32 pm

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Nicholas Scott): First, I congratulate the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) on his success in achieving the Adjournment debate, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent for his contribution.

Before I deal with the detailed points raised by the right hon. Gentleman and by my hon. Friend, I pay tribute, albeit briefly, in the warmest possible terms to both the staff and the trustees of the independent living fund for the way in which they have conducted the fund during its existence. When we discuss the legislation for the successor bodies, there will be another occasion on which I shall be able to perform the same task at somewhat greater length. I am deeply appreciative, and I am sure that everyone who has been involved with the fund and has watched its success in meeting the needs of a group of severely disabled people in our society is grateful to the staff and trustees.

May I first of all deal with the specific point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent—whether, in essence, social services providers should be able to deliver cash instead of services to a distinct group of people who need support. I have to say at the outset, whoever may or may not be present, that I can see some difficulties about this. There could well be difficulties about defining the particular groups who may be eligible for payments rather than for services, and some quite important decisions would have to be made about the control of cost in those circumstances.

Having said that, I understand and have some sympathy with the point that my hon. Friend has made. I can understand the frustration of many disabled people at the inflexibility of some of the arrangements that are made for them, designed to meet not their particular needs but the undoubted constraints and convenience which local authority social services departments find that they have to meet.

The tradition has been for local authorities to be service providers, but I hope that my hon. Friend will understand when I say that already I can see that pattern changing. Local authorities are no longer themselves necessarily providing all the services but are the facilitators, the purchasers of services for people from other sources. Many of the voluntary bodies are now going into the business of providing services that local authorities will be able to offer. My hon. Friend may think that this is but a small step away from the concept that he has in mind in this area. It is a matter that we will want to keep under review as we see how things develop, but I will not forget the important point that he has made.

The independent living fund, as we all know, was introduced as an interim measure. I am mildly aggrieved by the right hon. Gentleman's suggestion that it was in some way a mean-minded measure by comparison with the arrangements that had hitherto been made by means of the domestic care additions under the old supplementary benefit regime. Under that regime, I would remind the right hon. Gentleman, 6,000 people were getting those additions at a level substantially below what the 22,000 people that the ILF has been providing for are getting in cash terms.

I do not believe for a single moment that we can be accused of injustice or mean-mindedness in the way that the ILF has been operating compared with any arrangements which existed before. By the time it is handed over in April, some 22,000 cases will be on the ILF's books, with an average award of over £100. It has helped those severely disabled people who did not want to go into residential care but who could not live in the community without a considerable degree of domiciliary support to maintain their independence. That is something that we can all applaud and welcome. I do not believe that it would have been right to seek to continue the supplementary benefit arrangements, which were set at much lower levels of care needs than the ILF.

[Mr. Nicholas Scott]

I remember very well, because I had recently embarked on my job as Minister of State for Social Security and Disabled People when we launched the ILF, that many argued that it was wrong for this to be given to an independent body; they wanted it to be part of the regulated system. My own view is that the success of the ILF has proved that a system based upon individual assessment and on the discreation and judgment of independent trustees has been a considerable success, and has been able to respond much more flexibly to the needs of individual disabled people than any regulated system might have done. That is why we have built on this approach of individual assessment in deciding what the successor arrangements should be.

I think that it is fair to say that the arrangements after April must change. There will be an entirely new set of circumstances with the introduction of a community care system. Local authorities will have the responsibility to produce community care packages for elderly disabled people and others, and to ensure that services are delivered to them. Having come to the conclusion that that is where the main responsibility will lie, the Government decided that there was a level of costs beyond which it would not be reasonable in ordinary circumstances to expect local authorities to go on delivering care.

I believe that a reasonable level has been set. If it is necessary for extra help to be provided by the successor body, it will be open to the social worker who assesses the needs of disabled people to say, "We can provide services up to this level but we believe that a further level of care is necessary," and then to turn to the independent living fund. A joint assessment can then be made by the local authority social worker and the new ILF to ensure that the appropriate services can be assessed and delivered. The payment from the ILF will continue to be in cash. The local authority will, as under present arrangements, deliver its part of the bargain in the form of services. Cash help has been an important part of the ILF concept.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to the 22,000 cases that will be handed over to what we shall call the independent living extension fund in April. Those people will continue to be paid in cash. I am confident that the cash limit provided for the extension fund in the coming years will be sufficient to enable the fund's trustees to ensure that precisely the same arrangements exist. That means that if someone, sadly, finds that he needs extra help to maintain his independence within the community, it will be open to the trustees to increase the level of support, as they are able to do now. That should give real reassurance to the thousands of people who are presently recipients of help from the ILF.

I referred briefly to the 1993 fund and set out the arrangements that are being made. As the right hon. Gentleman rightly said, the new fund will be restricted to those of working age. The elderly—those who are beyond working age—will not be within the purview of the fund. I have crossed swords with the right hon. Gentleman on this issue before. Limited resources are available to the Government—if there were unlimited resources, we would take a different view—and we have to determine priorities.

In the time that I have held my responsibilities, I have deliberately sought not to exclude the elderly from help and support, but to tilt the balance towards the younger disabled, the people who had not the opportunity, because their disability was present from birth or early in their working lives, to build up the savings, pension entitlement and the other things that people with a full working life can provide for themselves in their old age. Therefore, within the resources available to me in the independent living fund 1993, it is right to make that judgment.

The fund will be able to organise in essence a discussion with those of working age who are eligible, so that there may be a tripartite settlement, as it were, between the customer, the local authority social worker and the social worker for the independent living fund. The local authority will be able to provide the first £200-worth of services to the individual concerned, and the fund will be able to provide a balance of up to a maximum of £500 in total.

I do not believe that, in those circumstances, there is anything offensive in our setting an upper limit beyond which it is not unreasonable that people who need help should have to look to other sources to maintain their independence in the community, or to decide, sometimes reluctantly, that the time has come for them to go into residential care. Obviously, at all times I have to balance the responsibility of providing resources for those who need help and the interests of the taxpayer, so I believe that to set an upper limit is acceptable.

The new arrangements should work well and should provide a sensible way forward, in combination with the Government's arrangements for care in the community, to ensure that a substantial number of the most severely disabled people in our society continue to have help through the independent living fund.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fourteen minutes to Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 26 February 1993

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITION

Disabled Persons (Discrimination)

9.34 pm

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): I have the honour to present a petition urging this House to make unjustifiable discrimination against people with actual or perceived disabilities unlawful. The petition reads:

> The Humble petition of people from all parts of the United Kingdom sheweth:
>
> That disabled people must have a right to the same equality of opportunity in all aspects of their daily life as non-disabled people;
>
> That people who are disabled or perceived to be disabled (for whatever reason) are continually having to face widespread unjustifiable discrimination;
>
> That legislation is necessary to outlaw this discrimination.
>
> Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House introduce legislation to outlaw unjustifiable discrimination against people with actual or perceived disabilities as soon as possible.
>
> And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

The petition is strongly endorsed by millions of others and by all the organisations of and for disabled people.

To lie upon the Table.

Disabled Persons (Civil Rights)

9.36 am

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): I beg to move,

> That this House believes that anti-discrimination legislation is necessary to ensure equality of opportunity for people with disabilities; and calls for the early enactment of specific provisions relating to public transport and other public and private services, employment and housing.

Any hon. Member who is lucky enough to come first in the ballot must then decide on his subject. For me, that presented no problem. The motion clearly demonstrates my interest in and commitment to the civil rights of disabled people. We discuss many important issues in the House—many such issues are under discussion at the moment—but I feel that they do not always directly affect our constituents. Not one hon. Member can say, "Thankfully, disablement is not an issue in my constituency."

Many hon. Members of all parties have spent the whole of their parliamentary careers campaigning for the rights of the disabled. Regardless of the party to which they belong or the region of the country that they represent, they have been united in campaigning for the rights of disabled people in this country. We know who they are —many of them are present today—and I pay the warmest tribute to them, as do disabled people throughout the country.

The following early-day motions dealing with the subject stand on the Order Paper: 330, entitled "Civil Rights (Disabled Persons)"; 615, entitled "Caring Costs Campaign"; 1161, entitled "Disability Living Allowance for Children under 5"; 1317, entitled "Disabled Facilities Grant". There are many others. Those early-day motions, which have all-party sponsorship and support, clearly emphasise hon. Members' commitment to the issue. The Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill was introduced in the other place by Baroness Lockwood. Today, in this House, the same Bill stands in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris). All hon. Members and many people in the country know his record as a campaigner and fighter for the rights of the disabled, and I pay the warmest tribute to him.

I and, I am sure, all hon. Members, readily accept that there has been progress, with changes being made to the law and legislation introduced. All that must be welcomed, but we must never accept that we are doing enough. We are not doing enough and we never have done enough. That is why motions in my name and in the names of two other hon. Members have been tabled for debate in the House today.

In many debates we often hear about recent economic achievements. I am prepared to say that there are some people who have done well recently. How would we equate the financial progress that some people in the community have made with that which disabled people have made, be it in personal financial terms or in the development of services or facilities for the benefit of disabled people? I suggest that there is a wide gulf between those two aspects of development.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is my hon. Friend aware that in the first 10 years of the Thatcher Government the richest 1 per cent. in Britain had tax cuts of £26·2 billion? Some of that money should have gone to the disabled. Does he agree that the Government should

[Mr. Dennis Skinner]

do one thing today—at half-past two they should tell the Whips not to shout "Object" to the Bill of my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris)? In that event, we would solve not all but many of the problems of the disabled. I believe that the Government Whips should desist from shouting "Object" and stopping the Bill by almost a secret method.

Mr. Cox: I agree with the comments of my hon. Friend, especially the last part of them. I shall come to those comments later. Hon. Members will be aware of the proposals in the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. I am sure that they are also aware that the Bill was fully discussed in the other place, many speeches were made and it was passed in the other place. I put it to the House that if one Chamber passes a Bill after a long and detailed discussion, surely the other Chamber—this Chamber—needs to take serious account, in its discussion, of what our parliamentary colleagues in the other Chamber have decided. I hope that we will get clear evidence that that will happen in this debate.

I have received some 600 letters from people all over the United Kingdom supporting this motion, but, above all, supporting the Bill to which I have referred. Many of the letters were sad and many were painful to read, leaving a feeling of injustice, a lack of hope and, sadly, often abuse.

I have received many letters of support from organisations which work with the disabled. I shall name a few of them because I think that a tribute should be paid to them for the work that they do not only for disabled people but equally for Members of Parliament in informing us of the issues. The organisations that have written to me include the Disability Alliance, Deaf Accord, the Greater London Association for the Disabled, the National Association for Mental Health, voluntary organisations for anti-discrimination legislation, the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation, the National League of the Blind and Disabled, the Spastics Society and the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People. I have received correspondence from other organisations.

The list of organisations that I have read out clearly shows the enormous interest in the debate and the Bill that is on the Order Paper today. That interest shows that the people who look after the disabled look in turn to us, as the law makers, to introduce legislation to help the disabled and their families.

I said—and I readily concede this—that progress has been made. However, it is clear from many letters that I have received that a great deal still needs to be done. In the next few moments I propose to refer to some of the comments that have been made to me.

In a letter dated 11 February 1993, the Greater London Association of Disabled People said:

> "GLAD—

that is the organisation—

> "has carried out extensive research on the difficulties disabled people experience when using public transport. Our research report 'All Change' showed that in 1986 there were over 465,000 people"—

we are talking solely about the Greater London area—

> "unable to use public transport as a result of being disabled. GLAD sees this as a form of discrimination because if appropriate facilities were provided 80 per cent. of these people would be able to use buses and trains."

I am sure that other hon. Members representing any part of the United Kingdom could make comments similar to those which I have made about the Greater London area. Can we say from the experiences that we have in our constituencies daily that there has been any great improvement since 1986?

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): May I, representing some of the people of Northern Ireland, encourage the hon. Gentleman to proceed down the road that he is travelling? There are more disabled people in Northern Ireland than unemployed—17·4 per cent. of the population are disabled. That is 20 per cent. higher than the figure in Great Britain. Is not it significant that it was the American Senate that gave us the lead in this matter? Will the hon. Gentleman join me in expressing hope that the Prime Minister will bring back from America good news on the matter?

Mr. Cox: The point which the hon. Gentleman makes is relevant. When the Prime Minister comes to the House next week—as one expects that he will—we hope that he will make a statement. Depending on what happens in the debate today, he may well be asked about his commitment. The hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) has made an important point, as he always does in such debates. I pay him the warmest tribute for his work not only in respect of disablement but for other associations in the House.

In a letter written to me dated 24 February, Deaf Accord said:

> "Deaf people are often refused jobs because of their deafness. Such discrimination is the result of employers' ignorance as to deaf people's capabilities, but without legislation we do not believe that the situation will change . . .
>
> There are 4 million hearing aid wearers in the UK, but most public buildings do not have induction loops . . . Deaf Accord hopes very much that Parliament will respond to the overwhelming desire by deaf and disabled people to have their needs met in terms of equality of rights. Without such legislation"—

this is a relevant comment from a respected organisation—

> "initiatives such as the Citizens Charter mean very little to millions of people."

The National League of the Blind and Disabled, in a letter of 22 February said:

> "For many years, especially since 1981, 'The International Year for Disabled People', disabled people have campaigned vigorously for the introduction of anti discrimination legislation so as to give them the same opportunities and choice as every other citizen in the United Kingdom."

The British Council of Organisations of Disabled People, in a letter to me dated 19 February, referring to the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, said:

> "I cannot express to you how strongly disabled people feel about the need for this legislation. Those of us who are disabled members of society often experience open discrimination in our lives. We are particularly indebted to you in that, by giving support to the EDM"—

I referred to early-day motion 330—

> "you too are aware of this."

Almost 300 Members of Parliament have signed that motion.

I have received two other letters. The first is from the Spastics Society, dated 22 February. It reads:

> "More than 60 per cent. of disabled people between the ages of 16 and 64 are neither in work or training. (1992 'Wasted Opportunities' The Spastics Society) . . . Disabled people are 6 times more likely to be refused a job interview even if their qualifications and work experience are the same as a non-disabled applicant (1990 'Equal Chance or No Chance' the Spastics Society)".

My last quotation is from MIND. In a letter to me dated 25 February, it said:

> "Unjustifiable discrimination affects people with mental health problems, as well as those with visually apparent disabilities . . . All disabled people face discrimination when it comes to employment but with mental health problems the 'disability' is always seen as relevant to the job. Education and persuasion has not worked . . . There are precedents for introducing civil rights legislation for disabled people all over the world."

As the hon. Member for Belfast, South intimated a few moments ago, America has had such legislation since 1973. I have given just some of the many views and comments expressed to me by organisations which work day by day with disabled people in Britain.

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): I am delighted with the thoughts that the hon. Gentleman is expressing this morning. I am a slightly disabled person and I find it difficult to go down stairs without bannisters. I always look for a bannister. So I understand what the hon. Gentleman is saying.

I attended a meeting recently at which the Spinal Injuries Association presented a racegoer's guide for disabled people. The man who introduced it at Sandown said, "As usual, my wheelchair tipped over getting here because there are no facilities even at Sandown." He told another story about when he went to the races at Lingfield. Because there was no facility for him to cross the railway line, he had to go to the end of the line and all the way back. So there cannot be anyone in the House who does not believe there is a need for legislation to protect disabled people.

We have legislation on race, which I think is a waste of time. We have legislation on sex, which I think is a waste of time——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. The disability obviously does not extend to the tongue.

Mr. Cox: Despite the last comment, Madam Deputy Speaker, the House will accept that the points made by the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks) are relevant to the debate. I thank him for his intervention.

Taking up the point made by the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington, this Parliament of ours cannot hold its head with much pride. I saw disabled people coming in today. I am sure that they are now in the Strangers Gallery listening to the debate. It will not have been a very easy journey for them to the mother of Parliaments. Let us consider how long it took us to achieve improvements for entry to the Grand Committee Room where people go to attend many types of public meeting. I hope that the powers that be in the House will follow up the need to ensure that our constituents can come and see us whenever they want. We know that such a move would have all-party support.

The organisations that have written to me have said that progress has been made, which we all welcome, but we still have much more to do. My motion calls for legislation. That is undoubtedly the next step we must take. I hope that every Member will take note of one of the comments made by MIND in its letter to me. It is not my comment but that of MIND. It said:

> "Education and persuasion has not worked."

All the organisations that work for and with disabled people call for legislation. Can they all be wrong? Can any hon. Member say that, we do not need to take notice of those organisations or that they are uninformed and out of touch? No one can say that, because we know how in touch and informed those organisations are. That is why today's debate is so important, on the day when the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill is on the Order Paper.

The Bill outlines what is needed—legal rights in law. My motion calls attention to the civil rights of disabled people. It says that anti-discrimination legislation is necessary. Who can object to defining disability in law, introducing a code of practice and clearly explaining what discrimination means to a disabled person? Who can object to establishing a disability commissioner to whom disabled people can present their case against the discrimination that they have experienced?

Would it be wrong for Parliament to support such proposals? Surely not when the other House of this Parliament has done so, in giving the Bill to which I have referred a Third Reading on 4 November last year. Surely the House has a duty to take note of what the other House says about legislation as crucial as that referred to in my motion. That is why my motion and the motions tabled by two other hon. Members are so important.

The views of disabled people, of the organisations that work with them and of the other House of Parliament have all been clearly expressed. I hope that we will start the final stage of a process that millions of people want.

On 17 February this year, *The Sun* newspaper said:

> "We don't want sympathy—just equal rights . . . Disabled people have enough problems to overcome without being treated as second-class citizens."

The Sun is often referred to in this House and it often touches the pulse of public opinion. It certainly did so on that occasion, and I thank the newspaper for its total support in the campaigns on which it has embarked in support of rights for the disabled.

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People knows a great deal about the subject, and we have known each other a long time; I have the greatest respect for him as a Minister. He knows that millions of people will follow this debate and he knows what they are expecting. I beg him not to ignore their views. The Government can win overwhelming support in the House and in the country by supporting the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, sponsored by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe, so that it gets a Second Reading and goes into Committee, following identical progress made in another place. That is the test for the House, for the Minister and for the Government.

I beg the Minister not to destroy the opportunity to demonstrate the Government's commitment—as hundreds of Members have shown their commitment—to the rights and dignity of disabled people who live in our communities.

10.1 am

Sir John Hannam (Exeter): I congratulate the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) on promoting this extremely valuable debate and on his excellent speech, which covered the main issues in the campaign for anti-discrimination legislation, which I totally support.

When President Bush signed the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, he said:

> "Let the shameful wall of exclusion finally come tumbling down."

That Act gave civil rights protection to disabled people in the United States, yet for far too many of the 6·5 million disabled people in the United Kingdom that wall of

[Sir John Hannam]

exclusion remains as formidable as ever, despite the Government's excellent record in improving financial support for disabled people. All hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Tooting, recognise the progress that has been made.

Since I first became involved in the all-party disablement group in 1970, the range of allowances and help for disabled people has increased dramatically and I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Minister for the dedication of his work while holding his present office. It would perhaps embarrass him if I were to dare to think that he would like to support anti-discrimination legislation today, but, like many of his predecessors in that office, he has had to move a step at a time within the limitations laid down by the Treasury, which always perceives potential spending explosions in the removal of barriers to employment, education, transport and access to buildings.

I am proud to join Opposition Members and my hon. Friends in paying tribute to my right hon. Friend the Minister for all that he has done, and I am sure will continue to do, to help to push back the frontiers of discrimination against disabled people.

As the House will understand when I explore some of the various sectors of provision, and as the hon. Member for Tooting so forcefully said, the barriers remain despite our efforts at exhortation and education through all the different Departments. The barriers are still as formidable as ever.

There are more than 6·5 million disabled people in Britain, which is more than 10 per cent. of our population, yet they are denied basic rights that the rest of the population take for granted. Disabled people have no right to legal redress when they experience discrimination every day of every year.

The Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, sponsored by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), would make it illegal for disability to be used as a reason for denying equal treatment in employment, housing, education, leisure facilities, transport and other public and private services. It will provide redress for people who have been discriminated against simply because they are disabled.

If hon. Members doubt whether such discrimination exists, I advise them to take part in the next disability awareness day organised in their constituency. On that day one becomes for a while a disabled person in a shopping centre. One chooses to become blind, by wearing a mask for an hour or so, or to become deaf by wearing ear muffs, or to sit in a wheelchair and push oneself around and one is sent off to try to do some basic shopping, make a telephone call or cash a cheque. I can assure hon. Members that it does not take long to discover what are the barriers and how difficult it is to carry out simple, normal everyday functions.

Sometimes the barriers are accidental and sometimes they are intentional. An example of direct discrimination is when a disabled person is denied entry to a cinema or other public place simply because he or she is disabled. Indirect discrimination exists when only minor or simple adaptations to buildings or premises stand in the way of a newly disabled person retaining his or her job.

Research has shown that, despite legislation to encourage integrated education, the number of children in special schools in 1989 was hardly lower than in 1977. Since we introduced integration in education in the Education Act 1981, 15 local education authorities have increased the number of pupils placed in special schools —some by more than 25 per cent.

More than one third of disabled children under 16 and more than 80 per cent. of disabled students have to accept segregated special facilities. Less than one in five colleges of further and higher education has a policy on the admission of disabled students. The Education Bill certainly reflects the Government's desire that disability should not be a bar to access to education and I welcome the personal interest shown by Education Ministers in getting the legislative provisions in the Bill right for children with special needs. The gaps will, however, remain until the onus of responsibility is switched to the provider, with legal redress for any disabled person who is barred, for one reason or another, by unfair discrimination.

The evironment is another crucial area, as disabled people face inaccessible homes, transport, offices and services. More than 4 million disabled people have mobility-related problems and 1 per cent. of the population use wheelchairs. The National Wheelchair Housing Association has calculated that there is a shortfall of 330,000 wheelchair-accessible houses. As the hon. Member for Tooting said, we do not have to go far from the Chamber to come face to face with areas of this place that are totally inaccessible to people in wheelchairs—for example, the rooms off Westminster hall.

We need to get mobility housing moving again. The number of starts has dropped from 4,733 in 1980 to only 543 in 1989. Even if we are unable to keep up the progress with the number of wheelchair-accessible housing starts, we should aim to get all new housing built to mobility standards. The extra costs at the time of building are minimal, but the benefits provided by wider doorways and other improvements are of value not only to disabled people but to the elderly and mothers with children—in fact, everyone benefits from better ease of movement in their homes.

The same principle must apply to transport, because most buses, taxis and trains are inaccessible to disabled people. British Rail is trying to improve its services for disabled passengers, but stations and current practice still discriminate against them. Travelling in the guard's van with the baggage is more the rule than the exception for wheelchair users. Very few stations have top-class access and facilities for disabled travellers. Steps, heavy doors, inaccessible toilets and cobbled pedestrian areas in shopping centres with no vehicle access for orange badge holders all present great difficulties for routine shoppers and people trying to get to work.

Not only are many restaurants, pubs, theatres, galleries, cinemas and sports halls inaccessible to disabled people, but all can openly deny them the right to use and enjoy such facilities. It took 10 years of pressure from the all-party disablement group to allow guide dogs into the Strangers Gallery with their owners. Before the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) became a Member of the House, he always encountered difficulties when he came here to attend debates. It was following one of his visits that Lord Ashley and I visited the Gallery to find out where the obstacle lay to preventing guide dogs from entering the Gallery with their owners. We found that it was due to one attendant's fear of dogs. That was why it was impossible, for some 10 years, to get proper provision made to allow guide dogs into the Gallery.

If any hon. Member tries to get into a cinema in a wheelchair, he will soon see what happens: he will not be allowed in. Management can insist on advance notice or can limit the number of disabled visitors at any one time. Several concert halls insist that disabled people must be accompanied by a non-disabled person. Some do not allow disabled people in at all. I wonder what President Roosevelt would have had to say if he had attempted to visit one of those halls.

Disabled people face the greatest frustration when it comes to employment. They are three times as likely to be out of work as non-disabled people, they face barriers to professional or managerial positions and their earnings are approximately half the average weekly wage—approximately £100 a week compared with £220 plus a week.

Our employment legislation is baffling because it is all lip service and no teeth, with the 3 per cent. quota scheme brought in under the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944 basically impotent. The latest figures show that fewer than 5 per cent. of public sector organisations get anywhere near fulfilling that quota, yet the 1944 Act has been used to bring 10 prosecutions only. Dare I say it, but Government offices and Departments are probably at the bottom of the list of those who meet the quota, The Home Office quota of disabled employees is 0·4 per cent., the Department of the Environment employs the equivalent of 0·9 per cent. disabled people, and the Foreign Office employs just 0·3 per cent.

The argument has always been that anti-discrimination law is unworkable, that it will create a legal nightmare and give rise to huge extra costs. In November, that legal argument was shot out of the water by no less than the Law Society when its employment law committee produced a report, which concluded that

> "a new law to protect people with disabilities from discrimination was needed."

The lawyers call for new legislation on principles similar to those already set out in the laws prohibiting race and sex discrimination. Using their experience of existing anti-discrimination laws and considering in particular the recent Americans with Disabilities Act, the committee members concluded that legislation here could be effective.

The lawyers' principal conclusions, which are of note to us in today's debate, were, first, that existing means of solving the problems had failed and, secondly, that education and voluntary approaches designed to improve matters were insufficient on their own.

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): I pay warm tribute to the hon. Gentleman for the work that he has done as joint chair of the all-party disablement group and for his work over many years for the disabled. This week I received a parliamentary answer from the Department of Employment that showed that, since 1985, no prosecution has been brought under the 1944 Act. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that central to any anti-discrimination legislation, which we all support, is the establishment of a disablement commission, because we must be able to enforce any new legislation?

Sir John Hannam: I accept that.

It is interesting to compare the changes that have been made to employment legislation for disabled people in other countries. In Germany, for example, the Government increased the employment quota to 6 per cent. and introduced financial sanctions against employers who did not reach that level. The money obtained from those sanctions was ploughed back into improving access and facilities for disabled workers in their place of employment. As a result, the Germans quickly approached a 5 per cent. quota of employment of disabled people. When one compares that with our achievements, it shows that a mixture of the carrot and stick would be the answer if we approched it with determination and vigour.

The employment law committee also concluded that the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill could form a good basis for the new law that it had recommended. However, those lawyers felt that it was too significant a matter to be dealt with under the private Member's Bill procedure and that it should be dealt with by a Government Bill. When I recall what was achieved by the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe when he successfully introduced the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 as a private Member's Bill, I believe that the same can be done again if necessary, if the will is there and the House and the Government are willing to accept the openings offered by the Bill.

I used to believe that the strenuous and worthy efforts of Government and Ministers to follow a path of education and exhortation with employers, architects and various other groups was the way to remove discrimination. When I look at what is happening in the world among disabled people, and when I look at the world as seen through the eyes of those people, I know in my heart that those efforts are not enough. More must be done. That is why I give my support to the campaign on behalf of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. I hope that it will go into Committee and will pass through the legislative processes of the House so that we introduce legislation similar to that introduced in America. That legislation has obviously benefited disabled people. If one goes into any office or department in the United States, one sees a far greater number of employed disabled people than one does in this country. That clearly identifies for me the success of anti-discrimination legislation, and I therefore support the campaign for it.

10.17 am

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): I most warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) on his choice of motion. We have been close parliamentary colleagues for 23 years and I have never known him to falter in conferring whatever luck he has had in private Member's ballots on people with genuine and pressing needs. His decision to make today's debate one about the urgent need to legislate on civil rights for Britain's 6·5 million disabled people will, I am sure, have won him respect and gratitude in all parts of the House and across the country.

My hon. Friend's motion calls for what the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, for which I am seeking a Second Reading later today, provides in full measure. So we are in total harmony. My hon. Friend's motion and my Bill fit like mortise and tenon.

I put it to the House that fully assured civil rights must now be seen as the defining principle of all enlightened policy making on disability. For without full civil rights, the handicapping effects of disability are made even harder to bear by social handicaps for which there is no moral

[Mr. Alfred Morris]

justification. That is why today there is no more important issue for disabled people and those who work to improve their status and well-being than that of civil rights. They insist that this is not an idea whose time has come, but one whose time came when the Committee on Restrictions against Disabled People—CORAD—reported to the Government in 1982.

I appointed that committee of inquiry, as the then Minister early in 1979, because of the force of the evidence put to me by disabled people and their organisations about the hurtful effects of unfair discrimination against them. By then the need to go further than education and persuasion if disabled people were to achieve full social equality was already widely accepted. CORAD's report convinced many more people by its unanswerable case for legislation.

Even so, for more than 10 years one Minister after another has refused to implement the report. Criticisms of their inaction have grown stronger, year by year, vindicated by the impact of the CORAD report abroad, where it was read more widely and with more sympathy than in Whitehall. When President Bush signed the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, he had the courage and intelligence to tell American employers that there are benefits as well as costs in ending unfair discrimination against disabled people. He said:

> "You have in your hands the key to the success of this Act, for you can unlock a splendid resource of untapped human potential that, when freed, will enrich us all".

The American statute, which is wholly consistent with the CORAD report, and often seen as its most important product, is one of many that now give legal protection to disabled people across the world. If it is argued that the American statute will not be fully operational for some years, at least the clock has started ticking there, and the sooner we make a start here, the sooner we shall achieve full citizenship and social equality for disabled people.

As of now,

> " the shameful wall of exclusion"—

which, as the hon. Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) reminded us, is George Bush's phrase—is still as high and formidable as ever in Britain. We could have led the way, as we did in becoming the first country in the world to legislate in 1970 on access to the built environment, but instead of being a world leader we now lag far behind many other countries in terms of protecting the civil rights of disabled people. The tide, however, has turned on those who argue that law has no part to play in achieving full social equality for disabled people, and the question today is not whether British Ministers will go with the tide but whether they will be the last in the developed world to do so.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): I support the right hon. Gentleman, as I have before. Does he accept that the tide has already turned? The Education Bill now being considered in the House contains civil rights, backed by law, for children with special education needs. The principle has been established and acknowledged. Therefore, I hope that we can progress from that in the way that the right hon. Gentleman suggests.

Mr. Morris: I accept that there has been progress and that further progress is being made. As I shall seek to explain in more detail, the organisations of and for disabled people are not, however, seeking only piecemeal reform. They want comprehensive reform. I welcome every initiative to nudge things forward for disabled people in terms of civil rights. But today we have an opportunity to achieve comprehensive reform that will help all disabled people.

One argument used by Ministers against legislative attempts to implement the CORAD report since 1982 was that they were defectively drafted. They said also that education and persuasion, rather than legislation, was still their preferred way forward. In the case of my own Bill —as the hon. Member for Exeter said, the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill—which was given a Third Reading in another place on 4 November last, the Government could not realistically argue that it was defective, so they sat on the fence. Although I suspect, like the hon. Member for Exeter that the right hon. Member for Chelsea (Mr. Scott) is a furtive supporter of the measure, the right hon. Member described his attitude as one of "benevolent neutrality", while a Government supporter, Mr. Robert Hayward, "talked out" the Bill when I first moved its Second Reading in this House on 31 January 1992. Five days later the former Member for Kingswood made a personal statement to the House in which he said:

> "on being asked . . . whether I was talking out the Bill, I replied:
>
> 'I am not going to talk it out; I am going to make my views known.'—[*Official Report*, 31 January 1992; Vol. 202, c. 1259.]
>
> I now recognise that the effect of my words was to mislead hon. Members and that Members were entitled to assume I intended to resume my seat before 2.30 pm. I deeply regret having misled hon. Members in that way. I offer my unreserved apologies to you, Mr. Speaker, and to fellow hon. Members."—[*Official Report*, 5 February 1992: Vol. 203, c. 287.]

Nevertheless, the Bill was blocked in this House and disabled people all over Britain felt cheated by what happened. I am of course, most grateful to my noble Friend Lady Lockwood for having introduced my Bill with skill and success in another place, where it completed all its stages and was given a Third Reading on 4 November. Now it is back in this House and there will be a further opportunity, later today, for it to receive a Second Reading.

As the Law Society says, in its valuable recent report on discrimination against disabled people in the field of employment, the Bill is wholly viable for its purpose. I want to make it clear again today, however, that the Bill's all-party supporters are entirely open to any constructive suggestions for improving its provisions. The Bill makes it illegal for employers and service providers to discriminate unfairly against disabled people. It covers all people with physical, mental and sensory disabilities, and—as the hon. Member for Exeter said—it applies to jobs, housing, education and training, leisure facilities, transport and access to buildings.

The Bill's sponsors, when I first presented it to this House, were drawn from every party, large and small. They included the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), the hon. Members for Exeter, for Moray (Mrs. Ewing), for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body), for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) and for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd). Their very names demonstrate that the argument now is not so much a clash between right and left, but one between right and wrong. If still further proof were needed that this is not a party issue it can be found in an admirable speech in another place on 4 November by Lord Renton, formerly Sir David Renton and the Prime Minister's predecessor as Member of Parliament for Huntingdon, when he appealed to the Government to find time in this House for the Bill. He said: "It is extraordinary"——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I must remind the right hon. Gentleman of the tradition that there should be no such direct quotations. I am sure that he will be equal to paraphrasing the passage very nicely.

Mr. Morris: I do appreciate and accept that point, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Lord Renton said that he regarded it as extraordinary and not very creditable that there had been such opposition or nonfeasance in the past. He said that when the Bill returned to the House, the Government should at least provide time for its discussion. He also added that it would be better still if Ministers could take on the Bill themselves and make it a Government Bill. Much to their honour, other Conservative peers gave the Bill their backing, just as many Conservative Members have also given it strong and consistent support.

All Members of whatever party know from their postbags that enactment of the Bill is anxiously awaited not only by their constituents who are disabled, but by all the organisations that work with and for them. I myself have had a huge correspondence in support of the Bill, from people of all parties and of none, and I want briefly to quote some of the letters sent to me by disabled people. Peter Large, whose distinguished work for disabled people all of us acknowledge, describes the Bill as providing:

> "the essential foundation on which campaigns of education and persuasion can be mounted and true goodwill as opposed to 'do-gooding' can flourish."

He says as well:

> "In the absence of such legislation people with disabilities will never be enabled fully to enjoy their rightful place in society."

Peter Large is uniquely well qualified to make these comments. I appointed him to chair CORAD in 1979 and he says now:

> "We were right to believe that campaigns to educate and persuade are too costly and ineffective in the absence of a legislative foundation of acceptable behaviour."

I want also to quote from a letter sent to me by Sir John Wilson, than whom very few people in any country can have given more distinguished service to blind people. A blind person himself, Sir John wrote simply:

> "Good luck for your Bill on anti-discrimination. We'll all be rooting for you on Friday".

Richard Wood, the executive director of the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People, who is also very highly respected for his work with and for disabled people, wrote:

> "I cannot express how strongly we feel about the need for this legislation."

He went on to say that it is not piecemeal, but comprehensive reform that disabled people want to see.

In this regard I want to recall again the words of Martin Luther King, when he dismissed piecemeal reform and reliance on education and persuasion to end racial prejudice. He said:

> "Morality cannot be legislated but behaviour can be regulated. Judicial decrees may not change the heart, but they can restrain the heartless".

We must all insist that it is an affront to civilised values, in a country claiming to respect human rights, for a citizen with a past or present disability to suffer prejudice, exclusion and both demeaning and hurtful discrimination for no other reason than her or his disability. It is an utter disgrace that to the restrictions that disability imposes there are added the gratuitous extra handicaps that attitudinal and physical barriers create. Let no one imagine that such discrimination is a thing of the past.

Dr. Julia Schofield, a woman doctor, who has spent most of her life helping fellow blind people, was recently awarded the MBE. When she arrived at Buckingham palace for the investiture, she was ordered to leave her guide dog, Amber, outside. She said afterwards that she felt demeaned and that her day was one tinged with sadness. She said:

> "Inflexible bureaucracy has marred this special day for me and harmed the cause of the blind".

She described Amber as her "independence and confidence" and said:

> "A guide dog isn't a pet. Mine is a valued part of my life. We need each other at all times".

A young policewoman was turned away from a charity event because she is confined to a wheelchair. Ironically, she became disabled while displaying conspicuous bravery in tackling a gunman.

Look also at the blatant unfairness among employers who say that they will never shortlist disabled job applicants. My hon. Friend the Member for Tooting was eminently right to place strong emphasis on the inexcusable attitude of some employers.

Wendy Lovatt, 21 years old, who was made severely deaf by meningitis after a serious road accident when she was seven, earned a brilliant degree at Manchester university. The only job she has had since graduating was a temporary one in a shop during the Christmas period. Her hearing aid enables her to use to a telephone and work normally, but again and again Wendy has been rejected by accountancy firms in favour of other applicants whose qualifications are inferior to her own.

> "To mention you are disabled,"

she tells me,

> "makes it virtually certain that you will not even be interviewed."

Is it any wonder that unemployment is three times higher among disabled than non-disabled job seekers? That statistic alone shouts the word "discrimination".

Again, who can justify the treatment of a successful candidate for a senior civilian post with a police authority who, because of her disability, but with no justification on the ground of special risk, was refused entry to its pension scheme? I speak with some experience as chairman of the managing trustees of the parliamentary contributory pension scheme.

If anyone still doubts that hurtful discrimination exists, he need look no further than a statement by the right hon. Member for Chelsea for a clear endorsement of what I am describing. He said that he had

> "no doubt that some employers' recruitment practices discriminate unfairly against people with disabilities."

The right hon. Gentleman also said:

> "there exists too much prejudice against disabled people in this country and that leads to unjustified discrimination."

The right hon. Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave) then Secretary of State for Health, told a CBI conference on employment and mental health that

> "People who suffer mental illness can find themselves discriminated against. Ancient prejudices are still to be found in the 20th century workplace."

Nowhere is prejudice and discrimination more deeply entrenched than in employment practices. In the queue for

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jobs, disabled people are the tail-enders in the longest queue in Britain today. Yet for them unemployment is a double handicap and leads to double despair. They seek not sympathy but social fairness; not the dependence of state benefits but the dignity and independence of becoming taxpayers; not expressions of compassion but practical concern for their right to become full citizens in a society about which one highly skilled disabled person wrote to me recently:

> "It would be an exaggeration to describe my present status as that even of a second-class citizen".

All of us know that the 3 per cent. quota scheme is now a dismal failure. More than three quarters of employers subject to its requirements do not meet the quota. There have been no prosecutions of defaulting employers since 1979. Large numbers of employable disabled people aged 16 to 64—perhaps as many as 1·2 million—are excluded from official unemployment statistics. Although they are very much out of work, they are hidden by the Government's figures. At present only 1 per cent. of the work force is registered as disabled; yet, according to official surveys, well over 3 per cent. are registrable.

For their part, Ministers take the same view of the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944 as they do of my Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. They prefer education and persuasion to legal requirements, but the more repetitively they state their view, the more tragically unemployment grows among employable disabled people. That is not, however, the clinching argument against the Government's preferred way forward. If education and persuasion alone can achieve equal opportunities for disabled people, why is the Government's own record as an employer so poor? They are huge employers and if education and persuasion are better than legal requirements, why have they neither educated nor persuaded themselves to employ more disabled people? How persuasive is the advocate who cannot persuade himself? That is the clinching argument against what has been the Government's preferred view of the way forward.

In 1991, the Department of the Environment had 0·9 per cent. of its employees who were registered as disabled; in 1989 the figure was 1 per cent. The Department of Health employed 0·7 per cent. registered disabled, the same figure as for 1989. The Home Office employed 0·4 per cent. in 1991 compared with 0·3 per cent. in 1989; and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office employed 0·3 per cent. in 1991 compared with 0·5 per cent. in 1989. With figures like that to explain, Ministers are being told, not only by disabled people but by many employers, that it is not what they say that impresses those whom they lecture about education and persuasion, but what they do. I must make it clear that my figures about the record of Government Departments came from the Cabinet Office in December.

None of the sponsors of my Bill has ever claimed that it can be a magic wand to remove all discrimination over night. We know that we cannot right the wrongs of centuries in a moment of time but we insist that attempts to educate and persuade that are not founded in fundamental rights set by law will end in failure. To succeed, any educational process requires a sound and rational base. That was one of the reasons for legislating on sex and race discrimination, and it applies with the same force now to disability. That is why the Employment Select Committee in its report on employment and disability of December 1990, commended the case for equal opportunities law to the Government. The Select Committee argued, quite rightly, that no amount of voluntary codes of good practice, or public relations exercises like the lamentable "two ticks" scheme, can be sufficient to make employers recognise the need for justified change to which they are resistant.

Practical social gains will result from enacting civil rights legislation, other than for its direct beneficiaries. The greater integration of disabled people into the mainstream of our national life—as workers, consumers and taxpayers—adds to wealth by reducing their dependence on benefits and increasing the economic contribution that they can make. This is no academic point. When the Americans with Disabilities Act was passing through Congress, the realisation of that effect secured the support of more and more of its former critics. They began to talk not only of its possible cost, but of its undoubted economic and social value.

There will no doubt be references in the House today to the costs of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill *[Lords]*, but, of course, the Bill cannot become law without direct Government involvement in quantifying and determining its costs. What disabled people ask is why those who speak only about the costs of legislating never seem to reflect on the costs to them of leaving the law as it stands. How do commentators who preoccupy themselves with costing legislation quantify the economic loss to the country of unemployment on the present grievous scale among disabled people seeking work? By common consent, they are among the least fortunate and most distressed of all the victims of the jobs famine.

Employers and others who now so hurtfully discriminate against disabled people argue that they are doing nothing illegal, but where does that leave young Wendy Lovatt and other disabled people who yearn for an opportunity to show that they have abilities as well as disabilities? What they say is that if the injustice they have to endure is allowed by existing law, then the law must be changed. In other words, if the law permits palpable wrong, there is manifest need for new law. Again, if piecemeal or ad hoc reform is suggested as an alternative to the Bill, disabled people will want to know how and within what time scale it will remedy the suffering that they endure. Their most earnest wish is that the House should take the further opportunity that we have today to support the Bill, and I urge all right hon. and hon. Members to accept Lord Renton's eloquent plea by giving the Bill their backing.

The Bill's passage through another place was an important milestone. Never before has a Bill to end discrimination against disabled people been approved by either House of Parliament. The Law Society's support is also most heartening, as is that of so many Conservative Members for the early-day motion sponsored so successfully by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Dr. Berry). Our purpose is solely and simply to secure for 6·5 million British people the rights that everyone else takes for granted.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I have been listening to the right hon. Gentleman with great attention, interest and sympathy. Before he finishes, may I let him and the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) know, as they have both taken such a keen interest in transport for disabled people, that London Transport has come up with a new bus that is specially adapted for disabled people? I hope that it will be just right for them. I shall unveil the first next month. Let us hope that that will be a move forward for disabled people travelling in London.

Mr. Morris: I very much welcome that important initiative for disabled Londoners. I rejoice in the launch to which the hon. Gentleman has referred. Right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House will, I am sure, want to send congratulations on, and all good wishes for, the success of that important initiative.

Our purpose today is simply and solely to secure for 6·5 million British people the rights that everyone else takes for granted. If the concept of citizens' rights means anything, it must mean that disabled people can now no longer be denied full social equality.

I am reminded again of that striking and very moving photograph of two baby girls, widely displayed by the Spastics Society, with the caption:

> "One of them has cerebral palsy, the other will grow up with full human rights".

That is what the motion and the Civil Rights Bill are all about.

10.47 am

Mr. Malcolm Moss (Cambridgeshire, North-East): I congratulate the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) on coming top in the ballot and on introducing such an important motion. I add to that congratulations to my hon. Friends the Members for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) and for Blackpool (Mr. Elletson). The latter was sitting next to me, but, when he realised that I was about to speak, went off to get a cup of coffee.

Disabled people are an enormous cohort in our society and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) said, 6 million to 7 million people are deemed to have some form of disability. That is approaching 10 per cent. of our population. No society or Government could ignore a group as large as that, with specific and identifiable needs. Some 2·5 million of that total are disabled people of working age and that represents a large problem. During the International Year for Disabled People in 1981, the BBC commissioned a Gallup survey, which showed that around one third of the population was seriously affected in one way or another, either personally or as a result of family connections with disability in some shape or form.

Today, we refocus on the problems of disabled people and more specifically on their civil rights. There have been many debates over the past few years, both in the House and in the other place, on these very topics. I noted that a private Member's motion on disabled people was tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis), who I am delighted to see in his place this morning. I have no doubt that he will make his usual important contribution. In March 1991, an Adjournment debate on these matters was initiated by the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson). The Second Reading of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill took place in January 1992. The Bill was introduced by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshaw (Mr. Morris), who is renowned as one of the most important Members in terms of supporting the disabled.

The same Bill was introduced by Baroness Lockwood in the other place in February 1992. It fell because of the general election, but it was reintroduced and obtained its Second Reading in June that year. The Bill now stands on today's Order Paper. Our attention was drawn to that fact by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), who made his usual sort of intervention, got his usual sound bite on the record and then disappeared for his coffee.

It is not only the involvement of Members in the problems of disabled people that is important. The interest that is shown by Members is clear from the good attendance in the Chamber this morning. We should be very much concerned, however, with the aspirations of disabled people. They wish to lead as normal a life as possible. Naturally, they want a fulfilled life. They want to live independently. They hate being labelled as disabled or handicapped because that denotes some sort of inferiority or second-rateness. They wish to be free to choose what they want. They do not wish to be dictated to by Members, by the Government or by public authorities on what is best for them.

Disabled people want the right to a job. They want to be allowed to undertake productive work that gives them fulfilment and yields a tangible result. They reject sympathy and condescension. They certainly resent being patronised. They need the dignity that we enjoy from our employment and our lives and they wish to achieve it by determining their own destiny.

Those are tall orders and they present a great challenge to both disabled people and society as a whole. My experience with disabled people began about 10 years ago when I was mayor of a small town in my constituency, Wisbech, and I was introduced for the first time to the voluntary sector. It was a revelation. I pay tribute to the many thousands, if not millions, of people who day by day devote their time and energy to the disabled. It is sad that many people do not realise how much work goes on behind the scenes. So much work is unrecognised, but tremendous help is being given to make the lives of the disabled people more acceptable.

I pay tribute to the many organisations in my constituency that are engaged in helping the disabled, including the Fenland Association for Community Transport, the local physically handicapped and able bodied enterprise, the St. Raphael club, the talking newsletter, the Alzheimer's Disease Society and many others.

Later, having been mayor of Wisbech, I became the chairman of the local social services committee of Cambridgeshire county council. I was introduced for the first time to the public sector involvement in caring for disabled people and in providing social services across the board. The local committee was an extremely useful organisation because it regularly brought together the public, the private and the voluntary sectors. That process involved carers and the cared for, including disabled people. It gave them a say in the range and quality of the services on offer. There were regular inspections of establishments and the committee received reports. I found it a vital liaison between the providers and their customers. I advocate that sort of local organisation as a model of best practice and I have no doubt that it has been adopted elsewhere. In Cambridgeshire, I found it an extremely important experience.

The Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970, which was introduced by the right hon. Member for Wythenshaw, has been extremely important. My own experience brought this home to me when, about two years

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ago, a wheelchair-bound young lady, Miss Helen Brown, who resides at the Octavia health centre at Wisbech, wrote to tell me that she found it extremely difficult to get into the town centre to do her shopping and other normal things. She challenged me to push her into town and back. I take note of the recommendation of my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter that when we next have a disability awareness day we should become involved. I had my experience of involvement, as I have said, two years ago.

Most carers are probably women and probably most of them weigh about 10 stone. Most wheelchairs seem never to go in the direction in which one wishes to send them. I am no 10-stone weakling but a 14-stone—overweight—ex-rugby player. Even so, I found it extremely difficult to negotiate the footpaths into town from the Octavia health centre. As a result of that experience and the determination of the wheelchair-bound young lady, we caused the council to make the necessary changes en route so that in future those being pushed in wheelchairs would not have negotiate a nasty pavement edge every few hundred yards.

My experience brought to light the problems that arise with pedestrianisation. Most of us welcome the process of releasing our town centres to the pedestrian so that he or she can shop properly, but it causes immense problems for disabled people, especially those who need to get their cars close to a shop and those who rely on wheelchairs. There are several problems in my constituency in this regard. It is important that local authorities, especially planning authorities, take into account the needs of the disabled when they are considering pedestrianisation. There are far more people who need to get close to shops than is generally recognised.

It is clear from our personal experiences and our postbags that there are disadvantages for disabled people in almost every area of daily life. They are to be found in housing, education and training, transport and employment. The disabled experience difficulty in gaining access to buildings as well as to leisure and arts facilities and public services. The hon. Member for Tooting said that the consequences of the problems faced by disabled people embrace every Member of this place and that is true. Not a week passes without our receiving correspondence on the matter.

What is the Government's record? Have they responded to the problems? Since 1979, total spending on benefits, both for disabled people and those who care for them, has increased from £3 billion to about £15 billion in the last financial year. That is an increase of about £9·9 billion, or 300 per cent. in real terms. It would be churlish to suggest that that is not a commendable record. Next year, an extra £300 million will be made available. There will be two new benefits—the disability living allowance and the disability working allowance. The DLA will give extra help for the first time to about 250,000 less severely disabled people. Some problems have arisen, as we all know from our postbags, because of the volume of the claims that are being made. I know that my right hon. Friend the Minister has taken this problem on board. We now have a special streamlined service to ensure that claims are processed as quickly as possible.

The Government have an influence on employment, leisure and living in the community. There has been talk this morning about the 3 per cent. quota for employers. Many people think that the system is extremely flawed. It deals only with the recruitment of disabled people. In other words, it does not promote effective employment policies. It also depends on people registering as disabled, which in many cases conflicts with their self-image. They would not prefer to see themselves as individuals, not as some kind of stereotype.

Many people would agree with the Public Accounts Committee's comment that the quota scheme is "ineffective, outdated and unenforceable". The problem is that, although it is imperfect, to abolish it would probably weaken the position of the disabled by sending the wrong signals to employers. I urge the House and the Government to examine every alternative before that legislation is thrown out or replaced.

Over the years, the Employment Service has been tasked with examining more carefully the needs of the disabled and I am pleased to report that it is now exceeding its target of placing disabled people in jobs. All Employment Service training schemes and others to help people back into work are available to the disabled. Financial help is available to employers to help with special difficulties and applications under that heading are increasing all the time.

As to leisure, the two main considerations are access to arts facilities—particularly theatres—and sports. In the Second Reading debate on 15 June 1992, Lord Rix spoke of the problems of access to London theatres and arts functions generally. The ADAPT fund, started in 1989 and run jointly by the Government and the Carnegie Trust, provides resources to help arts establishments, including theatres, to make their premises more accessible to those with disabilities. Although that fund exists, an enormous amount of work remains to be done in London theatres alone.

In 1991-92, the Sports Council spent £1 million promoting sport for people with disabilities—money extremely well spent. That was brought home to me when I watched the paralympics last year, which were a revelation in more ways than one. I refer not only to the standards achieved by the disabled people, but the tremendous joy of fulfilment that the participants experienced from participating in sport at that high level. That was an example to us all of what can be done with determination and with facilities provided through Government funding. That event was massively helpful in bridging the perceived gap between the disabled and their needs and the general public. The more money that can go into sport and be used to involve the disabled in that mainstream human activity, the better.

As to living in the community, the Community Care (Residential Accommodation) Act 1992 comes into effect in April. The total community care transition grant for the next financial year will be ring-fenced at £565 million—an enormous sum. There was lengthy debate in the Chamber about whether the fund should be ring-fenced and I am delighted that the Government ultimately saw fit to ensure that.

The independent living fund will be replaced by two successor bodies. One will maintain cash payments to all existing beneficiaries and the other, for those aged 16 to 65, will help the most severely disabled to live independently in the community. That arrangement will provide services at the same cost of residential home or nursery home care and councils have been allocated an extra £26 million for that purpose.

The motion in the name of the hon. Member for Tooting and the Bill both relate to discrimination, which is difficult to define because no relevant legislation or monitoring body exists. There is certainly evidence of disadvantage, to which I have already alluded. There are two types of discrimination. Evidence of the positive form is, unfortunately, mainly anecdotal, but obviously there is and will continue to be discrimination—particularly against those seeking employment. Passive discrimination can be the unthinking actions that we all take without giving any consideration to the needs of the disabled. Because we do not give them enough thought, we effectively bar them from participating or using facilities. I have in mind access to buildings, transport and educational facilities.

The Bill deals not only with those matters but homes in on anti-discrimination employment legislation. A plus point is that any such measure would send a positive message to employers. The problem is that disability can be relevant to job performance and it could be problematical to a prospective employer, who needs to fit the talents of the interviewee with the job, to bear in mind any legislation pertaining to the disabled.

Such legislation is also difficult to draft, because the definition is so uncertain. If uncertainty exists, employers may be more reluctant to hire disabled people and the relationships that we have tried to foster between employers and the disabled over the years could be damaged—and produce a result contrary to that which we envisaged.

The commission that would have to be established would be expensive. The Equal Opportunities Commission established in 1990 cost £4·6 million and it is expected that a commission to protect the civil rights of the disabled would cost more.

I am sure that most right hon. and hon. Members present in the Chamber are extremely supportive of the purpose behind both the motion and the Bill that was originally introduced by the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe. The nub of the question is whether we go for gradual and piecemeal reform, much of which has already been achieved, as against comprehensive and overarching legislation. Although I sympathise with the Bill's sentiments, it has serious and wide-ranging cost implications for employers, the transport industry and the construction and property industries. For example, the cost of installing a lift in an underground station would be £750,000. If one replicated that expense across the whole London Underground network, the capital cost would be in the region of £500 million. Perhaps the Bill seeks to achieve too much at a single stroke. It has experienced difficulty up to now in that regard and we will have to wait until my hon. Friend the Minister speaks before we know whether attitudes have changed in respect of attracting Treasury support.

Mr. Bowis: I would not want the House to be confused. My hon. Friend is right that costs will be incurred in adapting underground stations for use by the disabled. We must weigh up that cost, but I hope that we will accept it as right, proper and necessary. That is why those of us who represent London constituencies constantly press London Underground and British Rail to do more. As to employment, I trust that my hon. Friend does not believe that the Bill would do anything absurd. It aims to ensure that, other things being equal—a phrase used time and again when the Bill last came before us—there should be no discrimination against a person simply on the ground of his disability.

Mr. Moss: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention and entirely agree with his remarks. I certainly did not misunderstand that point. The problem is that it would be extremely difficult to make that case hold in law, were the Bill to get on to the statute book.

11.9 am

Ms. Liz Lynne (Rochdale): I express my support and that of my party for the motion and for the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. I thank the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) for enabling us to debate this important issue; it is only a pity that we are not debating the Second Reading of the Bill.

The first attempt to improve the position of people with disabilities in this country was made in 1968. Unfortunately, it was unsuccessful, but it led to the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970, which gave local authorities various functions to assist disabled people and made particular reference to transport and access to buildings.

More than 20 years later, many people with disabilities still have great difficulty in gaining access to all buildings. The one that we are in at the moment is a prime example which has already been given by many hon. Members. Some 63 per cent. of disabled people in London rely on public transport, but can often use the services provided only with much difficulty. A further 29 per cent. are unable to use public transport. People with disabilities need the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. More than that, they have the right to expect their Parliament to respond to their demands and enshrine their rights in law.

My party would go beyond that and would say that all British people should have their rights enshrined in a Bill of Rights. We are talking not about an insignificant but vocal minority of the population who are clamouring for special treatment, but about a large section of the population who should be heard and, even more important, listened to.

A Gallup poll published during the International Year of Disabled People in 1981 showed that 29 per cent. of the population were affected by disability, either directly or by family ties. The precise number of people with disabilities in this country is hard to determine accurately, but it is thought to be about 6·5 million. The Royal National Institute for the Deaf estimates that about 7·5 million people have some form of hearing loss. That is not an insiginficant minority. Furthermore, it is clear that those people are not asking for special treatment but are demanding the same rights as the rest of us enjoy. For example, a survey in the south-east showed that 40 per cent. of employers thought that disabled people were unsuitable for employment. This is clearly unacceptable and a law must be introduced to protect disabled people's rights.

The response that is often made is that legislation will not change people's attitudes. My reply is that surely some things in society are unacceptable and hon. Members should say so. One of those things is discrimination in any form, but in particular against people with disabilities. I

[Ms. Liz Lynne]

grew up in a home for people with disabilities which was run by my mother and encountered discrimination daily. One of my best friends was four or five years older than me. She and I used to go all over the place together and people spoke to me but never to her. That was one form of discrimination. If we had a civil rights or anti-discrimination Bill, it would at least give a signal to the country that people with disabilities are human beings and have the same rights as everybody else. That was one of the things that inspired me to go into politics.

Enshrining those rights in law will help people to think about the issue of disability and discrimination. Many members of the public and employers may be unaware of the level of discrimination that is experienced by people with disabilities. Many points that may seem obvious to us taking part in this debate may not be thought about by other people. An example of that was access to polling stations at the general election. I am sure that no one intended to prevent people with disabilities from voting, but none the less it was reported that only 12 per cent. of polling stations at the last election were accessible to all and as a consequence some disabled people were unable to vote. I hope that that will be considered before the local elections in May.

Mr. McMaster: The Government provide a 50 per cent. grant to make polling stations accessible by providing temporary ramps. Why not offer the option of a permanent ramp, if that is more suitable, thereby giving schools, churches and many other community buildings permanent access?

Ms. Lynne: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. That is exactly the point that I was trying to make. It is a disgrace that buildings are not accessible on a regular basis so that people have a right to use them and do not have to say, "I have a disabled person with me. May we have a ramp?" Again, that discriminates against disabled people.

Another fine example comes from the Government. The Railways Bill makes no provision for groups representing people with disabilities. Most notably, the disabled persons transport advisory committee was not properly consulted about the services that were to be provided. If education and exhortation are so effective, why have they not reached the Department of Transport?

The case for a comprehensive civil rights Bill for people with disabilities is overwhelming. No doubt hon. Members will have received much briefing material on this issue and many will have seen some of the statistics, which highlight why the Bill is so important. As the hon. Member for Tooting and many others have said, there continues to be massive employment discrimination against people with disabilities. They are six times more likely to be refused a job interview and two and a half times more likely to be unemployed than the overall population. No doubt, discrimination in employment is a major reason why two thirds of people with disability live below the poverty line.

Why has there been an almost 100 per cent. increase in homelessness among physically disabled people? We should not think of all disabled people as having mobility problems or being in a wheelchair. Wheelchair users account for only 5 per cent. of disabled people. We should not assume that other people with disabilities do not meet discrimination. The Royal National Institute for the Blind has catalogued examples of discrimination, including a partially sighted person who was asked to leave a gallery when she used an magnifiying glass to view a work. A blind man was barred from a conference because he was not accompanied. A deaf and blind man was denied use of leisure facilities if he was unaccompanied. Much has to be done and the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill is a significant step forward. It will give people with disabilities the confidence that they have Parliament and the law behind them in their struggle for equality.

I urge all hon. Members to support the motion and, most important, if it is carried, to allow the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill to have a formal Second Reading later this afternoon so that we may proceed with the debate in Committee.

11.18 am

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): I congratulate the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) on introducing this debate. The subject benefits greatly from a public airing, whatever our views on the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. I endorse many of the comments made and I contribute to the debate in that spirit. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms. Lynne). She, like other speakers in the debate, produced moving and sincere examples of unacceptable discrimination against disabled people. I join her in deploring those.

I am reticent about speaking in the debate. I am white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, healthy, white and male and I may be educated—although others might have a different opinion about that. All that makes me a little reticent about speaking for those who are so much less fortunate than I am, especially as I shall not take up the cry of the many and respected disability lobby groups which are pressing for general legislation in the area.

I am wary of a general legislative solution, although I do not rule it out completely. I doubt whether the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, which was presented to the House for Second Reading on 31 January 1992, would have had my support, although I remain open minded.

I start from the position held by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State. He said on Second Reading:

> "There is much common ground between the parties in the House. We all know that there is still too much unjustified discrimination against disabled people. We know that that is wrong and often has a cruel impact on the quality of life of disabled people. It is also remarkably stupid, because the wealth of ability and talent that disabled people have to offer —a variety of enterprise in society—is significant, and it is a waste of those talents if they suffer unjustifiable discrimination."—*[Official Report*, 31 January 1992; Vol. 202, c. 1251.]

The main reason for legislation is to change attitudes. Only by changing attitudes shall we achieve the non-discriminatory society that we all seek. Legislation on its own cannot create equality. We have learnt that from the introduction of non-discriminatory legislation in other areas.

Another argument against the case for legislation is the huge and disproportionate cost that may result from the implementation process. There is no way in which we can ensure that the public and private sectors allocate resources to the objectives of the Bill in the most effective way.

The costs involved in, for example, converting all public transport to satisfy the requirements of such legislation could far outweigh the benefits. It would cost about £500 million to put lifts into every tube station in London and that money could be used to provide free transport by taxi for disabled people in London. That might be a better use of resources and the remaining money could be used elsewhere.

There is a danger that general legislation will simply create an orgy for the lawyers, no doubt funded by the already burgeoning legal aid bill. I became more wary when my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) drew attention to the fact that the Law Society was in favour of non-discrimination legislation. To paraphrase the words of Mandy Rice-Davies, "It would say that, wouldn't it?" The lawyers are the people likely to benefit financially from all the litigation that would be likely to ensue. I remain open minded on the subject, but I am doubtful about the efficiency of such legislation.

The Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill would also impose an additional burden on business through the proposed regulations. I had the privilege and luck to present my own private Member's motion on small businesses earlier this Session. One of our great concerns is that small, medium and large businesses increasingly bear the huge cost of legislation that has laudable aims, but which imposes costs of implementation that run far beyond the benefit.

I give the example of nursery schools. We introduced regulations for nursery schools and town hall officials rushed round trying to force expensive improvements on village hall enterprises which would simply have put them out of business. I am glad to say that the rottweiler of the Department of Trade and Industry, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Corportate Affairs, who is responsible for deregulation, managed to get a handle on that and to get the regulations revised so that the enforcement was more reasonable. That highlights the danger of the big bang approach.

I shall not go through the details of the Bill and explain how they might cause public authorities and private businesses to spend disproportionate amounts. I am sure that the House is familiar with those dangers. I simply draw the attention of the House to the rules about accessibility for shops, hotels, restaurants, banks and other public buildings. Laudable as those aims are, the deluge of requirements on already strained public and private enterprises at a time of recession could be extremely damaging for jobs and might eventually be damaging for the prospects of disabled people.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): I have details of a specific area of discrimination in the hon. Gentleman's constituency which has been documented in a report on the general election produced by the Spastics Society, entitled "Polls Apart". It was discovered that there was a lack of accessibility in polling stations in Colchester, North. Would the hon. Gentleman be in favour of legislation that sought to tackle that problem? Such legislation would not have the problems that the hon. Gentleman has listed. It is difficult for disabled people to exercise their right to vote in general elections.

Mr. Jenkin: I note the point that the hon. Gentleman draws to my attention and I should be interested to find out further details. The matter has not been drawn to my attention until now. I point out to the hon. Gentleman that we have a system of postal voting. All the parties in my constituency, including my own, and the local authority went to great trouble to ensure that disabled people received a postal vote.

Mr. Barnes: That is not good enough.

Mr. Jenkin: I realise that the hon. Gentleman does not think that that is good enough. However, he should consider how much it would cost to put a ramp into every polling station in every constituency. Would that honestly be the best way to spend money when there are so many other demands and so many other ways in which we can help disabled people and which disabled people might choose for themselves?

I favour the step-by-step approach adopted by the Government. It can target the limited resources of both the state and private enterprise so that they can be used more effectively. In employment, the Government ensure that all their employment training schemes are open to those with disabilities. The entry criteria are often skewed in favour of disabled people.

We were the first country in Europe to produce a code of good practice for employers which gave them guidance on the best way in which to seek to achieve the 3 per cent. target. We have recently introduced PACTS—placing and assessment counselling teams—to advise individuals and employers. In 1991-92, the teams helped more than 85,000 disabled people into employment. There are special grants available to employers to help them with the difficulties involved in employing particular disabled people.

We are committed to the idea that education should not be a barrier for disabled people, but should provide further opportunities for them so that they can participate in society to the full. The Further Education Funding Council and local education authorities have specific duties to have regard to the requirements of students with learning disabilities. In the Education Bill, the special needs category has been updated and strengthened compared with the Education (Schools) Act 1991. About 2 per cent. of children are categorised as having special needs and we send some of them to special schools. I pay tribute to Kingswood Hoe and other special schools in my constituency, which do a marvellous job under difficult circumstances. The Education Bill will increase the right of parents to choose their children's school. Moreover, if the LEA refuses a statement to a parent who has exercised his right to ask for one, that parent will have the right of appeal to a new special educational needs tribunal.

In transport, improvements have been made to the orange badge parking scheme to enable more disabled people to park their vehicles close to important facilities and services. We are also allowing increased parking times on yellow lines. Badges are now available for drivers with severe upper limb disabilities as well as those who have difficulty walking.

British Rail is committed to providing disabled access to all Inter-City services and BR has its own guidelines on the refurbishment of its stations. By the year 2000, all London taxis will be suitable for use by disabled people. Already, nine out of 10 new buses have recommended features for disabled persons. The Department of Transport is encouraging low-floor buses.

The new building regulations, which came into force in 1992, provide that disabled people should have full access to all floors of new public buildings. Provision is also made for those with sensory impairments. The Department of

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the Environment is considering whether to extend those requirements to non-domestic buildings undergoing alterations and possibly also to new housing.

In the national health service, £1·1 billion per annum is spent on the disabled and long-term sick. The number of occupational therapists in the national health service has increased by 76 per cent. to nearly 6,000 since 1982. The number of local authority occupational therapists has increased by 146 per cent. to more than 1,700. The number of physiotherapists in the health service is up by 28 per cent. and the number of speech and language therapists is up 57 per cent.

In addition to everything that I have mentioned is all the financial help that is given to disabled people. Total Government spending on benefits for the long-term sick and disabled has trebled since 1978-79—an increase of £9·9 billion in real terms. More than 2 million people are in receipt of disablement benefits of one kind or another, compared with only 360,000 in 1978-79. An additional £300 million is expected to be made available during 1993-94 as we introduce the two new benefits—the disability living allowance and the disability working allowance. The invalid care allowance has also been improved. Premiums are paid on income support and we are, of course, extending the independent living fund.

I wish to end my remarks on a note of caution. Out of a total Department of Social Security budget of £74 billion, which is rising inexorably—to around £90 billion within three years, according to a speech by the Secretary of State—we spend £14·9 billion a year on the disabled. That is three times more than we were spending in 1978-79. That must be set against the background of a public sector borrowing requirement that will rise to perhaps £50 billion in the next year.

I am pleased that the Department is putting in work on the fraud issue. The Government are extending the funding of fraud work by £10 million and that is expected to produce a return of £100 million. It is hoped that the total fraud identified and stopped will increase to nearly £1 billion-worth each year. That is surely a good use of resources because it means that we shall have more money to spend in other areas.

We must ensure, however, that the resources that we devote to the cause of the disabled are used to the best of possible effect. We should not be afraid of asking questions about the whole system by which we deliver those resources. The Department of Social Security spends £3·5 billion merely running itself. Is there no scope for increased efficiency? The average employee costs £41,000 a year, compared with only £33,000 in the Inland Revenue. What is so different about the handling of problems in the DSS and the Inland Revenue? What makes the employee costs of the DSS so much more expensive?

When the system attempts to reform itself by simplifying the benefits structure, as with the introduction of the disability living allowance and the disability working allowance, the management system proves unable to cope and incapable of adapting to change in the way in which Ministers intended it to—as we all know from our constituency mail bags—leaving people vulnerable and without the money that they need. Moreover the so-called simplified system involves a form consisting of 40 pages and specifying 11 grades of assessment. That is not in the least bit conducive to efficient administration.

Mr. Alfred Morris: The hon. Gentleman has presented a fairly rosy picture of how well disabled people have been doing. He has looked back to the 1970s and examined what has happened since. Will he accept from me that what disabled people say is that, whereas average earnings have increased by more than 20 per cent. since 1979, disability benefits have increased by only 1 per cent? For disabled people and their organisations, that is the centrally important fact. Much of the increased expenditure has come from the increase in the number of beneficiaries of allowances that go back to the 1970s. That is what they argue to me and I am sure that it is what they will say to the hon. Gentleman. I ask him to pay careful attention to what disabled people themselves are saying.

Mr. Jenkin: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for that intervention, which gives me the opportunity to emphasise that I do, indeed, listen to disabled people. I am in touch with the Colchester Society for the Mentally Handicapped. I have received its petition about the Bill and have discussed these matters with it. I do not, however, think that we can escape from the problem, to which I am drawing the attention of the House, that there are finite resources. The corollary of what the right hon. Gentleman says may be that we are spreading the resources too widely and too thinly and that we need to concentrate them on areas of greatest need.

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Nicholas Scott): My hon. Friend has touched on two or three matters that are important to him and certainly to the Department, although they may fall outside the main theme of our debate. I do not want to go over the reasons for our early problems with the implementation of DLA, except to say that we have now largely dealt with those problems and a proper service is being delivered.

There is a real difference between the activities of the Department of Social Security and the Inland Revenue. The Inland Revenue is based largely on well-established and clear-cut rules. Much of the administration of social security benefit depends on adjudication officers, reviewing officers and appeals officers, who use their discretion in determining the benefits to which disabled, elderly and needy people are entitled under the system. That is bound to be a more expensive system than one running on strict legislative lines.

My hon. Friend mentioned the length of the DLA form. I understand why some people find that form daunting. I can only say that it is the price that we pay for the prize of self-assessment. Until now, access to disability benefits has depended on medical examinations which have often been intrusive and offensive to those claiming the benefits. The move to a system whereby disabled people themselves can assess the impact of their disability on their lives and the quality of their lives is a great prize, but has inevitably required us to ask for more information from the disabled customer than we have asked for hitherto.

Mr. Jenkin: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. I hope that he does not mind my asking questions in a spirit of genuine inquiry and to further the debate.

In the longer term, I believe that we need to look again at the whole system and to consider how to free resources not only to reduce the national debt but to maintain and improve provision for those in real need—not least for the disabled, who need state help to give them their dignity, their rights and their place as full members of society.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton): The line of my hon. Friend's argument in terms of releasing resources does not take into account the purpose of the Bill, which is that, in terms of employment opportunities for people with disabilities, there is a specific log jam. The amount of resources that the state spends on keeping people who are extremely able and who have tremendous talents to offer sitting at home day after day and year after year would be available to others if only we could persuade them of the opportunity that they would offer in the workplace. I ask my hon. Friend to take that into account when he puts the economic argument.

Mr. Jenkin: I entirely accept my hon. Friend's point. I emphasise that the Bill, which is the subject indirectly of the motion, covers a wide area. If specific employment measures were put in place, it would be better to deal with the issue on a piecemeal basis rather than create general rights which may not necessarily be enforceable except at disproportionate cost.

I was finishing my point about the whole system of social services as it relates to disabled people. The consequences of the shortage of resources may mean that we need to examine specific parts of the system that do not relate to disabled people and parts of the system in which the present public provision can be substituted by methods of private provision. But that is another debate for another time.

I wish to end by quoting the words of my right hon. Friend the Minister of State. On 31 January he said:

> "may I say with all possible passion that disabled people are not a race apart from the rest of society. They are of us and we are of them, and we owe them a duty to ensure that unfair discrimination is reduced and eventually, we hope, eliminated. Our common humanity, whether we are able or disabled, should transcend the differences between us. I say to people who are still blinkered to the potential contribution of disabled people to out society, 'Recognise and utilise that potential on behalf of your enterprises, whatever they may be'."—[*Official Report*, 31 January 1992; Vol. 202, c. 1256.]

Perhaps that is the best epitaph and the best response to the point of my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning).

11.42 pm

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) for winning the ballot and choosing this important private Member's motion. He has done the House and the country a great service this morning.

I am grateful that I am following the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin). As he developed his speech, I watched the Minister—for whom many of us have some respect—become more and more uncomfortable. That was the sort of support which the hon. Member for Colchester, North could have done without.

The whole of the hon. Gentleman's speech reminded me of someone who knows the cost of everything and the value of nothing. He started by telling us that he was reticent in speaking in support of disabled people because he was an Anglo-Saxon white white—I think he was white twice—male and educated. He should not have been reticent at all because he did not support disabled people and what the 6·5 million disabled people in the United Kingdom are saying.

The hon. Gentleman argued that legislation would not end discrimination. I have not heard any Labour Member argue that legislation would end discrimination. The hon. Member for Colchester, North did not go on to explain how no legislation would end discrimination and that is the issue which is before us today.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am grateful that I have caught your eye in the debate because I want to participate in it. I believe that I have perhaps a valuable contribution to make and I think that I have some of the skills that allow me to make that valuable contribution. I have the right to make that contribution, not only because of your courtesy in calling me but because all of us in the House are equal.

One can imagine how it would have felt to arrive at the door this morning and be told by the Doorkeeper, "We know that you are able to participate and we know that you want to participate, but you will not be allowed to participate. You will not have any rights to make a contribution." That is exactly what disabled people are told daily in all spheres of their lives. Doors are closed in their faces both metaphorically and literally in many ways —metaphorically when employers do not short-list disabled people simply because they are disabled, and literally when pubs and restaurants turn disabled people away simply because they are disabled.

Many people have championed this cause for much longer than I have, not the least of them being my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) and many noble Lords. Our friends Lord Ashley and Lord Rix are among those who have done a great service.

I think that some Conservative Members have misunderstood the Bill. It is about unjustifiable discrimination. There is no doubt that there is discrimination and that it is unjustifiable. I am not speaking simply on behalf of one political party, although that is the view of the Labour party. The all-party disablement group of which I am secretary widely holds that view. We have also heard views expressed well this morning by Conservative Members.

This is the last point in the triangle of discrimination which must be dealt with. We have equal opportunities legislation and race relations legislation, but we still do not have legislation to outlaw discrimination against disabled people and give them some rights. In 1989 Lord Strathclyde said:

> "The Government prefers to rely on securing voluntary commitment of employers through providing information, advice and, where necessary, practical and financial help".

I am often told that I look like Lord Strathclyde. I hope that I do not sound like him if that is the sort of nonsense which he talks in the other place.

There is no doubt that we need anti-discrimination legislation. The Government's policy depends solely on education to change attitudes. As has been said, centuries of education have not yet reached some Government Departments. It is clear that education has not worked and that it will not work.

No one who supports anti-discrimination legislation is kidding himself that, if such legislation were implemented, discrimination would disappear overnight. However, if

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such legislation were implemented, attitudes would change for the better over a period. What is just as important is that such legislation would be enforceable.

The Government's line is that anti-discrimination legislation would take away the good will that disabled people enjoy. What good will? Why should disabled people have to depend on good will? The Bill is about rights. It is fundamental and deserves the support of all hon. Members.

Disabled people do not ask for good will, sympathy, paternalism or philanthropic gestures from on high: they ask for rights and we should listen to them. There is discrimination in many fields, and employment has been referred to many times this morning. The 1988 report of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys showed that 31 per cent. of disabled adults were in employment while 69 per cent. of able-bodied people, the general population, were in employment.

Discrimination against disabled people is worse than that in terms of employment. As we have heard, disabled people are less likely to be short-listed for a job, interviewed or given the job even when they are often the best candidates. If they get the jobs, they are more likely to be lower paid because those are the sorts of jobs which employers offer them.

I refer to the first report of the Select Committee on Employment for the 1990-91 Session which recommended that anti-discrimination legislation was the right way forward. The Committee called on the Government to explore urgently the possibility of equal opportunity legislation for the employment of people with disabilities and report to Parliament on the potential effect and costs in the labour market. To the best of my knowledge, that has still not been done. It needs to be done urgently. It could be done by simply allowing the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill to go through this afternoon and move on into Committee.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that although that may be a nice point—using the phrase in the old-fashioned sense—we are debating a motion. The Bill is further down the Order Paper.

Mr. McMaster: I certainly accept that, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was concentrating on stopping discrimination against disabled people and making the point that the Bill would help. I shall put myself back on the tracks now.

Discrimination happens in many ways, not least in the provision of access. We all have anecdotes about injustices suffered by disabled people. They may turn up at a restaurant and be told, "It is not for people like you." They may find that guide dogs are refused entry to public places. People in wheelchairs are refused entry to some buildings. They are physically unable to enter other buildings because the buildings are not adapted.

Disabled people are also denied access to facilities such as training. If disabled people are to find work, they must have proper access to training. For deaf people, that could mean the provision of interpreters or scribes. Blind people may need braille services. Such provision is necessary.

We have heard about discrimination in transport provision. Access is bad. Sometimes when it is difficult for a disabled person to get on to a train because of steps, he or she suffers the indignity of being manhandled on to the train. I do not apologise for supporting legislation that would help to deal with such problems. There is a rumour abroad that the Government are planning targeted legislation to outlaw discrimination against disabled people in employment matters. But disabled people have to get to work. They cannot do so unless proper transport links are provided.

There is also discrimination in housing. When people become disabled after being able bodied they may have to move away from the Community in which they have lived all their lives because all the disabled and special needs housing is elsewhere. Some housing authorities believe that they know best and tell disabled people which house will suit them best. We all know of people who become disabled, having adapted their house when they were able bodied, and find that their house is no longer suitable or that they need further major adaptations.

I remind all hon. Members that disability for the most able bodied among us is only an accident away and any of us could face the problems that I describe at any time. The most fundamental right, which is enshrined in the Bill that the motion supports, is the right of disabled people to be full and equal citizens. They should have the right to be treated with dignity. They should have the right to be as independent as they possibly can and to be as dependent as necessary on the services that they require. That cannot be achieved without anti-discrimination legislation.

We have heard the argument that anti-discrimination legislation would be difficult to draft. Those arguments have been effectively destroyed this morning. Other countries have achieved such legislation. America has the Americans with Disability Act 1990. We could improve on the Bill. If drafting is a problem, let us allow the Bill to go into Committee where we can improve it and perhaps make it perfect or more perfect.

We need not only to legislate but to enforce. The 1944 Act was an important piece of legislation. It introduced the 3 per cent. quota. It is a law which is more honoured in the breach than in the adherence. Only 24 per cent. of employers achieve the quota. Most Government Departments do not achieve it. Many achieve less than 1 per cent. I understand that the Prime Minister's office achieves 0 per cent.—not one disabled person is employed there. We have the spectacle of the Department of Employment awarding local authorities and other employers which achieve a quota of 1 per cent. The Department responsible for enforcing a law awards people for breaking that law by two thirds.

Sections of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986 remain to be implemented. The Government have made it clear that they do not intend to implement them at least for some time. They intend to watch what happens with community care. That is foolish because the remaining sections of the Act would have been invaluable in implementing the community care arrangements that will be put in place in April.

It has already been said that most of the available evidence on discrimination is anecdotal. In preparation for this morning's debate I looked into that. The House of Commons Library has provided me with some information. A research note states:

> "The extent to which disabled people are discriminated against in the community is difficult to assess, other than through anecdotal evidence"—

so it is true that the only evidence available is anecdotal—

> "since there is no legislation outlawing such discrimination, such as there is for race and sex discrimination."

So the reason why only anecdotal evidence exists is that there is no legislation. The note continues:

> "Further, there is no body appointed by the Government to work towards the elimination of discrimination and to monitor cases of discrimination, as do the Commission for Racial Equality and the Equal Opportunities Commission"—

and as would the disablement commission proposed in the Bill. If we want to get our hands on the evidence that hon. Members have said does not exist, the way to do so is to create a disablement commission so that it can do that job.

If anyone is in any doubt about why we need a disablement commission, I bring to their attention an article written by Richard Ingrams in the *Observer* on Sunday 21 February. It said:

> "One of the more amusing"—

mark that word—

> "stories to come out of the crazy city of New York concerns the attempt by the authorities there to provide public urinals for the citizens . . . After much lobbying from activists the mayor eventually drew up plans for a number of urinals to be erected throughout the city. Then the powerful disabled lobby intervened, protesting that the loos were too small to admit wheelchairs. It now looks as if the New Yorkers will not get their urinals after all. The story illustrates the tyranny wielded by American campaigners for the disabled. And there are signs that the same kind of thing is starting to happen here."

So it seems that disabled people in New York are blamed for people being unable to relieve themselves in public urinals there.

I drew a different conclusion from the story. Later in the article, Richard Ingrams suggests:

> "It is surely obvious, however much one sympathises, that disabled people (by which is generally meant people in wheelchairs) cannot enjoy the same freedom of movement and opportunity as the rest of us".

He uses the story about the loos to support his argument. One could arrive at his conclusion that the tyranny of disabled people stopped the loos being built. Or one could conclude that the loos should have been made more suitable for disabled people. Such discrimination is not exclusive to America. It happens here all the time.

There is a groundswell of opinion in favour of the legislation. I am aware that many other hon. Members wish to speak and I want them to do so because the groundswell of opinion is fast reaching the House of Commons. I have much more that I could say, due largely to the excellence of the briefings from the officers of the all-party disablement group and from Victoria Scott, our researcher, but I shall conclude my remarks. I urge the Government not to object to the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill later today. I was here when a similar Bill was talked out and I shall take careful note of anyone who objects and along with other hon. Members, I shall ensure that other people know who they are.

I advise any Conservative Member planning to use the word, "Object", to telephone Bristol and ask the fellow who talked out the last Bill on the subject exactly what happened. I am not glad that that Bill was talked out, but I am glad that he lost his seat because he has been replaced by an excellent Member of Parliament who has supported the disabled.

If the House does not support anti-discrimination legislation today we shall be disappointed, but I assure the House that its day will come.

12 noon

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in the debate and, with other hon. Members, I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) for giving us the chance to air this important subject.

The crux of the matter seems to be whether there is a need for legislation. I say unequivocally that there is. We are trying to give disabled people civil rights and opportunities consistent with those of other citizens and to establish a mechanism, through a commission, to deal with discrimination. The background to the debate is that people have questioned whether discrimination exists and, if it does, to what extent it impedes the day-to-day activities and opportunities of disabled people.

If I may paraphrase the speech by Lord Henley, the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, in a Second Reading debate in the Lords, when he expressed certain sympathy with the underlying aims of people who wish to put on the statute book legislation to deal with discrimination, he said that the crux of the matter was the manner in which that was achieved. He expressed a preference for education and, although education is welcomed and should be an on-going part of the life of everyone who is trying to get across the need and realities of disabled people, frankly it is not enough.

I also pay tribute to the Government's record, as they have tried to improve the quality of life for people with disabilities in a range of measures, and especially through the benefits system. However, we must question whether that is enough. Will education fill the gap? No, it will not.

If we simply rely on educating the public and employers, or anyone who could have an active role in enhancing the opportunities and rights of people with disabilities, it will be a very long-term exercise. That will take too long and I want to speed up the process. I want us to be proactive and to try to bring about the equality for which hon. Members on both sides of the House have expressed a preference.

Anecdotal evidence about discrimination has been mentioned and how it applies and influences people's thinking. There is sufficient evidence in certain areas, especially in the media, to show that discrimination still exists. Discrimination within the media has a strong influence because it reaches so many people, and I shall give the House two examples. I do not intend to name on the Floor of the House the two publications concerned because I took the matter up directly with their editors, who have apologised and assured me that it will not happen again, so I believe that it would be unfair to name them. However, it is important to share with the House what I consider to be a monstrous example of discrimination in the media.

A cartoon appeared in the colour supplement of a national Sunday broadsheet in October last year. In the background, one could see a notice which said:

> "Welcome to the double-arm amputees therapy group."

The cartoon depicted standing underneath the notice three double-arm amputees and a tearful lady with arms and with a handkerchief, saying, "I want a hug". The facial expressions of the amputees show bewilderment because they are unable to offer her the solace that she seeks from their therapy group. One could comment on the pure bad

[Mrs. Angela Browning]

taste of such a cartoon, but, frankly, if there were anti-discrimination legislation the cartoon could not have been printed.

I am on record as having an interest in a group of people who come under the heading of disabled—people with learning difficulties or mental handicap. Perhaps that is the most difficult area because discrimination against such people is not always perceived by the general public. Often it is not apparent on first sight that a person has a difficulty. None the less, prejudice exists and such people experience the pain of discrimination.

A disgraceful one-page article about young people who suffer from autism appeared in a bi-monthly magazine for people with interest in a particular area of transport. I shall go no further as I do not want to name the magazine. The article sent up the condition, and the editor had apparently only just discovered that people with autism take a particular interest in certain types of transport, and began by saying that the information for the article came from a lecture given by an eminent doctor on the subject, and said:

> "One member of the staff is literally on the floor in hysterics—he has just discovered what he has been suffering from for years".

The article goes on to say that perhaps "we can all claim" a reduction in the poll tax as "confirmed mental defectives". The mocking article ends with a pseudo help-line number of about 12 digits and an invitation to phone Auntie Nora if people think that they are suffering from the condition.

One of the most worrying aspects of that disgraceful article is that it was almost certainly read by people who are suffering from autism.

Mr. Dicks: I appreciate my hon. Friend's argument, but will she please bear in mind that disabled people are all different? My colleagues take the mickey out of me and I like it. I would rather have that than people feeling sorry for me. Will she bear that in mind when discussing such articles?

Mrs. Browning: As my hon. Friend has challenged me, I hope that the House will not mind if I give some personal detail. I am the mother of a young man who suffers from the condition, and when I read that article I wept, so I hope that my hon. Friend will understand my concern that people with the condition, which is a life-long handicap, may read that rather jokey article which says that they are suffering from a "terminal illness"—a pun on the word terminal. I assure my hon. Friend that the pun would not have been within the rationale of people suffering from the condition.

When I spoke to the editor of the magazine and asked whether he would have written a similar article about race, he said no. If people suffering from autism had had legislative protection, that editor would not have printed that article without consulting lawyers. He would have been told that he was infringing statutory legislation and, therefore, the article would not have been printed.

Such articles represent painful discrimination, bad taste and certainly do nothing positive for people with disabilities; they can only do damage. They put into the public arena the idea that such discrimination is somehow okay and acceptable. If we are to educate people in terms of employment practice and social policy, such articles do nothing to help that process.

Mr. Jenkin: I congratulate my hon. Friend on her moving and powerful speech and the case she is making for civil liberties legislation for people with disabilities. Does she agree, however, that it does not put an individual beyond the pale of civilisation simply to question the efficacy of general legislation and the cost involved? Perhaps she will take the opportunity to distance herself from the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster), who seemed to exemplify the tyranny of certain lobby groups and how their lobbying can be misused.

Mrs. Browning: My hon. Friend kindly accepted my intervention on the subject of costs and the economic factors involved in introducing such legislation. I shall deal with that matter later when I consider training and workplace opportunities. I fully support the need for legislation, but most people would accept that a certain amount of pragmatism must be exercised. No one is suggesting that every public or private building should spend thousands of pounds to improve access to people with disabilities. We must view any change in a practical manner, but we must try to move forward because at the moment there is a sense of frustration as a result of stagnation. People cannot see how we will progress fast enough to meet the needs of disabled people.

It has been suggested that employment rights should be enhanced to facilitate disabled people to join the mainstream in the workplace. Given my particular interest in learning difficulties, I would be the first to acknowledge that that often presents a problem to the potential employer. In America, which has been mentioned many times today, that problem has been met by the employers themselves who are actively seeking ways to facilitate the employment of people with learning difficulties. They are not waiting for state-imposed suggestions.

Hon. Members may be aware of the American "buddy" system whereby someone works alongside the person with learning difficulties while he settles in. That buddy also acts as a mediator between him and other employees who may initially find his behaviour a little strange. The buddy will help that person to enhance his communication skills.

One of the difficulties for people with disabilities is that the initial time at work can be most traumatic. It is so frustrating when one finds an employer who is prepared to employ a person with disabilities to see that initiative break down after a few weeks because certain problems were not anticipated. The Americans have overcome that difficulty with a positive attitude and we have a lot of good practice to learn from them. It is good to see that instead of new regulations being imposed on employers, those employers are acting as catalysts and looking at ways to make the initiative work. That is the healthiest approach.

I should like to draw to the attention of my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) the economic arguments in favour of employing people with learning difficulties. In that connection, it is also important to consider the role of education and training. Reference has already been made to the Education Act 1981 and to the Education Bill before the House and the enhanced opportunities that it gives for statementing, integrated education and various other measures. I support totally such changes, but for what purpose? Is it right that we should take such active measures that give children with disabilities and their parents heightened expectations?

We are now providing more specialist education for such children to bring their natural talents and skills to the fore—my goodness, they have many to offer society. But after that, they hit the buffers. It is a good thing to bring more and more of those young people on, but we should at least consider what will happen to them when their education and training is finished. It would be a cruel trick to provide enhanced education and training programmes and to raise expectations only to realise that we have not moved any further in terms of providing employment opportunities. We must give that group of people the opportunity to take their place in the work force.

I cannot cite specific figures to demonstrate the economic savings, but we are aware of the amount of money that the Government spend on benefits. Surely it makes economic sense for people who are able to take their place in the work force on a full or part-time basis to be able to do so. In that way they can make a contribution, the same as anyone else. That is not only a civil right which any individual should enjoy, but it makes economic sense given the amount of money that the state now has to spend to support people with disabilities. Very often those people are isolated and lonely and that causes added anxieties and problems.

It is a tragedy for people with disabilities, and those close to them, when they are unable to fulfil their potential to work. But that also leads to those people suffering from other medical conditions, particularly of a psychological nature such as depression and a hundred and one other things. At the end of the day all those things cost the taxpayer money. It must make good sense to consider the economic argument in favour of providing work for people with disabilities, but we must also consider it in terms of the cost of not allowing them to work. In humanitarian terms alone, we can do more for such people, but in terms of the economic argument it must make sense to provide more employment opportunities for them.

Hon. Members have already mentioned the 3 per cent. target set for employers who employ more than 20 people. Many areas in the public sector, regretfully, do not get anywhere near that 3 per cent. target. It is interesting to note that district councils have a good record of meeting the quota, but the Department of Health and county councils do not have such a good record. I cannot understand why. Surely the Government could consider how we could improve good practice and share that good practice.

People who take on the challenge and make it work have a wealth of experience that could be shared with other potential employers, whether in the public or private sector. My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North spoke of the burden on business. I know of many small businesses that employ fewer than 20 people who actively go out of their way to employ—I do not mean that they create artificial work—people with disabilities. I believe that information about how they overcome their practical problems and their approach to them should be shared. If people shared such information with their local chambers of commerce and were more vocal, it would lead to great improvements.

I support the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill because it will concentrate minds. As the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) said, the Bill will not change the world but it will raise the profile of people with disabilities. It will concentrate minds and it will lead to best practice in the public arena which others can emulate. I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate. I welcome the Bill, which has my wholehearted support.

12.20 pm

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning), whose personal testimony and persuasive arguments in the Chamber today will, I hope, be heard and heeded by Ministers. I am also grateful to the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) for introducing the debate and to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) for the fact that there is a Bill before the House, albeit not for debate.

It is significant that December 1992 marked the end of the decade for disabled people, launched by the United Nations. Late last year, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Boutros Boutros Ghali, said of the decade:

> "When the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 1981 the International Year for Disabled Persons, few realised that this would herald a whole new era for those with disabilities. So successful was the Year that it has come to be regarded as a milestone in the long struggle of disabled people for equal rights. During 1981, the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons was drawn up, based on the principles of human rights, self-determination and equalization of opportunities. The World Programme sets forth a new and challenging approach that can open the way to a future in which disabled people may participate fully in society."

The Secretary-General continued:

> "I wish to invite Governments . . . . to renew their support for the World Programme of Action, which will in turn improve the quality of life for people with disabilities around the world."

That gives us an appropriate context in which to ask the Minister what the United Kingdom Government are doing in response to the challenge of the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Earlier, some of my colleagues had a meeting with the Minister and the Prime Minister. I was glad that there were signs that the Prime Minister acknowledged, at least in principle, the need to consider using anti-discrimination legislation. That would be a step forward. We hope that we shall achieve more than that today and that the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill will be given its Second Reading—I realise that we cannot discuss that Bill in detail in this debate.

It is disappointing that more progress towards anti-discrimination legislation has not been made. There are 379,000 disabled people in Wales—twice the number of unemployed people in Wales—which puts the disability dimension into perspective. I have received representations from the Wales Council for the Disabled, which drew my attention to cases of which it is aware. It stated:

> "Pubs, cafes and restaurants do refuse disabled people because 'they upset the other customers'. Offices are deliberately designed with floor areas just below Building Regulation criteria requiring full access. Theatres and cinemas have turned away disabled people because they are a 'fire risk'."

[Mr. Dafydd Wigley]

Howard John, the director of the Wales council for the Disabled, continued:

> "While discrimination on the basis of gender and race has rightly been outlawed in Britain, there is no legislation to protect disabled people from the effects of public and institutional ignorance, fear and prejudice. Our experience shows that, however much we may wish, goodwill will never be enough. The rights of disabled people must be enshrined in policy and in law."

That encapsulates the argument.

Only 12 months ago a Bill was blocked in the House, which was highly regrettable, and many hon. Members have drawn attention to that action. Although the rules that will be effective at 2.30 pm theoretically allow one hon. Member to shout "Object", I believe that as we shall have had a debate on the subject for five hours, the rationale of allowing one hon. Member to shout "Object" to stop a Bill is incorrect and should not be allowed. The fact that we have had a debate to air the matters should enable the motion to proceed and one hon. Member shouting "Object" should not constitute a reason to stop the Bill proceeding.

Although there may be difficulties with the Bill—I accept that there are some practical problems and I listened with care to the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin)—if it is allowed to proceed, amendments could be tabled in Committee. If some aspects of the Bill have high expenditure implications, they could be phased, with orders to introduce measures at different times.

The House has clearly shown its wish for the legislation to make progress. Early-day motion 330 has been signed by, I believe, 286 hon. Members. If we add the Opposition Front-Bench team, who do not sign early-day motions, we see that almost half the House has formally signified support for such legislation. If the number of names on the motion exceeded 325, how would the Government respond, in view of the traditions of giving a positive response in such circumstances?

A number of examples of discrimination have been given. The physical layout of the House and the electoral process—we all know examples of polling booths that make it impossible for the disabled to gain access—present problems. Employers often have a subconscious prejudice. They do not want to be deliberately nasty to disabled people, but their reasoning contains a subconscious element. At the back of their minds they wonder whether a disabled person might be a nuisance or an embarrassment or might cause an adverse reaction among customers, suppliers or fellow workers. So many such attitudes are based on ignorance and must be confronted. We need the framework of law, not for good employers who are already conscious of their responsibilities, and possibly not for the evil employers who will not be persuaded of their responsibilities even if laws are introduced, but to upgrade the argument so that there is an awareness equal to that which now exists in the context of race and sex.

I have examples from my constituency and my own experience in the world of employment. I know of young, disabled people who have undergone training, only to be told by fellow workers at the end of the course that, although up to the job, the disabled people will not even reach the shortlist. There is little doubt that such decisions are based on a prejudice against disabled people which closes opportunities to them.

Requirements exist in education, but they must be stepped up. So often, schools and colleges are without adequate facilities for disabled people. It is a disgrace that many local education authorities, universities and colleges have shown so much inertia. There are also many difficulties involving the integration into ordinary schools of disabled children and those with learning difficulties. Practices vary greatly in different parts of Britain.

There is also discrimination in the world of leisure. I am aware of a club in my constituency to which a father used to take a girl with learning difficulties. He was told not to take her as she might embarrass the others who came to the discos and other events. That is disgraceful, but such practices occur—I see that hon. Members are nodding their heads to show that they know of such incidents. Therefore, we must define in law the civilised standards that we should expect as a norm so that people have a measuring rod.

A case was highlighted in Cardiff in a report in the *South Wales Echo* of 11 February 1993.

The headline reads:

> "Disabled Andrea is shown the door".

The story goes as follows:

> "Disabled council clerk Andrea Rowe was ushered out of a city centre cinema when staff saw her in a wheelchair. The 31-year-old spina bifida sufferer says she was 'totally humiliated' when asked to leave the MGM cinema in Cardiff's Queen street as she and a group of four friends queued to see Whitney Huston and Kevin Costner in 'The Bodyguard'".

Speaking of the person who asked her to leave, Andrea said:

> "He did not even speak to me—he told my friends. And when he was told to speak to me he said, 'I'm sorry, we don't have the handicapped in here.'".

When Andrea asked why she could not go to see the film like millions of other cinema goers throughout the couintry she was told, "It is our policy." That is why we need anti-discrimination legislation. How long must people like Andrea wait for a new law?

Legislation of this sort will not cost a great deal and there must be a monitoring system to keep an eye on its progress.

We have heard about housing and transport already. I agree that there are large cost implications for transport and the measures that we seek will have to be implemented over time—but the sooner we start, the sooner matters will be improved.

There is even discrimination in the benefits system. People with similar impairments receive vastly different amounts, for instance, according to their work records, age or marital status. An unemployed disabled person on a war pension can get up to four and a half times as much a week in benefits as someone with a similar impairment who has not worked or lived in the United Kingdom for the past 20 years. That is discrimination.

As for the NHS, Mencap has drawn our attention to the fact that disabled people with learning difficulties have been banned from giving blood by the blood transfusion system even though nothing in their conditions can justify that sort of discrimination.

An even worse form of discrimination is that against depression associated with mental illness. Often, people who have suffered from depression are stigmatised as having a mental illness and all the unnecessary connotations that go with it. That stigma opens a Pandora's box of prejudice against them and blocks their job opportunities—all for no reason at all.

Other countries have introduced anti-discrimination legislation. Why on earth cannot Britain follow the example of the civilised countries that have moved in this direction and found it helpful? We need legislation to establish civilised standards.

It is not a question of legislating to create the right attitudes; of course we need more than legislation for that. But we need legislation as the basis on which the right awareness can be built. We can then create an atmosphere in which prejudice is seen for what it is.

The legislation that will soon be commended to the House contains many provisions: the duties of a commission to eliminate discrimination, to carry out general investigation and to investigate specific complaints; the provision of assistance for people with disabilities so that they can obtain their rights; and the review of the working of the Act and published codes of practice. Those are all practical measures that can be introduced under the legislation.

The Government plead cost implications, but they must also consider the price that disabled people are paying because of the lack of this sort of legislation.

I conclude with a reference drawn to my attention by Deaf Accord, which says that it hopes

"that Parliament will respond to the overwhelming desire by deaf and disabled people to have their needs met in terms of equality of rights. Without such legislation initiatives such as the Citizens Charter mean very little to millions of people".

I hope that that message will go back to the Prime Minister via the Minister of State. I hope that the Government will allow the legislation to make progress today. If for any reason they cannot do that, I hope that they themselves will introduce and find time for legislation very soon, so that these rights can be enshrined for the millions of people who need them.

12.33 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): This is one of those occasions when the whole House is united on the need to do more to help disabled people. I share some of the concerns expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin). I was disappointed to hear the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster) sound a note of political correctness for the first time in this debate. It reared its ugly head in his remarks about my hon. Friend, and he should regret them. Threats to those who disagree not about the objectives that we all share but about the tactics required to meet them are quite unacceptable.

The hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox), whose motion we are debating, rightly said that this issue touches every constituency, and I should like to begin by discussing the issues that confront the people of Worcester. I pay tribute to the city and county councils for their enlightened attitude to these matters. The county social services department works tirelessly for those with learning difficulties and provides excellent rehabilitation and education facilities. The city council is always quick to provide planning permission when it is necessary for the needs of local disabled people. Dropping kerbs for wheelchairs and appropriate road crossings are always forthcoming if asked for, and we welcome that.

However, the private sector has a rather less proud record. I fear that all too few of the shops, offices and factories in my constituency have doors and steps that are properly accessible to wheelchairs, and there are not enough toilet facilities for the disabled both in those places of work and shops. Out of the scores of bars and restaurants in the city of Worcester, only three provide large print or braille menus for those with visual handicaps.

Let me pay tribute to the Royal National Institute for the Blind's New College for the Blind, which is based in my constituency and to its principal, Rev. Bob Manthorp. For many years, it has had remarkable success with its pupils, and that proves that integration is not always the best way forward for people with disabilities. I have been constantly impressed by the success of those pupils and the approach that they take to their disabilities, which they bear with great courage and—here I think of my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks)—with great good humour. I find that particularly moving.

We are often quick to blame the public services for their failure to provide adequate services, so I pay particular tribute to the West Mercia constabulary. My local police force recently won the "Fit for work" award because of its disability employment policies. It has seven blind switchboard operators in my constituency and has invested considerably in the machinery necessary to make it work.

I shall deal now with some of the specific problems of blind people. I agree strongly with the comments of the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms. Lynne) about the difficulties that disabled people experience in voting, particularly the physical problems of simply casting one's vote. I was one of the hon. Members who recently had the privilege of participating in the RNIB awareness exercise about the difficulty of voting with a visual handicap. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary should look carefully at that problem, and in particular at the size of print on ballot papers.

There are some 1 million blind or partially sighted people in the country, many of whom have serious mobility problems, so I welcome the extension of the disability living allowance, which has done much to enhance their civil rights. However, if one is registered blind, one gets a discount of £1.25 in the television licence fee. That is an insultingly low figure, which I hope will be increased in the Government's review of the charter of the BBC.

The motion deals with financial assistance to, as well as the physical needs of, the disabled because financial assistance is a crucial part of the civil rights of disabled people. I welcome the growth that we have seen, under the Government, in the provision of funding for disabled people. Last week I was told, in answer to a parliamentary question:

"By the end of 1992-93, we expect expenditure on benefit for long-term sick and disabled people to have risen by more than 170 per cent. in real terms to £13·7 billion."—*[Official Report*, 15 February 1993; Vol. 219, c. *100.]*

That is a remarkable record.

I know that there has been much controversy about the implementation of the disability living allowance and the unacceptable delays experienced in the early stages of its introduction. It is right that we should also pay tribute to the hard-working staff of the Benefits Agency, who are now putting superhuman efforts into addressing problems.

[Mr. Peter Luff]

Hardly a Saturday morning goes by without a telephone call to my home from a member of the staff sorting out a problem for one of my constituents. To have calls from a public servant on a Saturday morning is almost unprecedented, and I have had some moving success stories, thanks to the hard work of that agency in recent weeks.

I do not entirely share the confidence of my right hon. Friend the Minister of State about the problem over the forms. I understand the need for self-assessment, but I have heard of too many cases when it has resulted in forms being badly filled in, resulting from inadequate offers of advice from the Benefits Agency. In one case, the mother of a child in my constituency is being denied DLA. The child suffers from leukaemia and she takes him to a regular clinic in the Birmingham children's hospital. All the other mothers and children get the benefit, but this child does not simply because the mother made a small and fully understandable mistake in filling in the forms. The form for DLA should be looked at carefully.

Mr. Scott: We shall be producing a new form for DLA in April, having consulted widely with the organisations of and for disabled people. I hope that my hon. Friend will find the new form an improvement.

Mr. Luff: I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. It will be similarly welcomed by all my constituents and those of all other right hon. and hon. Members.

I do not deny for a moment—my earlier remarks have illustrated, I think, that I understand the problem clearly—that there is significant discrimination against disabled people. I am reluctant, however, to support omnibus legislation to address that discrimination. I am concerned that the Bill that is to be considered later today takes something of a blunderbuss approach. Instead, we need more precise rifle fire.

Much has been said about the experience of the United States and the Americans with Disabilities Act 1990. It seems from the evidence of some of my friends in the United States that there is the beginning of a backlash against that Act and against the disabled people it is designed to help. There is increasing evidence that litigation is the only real result of that legislation. Professor Kira, the professor of architecture at Cornell university, who has been a leading exponent of the needs of disabled people in terms of the built environment, has been expressing just such concerns about the 1990 Act.

Changing attitudes may be more difficult than producing legislation, but I believe that we should proceed without compulsion, which too easily breeds resentment.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): As I know the professor, both in this country and at Cornell—he will be in this country shortly—I ask the hon. Gentleman to tell us what particular features of the American legislation are causing a backlash. Most of the real impacts of the Act have barely started to take effect. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will give us some examples to nail down his assertion.

Mr. Luff: It is true that it is only recently that the Act has been fully implemented. I think that only this year was there some of the primary impact. I can only say that I have spoken to several of my friends. They are disabled and they have extensive contacts with similarly disabled people in the United States. They have expressed concern that there is a new sense of resentment almost towards the disabled in many areas of the United States.

I agree that these are early days, but I want to flag the concern that I have heard expressed by disabled people here on behalf of their disabled friends in the United States. The American legislation is not producing the advantages for which they looked. Instead, it is producing some serious disadvantages. I cannot refer to specific instances, but I can say that there is concern about the attitude that is being developed as a result of the implementation of the Act. I recognise that these are early days when it comes to saying what the final result will be, but it would be premature for the House to assume that the legislation proves the case for introducing similar legislation in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Dicks: The information given to me by friends in the United States is that the 1990 Act is being influenced and gradually overtaken by the AIDS lobby. That is one of the issues to which we should give careful consideration.

Mr. Luff: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention, which I note.

I do not oppose legislation per se. In many instances legislation is appropriate. Several hon. Members have referred to the Education Bill, which will provide examples of specifically targeted legislation. There may be a case for specific employment legislation. It would seem that it is acknowledged generally on both sides of the House that the quota system has not been a success. It may be that we should introduce more anti-discrimination-based employment legislation.

Several hon. Members have talked about the need of disabled people to gain access to houses, and that need is not confined to ladies and gentlemen in wheelchairs; mothers pushing prams would also benefit. It is clear that building regulations would have a major part to play. There would be a spin-off of advantages beyond the disabled. But do we need the paraphernalia of the Bill to achieve the advantages that we all want to see? For example, access to cinemas raises legitimate and proper concern, but I cannot help feeling that a slightly more enlightened view of the enforcement of health and safety rules by local fire brigades might be the way forward.

I take issue with my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) and the hon. Member for Rochdale when it comes to public transport, and especially British Rail. There is a great deal to be proud of in British Rail's approach. I pay tribute to the work of Mr. Bill Buchanan, who is himself disabled, who is an adviser to the British Railways Board on disability matters. The improvements that we have seen within the railway system owe a great deal to him.

No legislation imposes any duty on British Rail, yet it is the leading railway in the world when it comes to making provision for disabled people. One hundred per cent. of InterCity train carriages are now fully accessible to the disabled and their wheelchairs. There is also specific provision for the partially blind, which is also a small step forward—the provision of coloured grab handles on the outside of InterCity carriages which enable them more easily to see where they can board the train. Ninety per cent. of regional railway rolling stock is similarly adapted. There is a problem with Network SouthEast—an intensely used commuter service—but all stock now entering service on British Rail is adapted to the needs of the disabled. I am told that there are more toilets for the disabled on British Rail trains than those of the rest of Europe put together.

Other improvements have been achieved without major legislation. In the arts, loops for the deaf are now the norm in theatres rather than the exception, and that was achieved by voluntary action. All that is happening without legislation because of changing attitudes.

Mr. Iain Duncan-Smith (Chingford): Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a target market that commercial operations may be missing? If they can understand the message that they can sell to another group of people, the logic of improving access and making changes is, for them, a commercial exercise.

Mr. Liff: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and makes a powerful point. One should not assume that, when organisations take measures to assist the disabled, they do so as an act of charity; it is often in their own enlightened self-interest.

I pay tribute to someone who has played a leading role in advancing the cause of the disabled—His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales. After the International Year of the Disabled in 1981, of which the Prince of Wales was patron and Lord Snowdon was president, His Royal Highness formed the Prince of Wales advisory group on disablement whose extremely good work should not go unrecorded in this debate.

There is also the Prince of Wales's work with his school of architecture, in respect of enhanced provisions in new buildings, a charter with 75 employers that had the endorsement of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister last year, and efforts involving medical students—particularly with the help and assistance of Lady Warnock, who is playing a special role in seeking to improve understanding among medical students of the needs of the disabled.

Later, we shall have an opportunity to consider whether the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill should receive a Second Reading. From what I have heard so far, I hope that it will not necessarily receive a Third Reading, but there is something to be said for allowing the Bill to progress to a Committee so that the issues can be debated in detail. That may then inform subsequent Government legislation in specific areas of legitimate concern.

I hope that no one misakes my reservations about giving the Bill a Second Reading, for they do not reflect any doubt about the need to help the disabled. It is just that I believe that education, changing attitudes and pragmatic legislation offer the best way forward.

12.47 pm

Dr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): I am delighted to speak in support of the motion in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox), and to congratulate him on raising the issue of civil rights for the disabled. However, I am saddened and a little appalled that, in 1993, we still have to debate the issue in the way that we do. Soon after I entered the House, I tabled early-day motion 330, which was co-sponsored on a cross-party basis:

> "That this House believes that anti-discrimination legislation is necessary to ensure equality of opportunity for people with disabilities; and calls for the early introduction of a Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill."

I believe that each and every party represented in the House contributed a sponsor to that motion, which has the support also of the all-party disablement group. At the last count, the number of right hon. and hon. Members who had signed the motion totalled 288—the largest number of signatures lent to any of the 1,500 early-day motions tabled this Session. As a new Member of Parliament, my knowledge of the conventions of the House are limited, but I calculate that if one takes into account right hon. and hon. Members who, by tradition and convention, would not consider signing an early-day motion, mine has already achieved a majority. The motion and the sentiment behind it has genuine substantial cross-party support.

More important, the motion and the campaign for the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill has massive support outside the House, and we should do well to remember that. The hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) referred to the tyranny of lobby groups. I am aware of the actions of lobby groups, and I cannot be the only hon. Member who is proud to have been educated by their actions.

Mr. Duncan-Smith: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) is not present because he has to deal with a constituency matter, but it is only fair to put in context what he said following the comments by the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster) about Members doing well to listen to lobby advice because of the security of their seats. That was the measure of what he considered to be his threat—not that they would not educate, help or assist. I hope that that puts the matter straight.

Dr. Berry: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's comments, which I note.

Many hon. Members have learnt much from the efforts of lobby groups. It is invidious to list organisations for fear of omitting important ones. Nevertheless, the activities in recent years of the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People, the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation, Mencap, the National Association for Mental Health, Arthritis Care, the Spastics Society and many others deserve the compliments of hon. Members. Their work in promoting the interests of disabled people should be a matter of record. I know of no organisation concerned with the welfare of disabled people that fails to support the Bill that we are discussing today.

I tabled the early-day motion for two reasons. The first and foremost reason is my long-standing belief that the law should be used to tackle discrimination against disabled people in the same way as it is used to try to tackle discrimination on grounds of race or gender.

My second reason is slightly more personal and it has been alluded to already today. On 31 January 1992, the House debated the Second Reading of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, which was introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris). I place on record my admiration for the work that he has done over many years. At 2.16 pm, my predecessor started to speak against the Bill. At 2.20 pm, he assured the House that he would not talk it out, but, unfortunately, at 2.30 pm he did so.

I do not mention that to score points. It is a matter of history and in one sense it does not matter any more, but it matters in the effect that it had on my constituents. There

[Dr. Berry]

was anger beyond comprehension that their Member of Parliament had talked out the Bill. The chair of the Kingswood Council for the Disabled said:

> "Perhaps he would like to come to our meeting and explain why he has done this to us."

The Avon Coalition of Disabled People said:

> "The reality is we experience discrimination everywhere we turn. On Friday Robert Hayward justified and condoned such discrimination. His actions will subject disabled people to continued denial of our human rights and civil liberties."

I could go on with public statements by the regional director of South West MIND, from the Bristol Royal Society for the Blind, the Avon disability advice centre, the Spastics Society, West Region and Avon County group of Mencap societies. Organisations in my part of the country were angry that one of their Members of Parliament had talked the Bill out and were anxious to dissociate themselves from that action.

Mr. Bowis: I, too, regretted that the Bill was talked out that day. However, I point out to the hon. Gentleman that Robert Hayward had the courage then to apologise. He said that he had got it wrong. We should also remember that Robert Hayward served the House while suffering from multiple sclerosis. He was a person of great courage who coped with that disability while serving his constituents and we should recognise that.

Dr. Berry: Nevertheless, the point is that people in my area expressed great public anger when the Bill was talked out. One of the commitments that I made in the general election was to do all that I could as quickly as possible to give support to legislation to promote civil rights for disabled people. That has been a motivating force behind what I have done.

The one point that I want to make above all today is that the House must listen when it is told about the daily experiences of the 6·5 million disabled people in this country who have one or more physical, sensory or emotional disability. That number will grow, as we all know, and, unless something is done, so will the number of people who regularly face discrimination in all aspects of their lives.

Disabled people have to face employers who refuse to employ them even when they have the relevant qualifications and skills. They have to face cinema proprietors and managers who, astonishingly, ban disabled people on the ground that they, rather than the building in which the cinema is located, are a fire risk. A blind person who is fortunate enough to be invited to Buckingham palace will find that guide dogs are banned. We have all come across such discrimination and we must listen to what people say.

A few weeks ago, I asked the Prime Minister what action he intended to take on the matter. He said:

> "For a year I was, of course, the Minister of State responsible for disability, and I am well aware of the Government's excellent record in increasing the benefits for disabled people and providing a much wider range of facilities for them."—[*Official Report*, 21 January 1993; Vol. 217, c. 496.]

I did not get that impression from the Government when, three weeks ago, a Government Whip from a sedentary position talked out my private Member's Bill —the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons (Amendment) Bill—which would have provided day services and respite services—[HON. MEMBERS: "Objected."] I should have said "objected". As a new Member of Parliament, I am always grateful for friendly advice from Conservative Members. I think that the Government would have talked out the Bill if they had had the opportunity. As it was, the Whip objected from a sedentary position to legislation that would have provided day services and respite services for disabled people and their carers. Again, that proposal had cross-party support. I do not get the impression that the Government are anxious really to promote the interests of disabled people as they show continued hostility to the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill.

Most people agree that it is nothing short of a scandal that disabled people are denied the opportunities that non-disabled people have. It is nonsense in the circumstances for the Prime Minister to dream about a society at ease with itself. On the contrary, we have a society that actively disables people; a society in which discrimination against disabled people is widespread and institutionalised.

There is, therefore, a long overdue need to outlaw discrimination in employment, in transport, in leisure facilities and in education and training. There is, above all, a long overdue need to be honest about what is going on. There is a long overdue need to ensure that the 6·5 million people who are disabled have the rights that everyone else has.

In essence, we need to consider only three questions. First, does discrimination against disabled people exist? Of course it does. We all agree on that.

Secondly, has the Government's preferred option of voluntary action delivered? Has it worked? I think that it is manifestly clear to us all that it has not.

Thirdly, and finally, will legislation assist? I repeat that if the law can be used to act against sexism and racism, there is no reason why it cannot be used against discrimination on the ground of disability. If such legislation can operate in other countries—the United States, Canada and Australia—it can certainly operate here.

If the Law Society, which has been maligned this morning, confirms that view, the Government must surely take the matter seriously. As we have already heard, on 4 November last year, the Law Society launched its report "Disability, Discrimination and Employment Law", which concluded:

> "There is a need for the creation of a new statutory civil right to prevent discrimination against people with disabilities in the workplace . . . the employment provisions appearing in the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill indicate precisely the direction in which the law should move."

I have been invited to attend a meeting of disabled people from the south-west of England and south Wales in Bristol tomorrow to discuss how to further the struggle for civil rights for disabled people. I very much want to be able to tell that meeting that progress was made today. I have no doubt that the view of that meeting and of disabled people throughout the country will be that it is an outrage that it is taking so long to secure basic civil rights. Equally, I have no doubt that the message to opponents of anti-discrimination legislation will be the same as mine: is it not about time that they ceased to be part of the problem and instead became part of the solution?

1.1 pm

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Nicholas Scott): It may be useful if I intervene to clarify the Government's position on the motion and the Bill to which it relates.

The hon. Member for Kingswood (Dr. Berry) emphasised strongly his view that the Government and the House should listen with great care to what we are told about the day-to-day experience of disabled people. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government do that and that much of the progress that we have made in providing for disabled people in recent years has been a direct result of representations, to which successive Ministers have listened, from organisations of and for disabled people. That is a practice which we intend to continue.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) on his success in the ballot and on his opening speech. The hon. Gentleman's success and the early-day motion tabled by the hon. Member for Kingswood may not have kept me awake at night, but they have added substantially to my work load, which will no doubt be a cause of some satisfaction to both hon. Members.

I congratulate all the hon. Members who have spoken in a universally high-quality debate. Many hon. Members have spoken with direct personal experience of the impact of disability on themselves or their families or from direct constituency experience. The issue of disability affects every single constituency in the country and therefore every hon. Member, irrespective of party or region. If it is within the rules of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should like to draw attention to the fact that attendance in the Gallery has been higher than it usually is on a Friday. That, too, is a tribute to the interest of this important matter.

I pay tribute to the all-party disability group for its sustained efforts. Successive Ministers, from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) to myself, have found it of immense benefit to receive the advice given to us and the pressure—sometimes welcome, sometimes not so welcome—placed on us by the dedicated members of that group.

The hon. Member for Tooting and at least one other hon. Member read out a list of some of the organisations of and for disabled people which play such an important part in these discussions and identify the way forward on disability.

My opposite number, the Minister for Disability in France, Michel Gillibert, regards the pattern of voluntary organisations in the United Kingdom as one of its absolute glories. He said that he wished he had the same advantage as I have in being able to seek the advice and support of those organisations. I might have said that sometimes it was a mixed blessing—nevertheless, it is a blessing.

I reiterate the point that was made about the importance of the role of the Prince of Wales in keeping a sustained interest in the subject and persuading many others to take it much more seriously than they have previously. The son of a former Member of Parliament is the secretary to His Royal Highness's group and he is in regular contact with the Government on a range of issues.

I shall make a few general points, move on to the Bill and then put on record some of the things that the Government are doing as an alternative to legislation. To come back to the point of the hon. Member for Kingswood, I do not think that anyone who has listened to the debate can doubt for a moment that there continues to be considerable discrimination against disabled people.

Although the Government's approach may not have solved the problem in its entirety—nor, incidentally, do I believe that the Bill would solve the problem in its entirety—I hope to be able to show that we have made substantial progress and have plans to make further substantial progress in the future.

We have listened to a number of graphic illustrations of discrimination against disabled people of one sort or another, including the sad story of Dr. Schofield and Amber. I trust that my good friend Quellar has managed to gain access to the Gallery and is listening intently to the debate. Several other graphic examples of discrimination have been given.

Everyone who has done my job must be aware that discrimination exists. It exists and it is wrong. As I said previously, it is remarkably silly because it does not benefit society or those who discriminate against others. I shall explain and expand on that in a moment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning) stressed the tremendous pool of skills and commitment among disabled people, much of which is not been taken advantage of by employers. There is a huge market with 6 million disabled people in the United Kingdom. Cinema and theatre owners and managers and a whole range of other people who sell services or goods ignore that huge market in a short sighted way. We know about the disabled people who were turned away from cinemas showing films such as "My Left Foot" and "Born on the Fourth of July". Both films involved disability issues, yet disabled people were unable to get into cinemas to see them. It is remarkably silly and short-sighted.

We know about the aspirations of disabled people to the maximum quality of life—to be able to live independently to the greatest extent posssible and to exercise control over their lives. Looking in, as it were, from the outside, it is easy to talk about disabled people as though they were a homogenous group. But they are parents, children, athletes, artists, craftsmen and employees. They are all the things that the rest of us are. Everything that applies to us applies equally to disabled people. We should all be clear about the common humanity of which I spoke when I last addressed the issue. As the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster) said, for many of us, disability is but an accident away or perhaps a few years away with the inevitable onset of the impact of age on our quality of life.

I have been lucky recently to be closely in touch with sport and disabled people, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) referred. Yesterday I attended the opening by Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales of a new Douglas Bader centre for sporting-based rehabilitation at the Roehampton hospital. Tremendous co-operation was involved in providing the wonderful facilities at that new centre and funds were raised by the Douglas Bader Foundation.

The day before the opening—this is of particular relevance to the point of my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton—I attended the annual media awards of the British Sports Association for the Disabled. Those of us who follow such events closely are aware that, increasingly, sport for disabled people is covered along with mainstream sporting activities and is no longer

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tucked away on some odd page. That is a tremendous help in raising the general level of awareness of disability. Anyone who enjoyed the magic and the glory of the paralympics at Barcelona will never forget the experience.

The general points that I have made indicate the angle from which I approach the issue. I hope that they will not go amiss. But I now have to turn to the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. Before the right hon. Gentleman addresses the Bill, I remind him that we have before us a motion. It would not be appropriate to go through the Bill in depth, although, obviously, some allusions to it are entirely in order.

Mr. Scott: I have no intention of being so disorderly as that, but the motion refers to legislation and that is the issue which I wish to address.

I suppose that my head and my heart divide on the Bill. Of course, I should like to be able to say from the Dispatch Box that we should let the Bill go forward into Committee. But my head warns me and convinces me that that would not be right. I say that with reluctance and a degree of sadness. It would not be right to allow the Bill to go into Committee and be discussed because it would arouse expectations about the outcome of progress on any such legislation which might have to be dashed in due course.

Mr. Wigley: The Minister may be about to clarify the matter, but while he says that he cannot encourage legislation that has passed through another place, can he none the less confirm that the Government accept the principle that legislation has a role in anti-discrimination?

Mr. Scott: The hon. Gentleman was present at a meeting with the all-party disability group on Tuesday this week attended by my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Social Security and myself. He will have heard the Prime Minister give me a remit to enter discussions with the group on whether and, if so, how legislation could play any part in seeking to reduce or eliminate discrimination against disabled people. I have accepted that remit with enthusiasm and I shall honour it in the full spirit in which the task was given to me.

Mr. Cox: I am pleased by the Minister's last comment, but disappointed to hear of his reluctance to allow the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill to go to Committee. Surely all hon. Members who have been in the House a while know that the difficulties can be explained to the general public in Committee. Sadly, many people will think that it is a dodge-out and if there are genuine reasons, will wonder why the Government do not want to try to explain them or discuss them openly in Committee.

Mr. Scott: We must consider the basic shape of any legislation. As the hon. Member for Tooting knows, we have legislated on various issues, such as facilities and services for disabled people. Legislation covering access and employment already exists. As issues come to the fore, there may be new directly targeted legislation. Beyond that, we must question whether anti-discriminatory legislation could be introduced without the over-arching pattern of the legislation that has passed through another place. Undoubtedly, expenses for the Government and other providers would be implicit in the passage of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill and we need to deal with such issues.

I am sceptical and my head warns me against the principle of such over-arching legislation. I am in favour of targeted legislation, even if it is wider than that passed to date. Those are the issues that I want to discuss and which incline me to be sceptical about the common sense of allowing the Bill to pass into legislation, since its fundamental shape is not acceptable to the Government.

The Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, which has passed through another place, is wide ranging and would imply considerable costs for employers, suppliers and the Government. The hon. Members for Tooting and for Kingswood said that the Government's approach has not worked. I cannot claim that it has had 100 per cent. success, but anyone who considers fairly what has happened under successive Governments during the past 20 years will recognise that real progress has been made.

I well understand the impatience of many hon. Members—the impatience of many disabled people is even more understandable—at the pace of progress, but there has undoubtedly been progress.

Having considered the matter carefully and facilitated the meeting between the all-party disablement group and the Prime Minister on Tuesday, the Government have concluded—not without some reluctance—that a general approach would create more problems than it would solve.

Sir Richard Body (Holland with Boston): In view of what my right hon. Friend has said, does he agree that if a Standing Committee dealt with the Bill for two or three Wednesdays, it would be a good opportunity for those issues and some of the difficulties to be thrashed out? As a sponsor of the Bill I agree that it has imperfections, but it seems to be eactly the sort of Bill that needs a dummy run in Committee. If the Government listened to the objections and thrashed out the issues they could return next Session with legislation which would perhaps have a better run than would otherwise be the case.

Mr. Scott: I accept that that would be one way forward, but if the Bill went into Committee it would be likely to arouse expectations outside the House—inside the House poeple realise what is happening—and result in disappointment. A better way forward would be for me to accept the remit from the Prime Minister and go to the drawing board with the all-party disablement group to have a fresh look at the concept of legislation and the breadth that it might or might not have. I understand why my hon. Friend might prefer an alternative approach, but, having agreed on our plan with the all-party disablement group earlier this week, I believe that that is the best way forward.

Some comparison has been made between the proposals in the Bill that passed through another place and existing legislation against discrimination on grounds of race and gender. I know that those analogies have been drawn in support of the Bill. I believe that there is a difference, however, between anti-discrimination legislation for people with disabilities and our long-standing legislation against discrimination on grounds of race or gender.

As has already been made clear, the category of people with disabilities embraces a considerable number of people with different needs and there are different sorts of discrimination against people who happen to have any particular one of a range of disabilities. Broadly, we can divide the disabled population into those who are sensorily, physically or mentally impaired in one way or another. Even those wide groups have different needs in terms of accessibility to employment, transport and buildings. When we are dealing with sex and race discrimination, however, we are talking about broad groups of people whose needs can be addressed broadly. Discrimination against disabled people is more complicated and it is therefore likely to need more complicated legislation, or even separate Bills—should we decide that legislation is right—to address the different problems that arise.

Dr. Berry: Does the Minister believe that the problem of alleged discrimination against disabled people is identifying that discrimination, or does he believe that the problem is identifying the action to respond to it? What is it about such legislation that makes it fundamentally different from discrimination on the grounds of race or gender?

Mr. Scott: It is perfectly possible for the Equal Opportunities Commission or the Race Relations Board to take a comprehensive view of the impact of discrimination upon those under their remit.

If we were to identify discrimination against people with disabilities in terms of access, we already have the disabled persons transport advisory committee, which draws up regulations to enable transport to be properly provided. The existing building regulations advisory committees deal with problems of access to buildings. We have a range of similar organisations that are much better able to deal with practices that turn out to discriminate against disabled people than would be an over-arching commission with a remit to look at every sector where discrimination occurs. I believe that the sector-by-sector approach is likely to provide a more expert and, in the long run, more effective approach than tackling discrimination with an over-arching commission, as recommended in the Bill that passed through the other place.

Mr. Alfred Morris: There is nothing in the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill which conflicts with the Minister's proposition about the diversity of disabled people. All of us who were involved in the making of that Bill totally recognised that one cannot lump all disabled people together. How can we possibly reject the recommendations of a Select Committee of the House? To talk to people from all parties now leaves aside the very important point that there has been detailed discussion in a Select Committee. How can we ignore what the Law Society said? How can we ignore what was said by Lord Renton, who is a distinguished lawyer and an extremely long-serving Member of the House, as well as of the Conservative party?

Mr. Scott: I think that I have said before, both to the House and to the right hon. Gentleman, that my judgment is that it would be best for me to take the advice and expertise of the all-party disablement group, which has a tremendous body of knowledge. We can consider whether the over-arching principle makes sense or whether it would be better to tackle the problem sector by sector. That will have to remain a point of difference between the right hon. Gentleman and me.

I wonder whether the over-arching approach suggested in some quarters might simply turn out to be a legal bean feast for lawyers. The enthusiasm of the Law Society for it makes my eyebrows twitch a little. I have no hostility towards the Law Society, but the definitions in the Bill are extremely wide. The question of how to define a person with a disability has scope for tremendous argument. It is difficult to know whether concepts such as "reasonable accommodation" can be interpreted in an even-handed way across the board. A number of issues would be better treated using a sector-by-sector approach, without creating a vast new bureaucracy which I fear could flow from some of the suggestions made today.

I am conscious that other hon. Members wish to speak and we have just one hour left, so I shall merely say a few words about the Government's approach to the subject. We have been trying to work with business, industry, voluntary organisations and other levels of government to bring about changes in society's attitudes, promote equality, develop services and create an environment in which people with disabilities can fully participate in our national life. I believe that we have come a long way, but I do not disguise the fact that much remains to be done if we are to achieve our ends.

Spending on benefits for long-term sick and disabled people has trebled in this Government's lifetime. New benefits have been introduced and the scale and scope of provision for disabled people through the benefits system have improved. The Government have shown their commitment by providing extra resources for those new benefits.

There has, inevitably, today been much discussion of transport. The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) urged us to make a start; we have done more than that and have gone a long way down the road, railway or canal —whichever analogy one wants to use. About 50 per cent. of buses are now covered by the DPTAC specification. We are trying to work in partnership with industry on a range of transport issues to ensure that the needs of disabled people are taken into account at the design stage. Only recently, I saw a taxi that had been designed by a British company and could be used in all European capital cities to meet the needs of disabled people. I hope that the designers will make progress with it.

Some 90 per cent. of new buses now contain the features recommended to help disabled people. All InterCity routes are wheelchair accessible and new rolling stock that is introduced will offer full access. I pay special tribute to Mr. Bill Buchanan, who chairs the committee that advises British Rail on accessibility. Of course, we face problems.

Mr. Harold Elletson (Blackpool, North): While I am sure that we all welcome the improvements in InterCity services that guarantee accessibility to disabled passengers, that is not much good when InterCity services are withdrawn—as they have been from London to Blackpool. Will my right hon. Friend join me in pressing British Rail to restore those links, particularly for the benefit of disabled passengers, many of whom usually visit Blackpool on holiday every year, but will be unable to do so?

Mr. Scott: My hon. Friend has made his point and I doubt whether he needs my support to make his case. I am

[Mr. Scott]

sure that he will be highly effective as he goes about achieving it, but I should be glad to have a word with him later.

All new licensed taxi cabs in London must now be wheelchair accessible and another 60 licensing authorities have adopted the same policy. All this has happened without the need for legislation; education, persuasion and awareness have brought it about.

I welcome the interest expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) in this aspect as it relates to buses—taxis tend to be expensive. The next stage must therefore be to develop fully accessible buses. There are to be trials in two areas later this year. London Transport will try out 68 vehicles in north and west London and Go-Ahead Northern-Coastline is to run vehicles in north Tyneside.

Access to buildings is immensely important, too. I will not go into detail except to express my strongly held view that the work carried forward by the building regulations advisory committee, which is looking into the design of new housing, should be given a fair wind. We all know how expensive it is to adapt a house once it has been built. The extra expense of building accessible houses from scratch is likely to turn out to be minimal.

Hon. Members have discussed loops. Part M of the new building regulations, which came into effect a few months ago, specifies the need for induction loops or infra-red hearing systems in booking and ticket offices, large reception areas, auditoriums and meeting rooms above a certain size. That shows that we have made a certain amount of progress.

I take the point about the Palace of Wesminster. We shall be discussing that. Some Members of the House and of the other place have suffered from disabilities and we are all conscious of the need for members of the public with disabilities to be given proper access to their Parliament. A consultant is looking at the pattern of provision in the Palace, with the idea of making recommendations.

As for access to employment, there has been a growing realisation of the inadequacies of the quota system to tackle the problem of employment of disabled people. I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment has this under review and I hope that we may hear from her in the not-too-distant future.

I know that I will have disappointed many in the House and elsewhere by our attitude to legislation. I am certainly not complacent about the Government's achievements. We have done well, but we can do better. Education and persuasion remain important parts of the way forward, but I reiterate my commitment, given to the all-party disability group earlier this week, to enter, with the Prime Minister's encouragement, into constructive discussion of any possible way forward that involves legislation.

1.33 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): I rise with some apprehension to speak in a debate which has, in a sense, been going on since long before I had responsibility for these matters. The debate illustrates a degree of expertise and commitment matched by no other subject that comes before the House for discussion, so I approach it with humility.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox); as ever, he appears to be as lucky at drawing the number one spot for debate as he is with horses. I also congratulate him on choosing for debate such an important subject.

However, the persistence and patience of my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), in his efforts to focus our attention on this enormously important subject, cannot be praised too highly. His Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill has been much discussed today and remains, in the view of the Opposition, the one realistic hope for an early and dramatic improvement in the circumstances of disabled people.

The debate has been wide ranging. It has reminded me of a jolly good party, with all of us having a glass of whatever pleases us, coming almost to a crescendo, when in walks someone who is usually a reasonably welcome guest, but who announces that the bar is closed or that the festivities must end. We should be grateful that the Minister waited so long to make his contribution because, when he did, he dampened the atmosphere of the debate.

Being something of an historian, I want to go back and look at the reasons why we are discussing the subject today and why we do not already have a Bill setting in place civil rights for disabled persons. Many people might have thought that such a Bill would already be part of our legislation. The Opposition have long believed that civil rights for disabled people are extremely important. My right hon. Friend's Bill, which he has been trying to get through the House for a long time, is the one way forward. A disablement commission that would defend, protect and advance the interests of disabled people is the right route to follow.

Let me first examine the struggle for civil rights for disabled people and suggest some reasons why, in 1993, we still do not have effective anti-discrimination legislation. The case for it has been made, more eloquently than I can make it, by hon. Members on both sides of the House. They have quoted not only an enormous range [illegible] statistics but the heartfelt and most important personal experiences of people with disabilities, including friends, families and even colleagues.

I shall not bombard the House with statistics, but we have to go back a little way to look at what happened in the 1970s. After all, it was nearly 20 years ago, in 1975, that the Equal Opportunities Commission was established. The Commission for Racial Equality followed a little later, in 1977. Those legislative innovations were profoundly important milestones in the campaign against discrimination on the ground of race or sex. They do not deliver everything, and they are not an all-purpose panacea, but they are the bedrock and foundation of many advances in our society.

Logically, one might have expected a similar innovation in the rights of disabled people to follow pretty quickly. Unfortunately, a rather different atmosphere was created, partly as a result of the new Government in 1979, and partly because a change in philosophy permeated society throughout the 1980s. I expected the Minister to be the harbinger of good news; I hoped that the spirit of the 1980s was changing and that a thrust towards the acceptance of disability rights legislation would mark the beginning of the real thaw in Government attitudes. However, judging by the Minister's remarks, civil rights legislation for the disabled is not likely to come about quickly. As a disabled friend of mine said, it seems, sadly, that after sexism and racism, equal opportunities cease to exist. That seems to be the situation. That is the opinion of many disabled people in our society. They feel strongly that progress since the late 1970s has not been fast enough and that we have not moved forward far enough.

The case that I shall present contrasts with the position that was adopted during the 1970s and the 1980s. If we put disablement in context, we have not moved ahead as fast as we should have done because of the attitude adopted throughout the 1980s that community and society do not have a legitimate place. The example is slightly tired, but I revive the remarks—they are now infamous—of the former Prime Minister, Baroness Thatcher. She said that society did not exist. She said that in an interview with a woman's magazine. She added:

> "And, you know, there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look to themselves first. It's our duty to look after ourselves".

That was a summation of the feeling that prevailed in the 1980s.

I could not help thinking of Baroness Thatcher's remarks when I was on the other side of the river at the national theatre this week. Some of us were let off the leash, and it was a most enjoyable evening as we watched "An Inspector Calls". It was interesting to hear the remarks that J. B. Priestley gives to the father of the family for a crucial period of the play. The father is giving advice to his son and potential son-in-law. He says:

> "I don't want to lecture you two young fellows again. But what so many of you don't seem to understand now, when things are so much easier, is that a man has to make his own way—has to look after himself—and his family too, of course, when he has one—and so long as he does that he won't come to too much harm."

That is redolent of the attitude of Baroness Thatcher throughout the 1980s, which permeated the Government throughout that period. To put it in another way, people were saying, "Look after yourself and nobody else matters very much." The father in the Priestley play also says:

> "But the way some of these cranks talk and write now, you'd think everybody has to look after everybody else, as if we were all mixed up together like bees in a hive—community and all that nonsense."

The permeation of self interest is something with which we are all familiar. There is nothing new about it because it comes straight from 19th century liberals such as Herbert Spencer and those other intellectuals of laissez-faire liberalism. It is a highly individualistic view of society. Its highest motivation was to inspire men and women to opt for self interest first, and the philosophy was brilliantly encapsulated by J. B. Priestley very much later. I do not want to labour my experience at the theatre too much, but I shall return to Priestley. I have had the opportunity to educate some of the Whips, who do not often have a chance to go to exceptional places of culture.

Since 1979 we have had plenty of experience of people looking after themselves. Perhaps that explains the appalling situation in which many disabled people find themselves and the Government's reluctance to endorse a Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. There have, of course, been determined efforts by a noble band of campaigners. Somewhere in the House there should be a roll of honour for them. They stretch from Lord Ashley and his attempt in 1982 to get such a Bill on the statute book. There was Donald Stewart, my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing), Lords Longford and Campbell, John Hughes and, of course, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe. They all campaigned in an extremely cold climate.

At the very time that they were campaigning in our cold climate, the temperature in the rest of the world was warming up—as the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) pointed out, with the International Year of the Disabled in 1981, and the launch of the decade for the disabled person in 1983. The British Government saw to it that such issues remained in a veritable permafrost. In those years, positive progress for the disabled was made in many parts of the world, but Britain stood still and has since been overtaken.

Now well into the 1990s, do we detect the possibility of a thaw? I prepared two versions of the central part of my speech. One responds positively and warmly to the Minister's conversion. I thought that we might have seen a Pauline conversion because on 30 January 1992, the Minister said that he was "benevolently neutral". Everyone knows that the country was then moving towards a general election and that there was little time for any new legislation, but most of us believed the Minister's statement that he was "benevolently neutral".

Some of us have supported the Minister since he first entered the House. We thought that we were protecting an endangered species. Sometimes we thought that his ministerial career was a bit precarious because he appeared to be on the side of the angels. Some of us on this side of the House nearly started a club to support his continuity of office. It is a good job that we did not, but I approach a serious point lightly.

This morning's debate has been rather sad, in that we have witnessed a struggle between the two modern Conservative parties. One is that represented by the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin)—and I told him before he left the Chamber that I would mention him in my remarks. That hon. Gentleman invited the House to compare him with a disabled person. We are seeing whether the modern Conservative party is that which I used to think of as a party of Chelsea and Tiverton, or is it the part of St. Albans and Colchester?

I fear that the Minister's remarks at the Dispatch Box a few moments ago confirmed that the party of St. Albans and Colchester rules. It is the party that says, "There will be no movement in this area." I refer to the Minister's remarks last year, when he spoke of his "benevolent neutrality". We were given a fascinating insight into the Government's reasons for not taking action last year. The Minister was eloquent and, using dramatic phrases that I will not repeat today, clearly emphasised the need for action. Using a clever and classic technique, for he is a great exponent of the doctrine of unripe time, he said that he was not against legislation on principle, but it was a question whether education and persuasion had been tried long enough. He still held out the hope that they would work and that legislation would not be needed just yet. "Give me a little bit longer," he said.

The right hon. Gentleman also said something worrying, and he said something today that will worry the disabled and those who lobby for them. He stated that there was no unanimity among the disabled or groups for the disabled. He said that there was no unanimity in the disabled community—an interesting phrase—and those who support it. I found that interesting. How often have hon. Members introduced legislation about which there is

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unanimity? Why should every last man Jack and Jill agree before we legislate to ensure equal opportunities for disabled people? Why do we need the unanimity rule for disabled people?

Interestingly, this morning the Minister changed his ground. He said: "Forget what I said last year. I have looked at it again and it will be far too heavy-handed. We should adopt the over-arching approach." What is the over-arching approach? What does that mean?

Mr. Scott: The hon. Gentleman's description is a parody of my speech. He was not present when the Prime Minister met the all-party disablement group, but a number of Labour Members were. They will recall the sympathetic and constructive discussion with the Prime Minister about discrimination against disabled people, at the end of which I was given a clear task to liaise constructively with the all-party disablement group. My basic instinct is to continue to tackle discrimination with a sector-by-sector approach, rather than one where the costs are unquantifiable and which is likely to lead to excessive bureaucracy and a beanfeast for the legal profession.

Mr. Sheerman: I am interested that the Minister thinks that my description of his speech was a parody. I was not invited to the meeting with the Prime Minister. The impression that I have formed this morning is not of a Minister who has gone to his Prime Minister and Secretary of State, made his case and won. I assume that what has happened, although the Minister cannot admit it, is that the Prime Minister and Secretary of State have told him to toe the line. He has been told to go back to the House of Commons and the all-party group.

Sir John Hannam *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Sheerman: The hon. Gentleman may not like it, but I must tell the truth as I see it. I listened patiently to him. I understood the Minister to say this morning that there is no way forward. We have been given yet another fudge instead of allowing the Bill to be considered in Committee. The hon. Member for Exeter (Sir. J. Hannam), for whom I have much admiration and who is one of the supporters of the Bill, pleaded with the Minister, "Give us a few Wednesdays and the opportunity to get the Bill in Committee." My right hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe has guaranteed that the Bill is open to amendment because he realises that it has imperfections. He is willing to scrutinise it in Committee, where he will give the Minister every assistance to ensure that the Bill is right.

We are debating a very important Bill for disabled people. It is supported by almost 300 Members of Parliament, 23 of whom are Conservative Members. It is good to have some Conservative support, but we are thoroughly discontented and we cannot accept an all-party approach when the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People comes here and kicks disabled people in the teeth. *[Interruption.]* The Minister does not like my comment; I did not expect him to—*[Interruption.]* Some hon. Members do not like me bringing an element of abrasiveness to this debate.

The Opposition are appalled that the Minister, in his usual melliferous tones, has given us hard news to take to our constituents. We shall have to tell disabled people that there is no hope that the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill will be passed, although it seeks to give ordinary disabled people the opportunity to show that they are not just disabled and that they are able in mind and in body in so many ways.

Disabled people have potential. Time and again, in employment, in access, in education and in training, they are not given the opportunity to show that they have talent. The reason why I am so angry and why I refuse to kowtow to a quiet, all-party agreement is that the Minister has sold out disabled people today—*[Interruption.]* Some hon. Members think that I am being too hard and they do not like it.

I have not held my present position for long, but I have already noticed that the Government have a great advantage. The Government take a strong line when they speak about the absence of community and about the absence of society. They refuse to help people as we urge them to. However, the Government have the great advantage of a Minister for Social Security and Disabled People who is charm itself at the Dispatch Box.

Everyone finds it difficult to cross swords with the Minister because he presents an unacceptable case eloquently and diplomatically. That is not good enough. He charmingly tells the House that he intends to block the Bill, and he speaks with an air of resignation and in tones of sorrow. That is not good enough. In some ways, it would be more acceptable to have the Secretary of State for Social Security here. He puts the Government's view far more aggressively, so we should understand exactly where the Government were coming from in their treatment of disabled people.

I understand that some hon. Members do not like the tone that I bring to the debate. We had high hopes this morning that we would make progress, and that a Whip would not shout "Object!" at 2.30 pm and thus block the opportunity to bring a ray of hope to disabled people.

In speeches inside and outside the House, the Minister has emphasised that he believes that there has been progress for disabled people. He almost always points to a change in benefits. We could have a long argument about how benefits have shaped and changed over the past 13 years. My analysis would be different from the Minister's. The Government have shaped and changed benefits rather than improved them. I take a longer view of benefits. Disabled people and those in the disability lobby believe that the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill represents an alternative to the idea that disability is just about benefits.

Many disabled people tell me that they feel as though their whole world is hedged about by talk of benefits. They want to be released from that feeling. They need benefits for certain things, but ultimately they want an environment that allows them access to training, education, good jobs and good pay and in which benefits are not the only subject about which they talk to politicians. That is the difference between us. The Minister cannot understand——

Mr. Scott: With the greatest respect, the hon. Gentleman must have been pretty selective in his reading of my speeches. Each and every one of the issues to which he has referred is an issue which I have tackled during the six years for which I have been holding my present responsibilities.

Mr. Sheerman: I will certainly not withdraw. As I have explained, ordinary people who have a disability feel that the emphasis is always placed on their disability. We hoped for the opportunity to establish a bedrock of rights—a foundation on which to build. If disabled people felt that their rights had been infringed, they could voice their aggravation and hurt. If they felt that an injustice had been done—if they felt that they had been denied access to transport or education—they could take it to the commission in the hope of gaining satisfaction. Of course they would not always win, but they could move forward towards attaining rights in the fullest sense.

The strong language that I use is absolutely correct to describe the feeling that exists not just among the disability lobby but among ordinary disabled people. As the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms. Lynne) said, disability affects 25 per cent., of families in one way or another. Today, those families will feel that they have been cheated, and they will have been cheated because the Minister has done the bidding of the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Social Security rather than standing his corner and standing up for the rights of disabled people in Britain.

2.2 pm

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): Rarely have I heard such a disgusting and deplorable speech. The unique talent of the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) is to misread the House every time he speaks—whether it be on law and order or on disability. The debate to which I have been listening since 9.30 am has been about caring and concern and about how best to proceed on the question of disability. The hon. Gentleman has done nothing to enhance the debate. I am a disabled person and I can say that if I belonged to a lobby, I should be ashamed to approach that man for any kindness or consideration.

I wish that the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) or the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) were sitting on the Front Bench and that the dreadful man who made that speech was sitting elsewhere. I feel so angry about what he has done. He should be damn well ashamed of himself. He referred to a visit to the theatre and mentioned disabled people looking to themselves. If there is one thing that disabled people want to do it is to look to themselves—as best they can and as far as they can—and, in suggesting otherwise, the hon. Gentleman shows a complete lack of knowledge and understanding of the needs, wishes and, most important, the aspirations of disabled people. The sooner he goes out and finds out what it is all about, the better.

I shall now calm down, Mr. Deputy Speaker. On the issue of race and sex discrimination legislation, I do not agree with my right hon. Friend the Minister that there is a significant difference, although I acknowledge that they are different categories. If anything, that should be a reason for taking action through legislation. Everyone has said that the quota system does not work. Many years ago, I worked at a labour exchange, where the disability officer had beside him a big pile of exemption vouchers and spent more time reaching for them than ringing up companies to ask why they were not employing their 3 per cent. quota of disabled people.

I get concerned when we talk about money because we subsidise the pleasure of going to the theatre through the royal opera house by about £30 to £35 a seat. The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms. Jackson) looks at me with her questioning eyes. If we can subsidise the pleasure of people going to the opera house by £30 to £35 a seat, why do we wonder about the Government spending money to introduce legislation to give disabled people the right of access? What is the good of subsidising the arty farty types, the great and the good, when we are sorry that we cannot find the money to introduce legislation to give disabled people the sort of access to the theatre which they might need?

Let me talk briefly about the Spinal Injuries Association to which I am loosely connected. I hope to become more involved with the association later. In an intervention that I made this morning—it seems like yesterday—I said that the latest idea of the Spinal Injuries Association is to introduce a disabled racegoers guide to tell them the best places to gain access and the places to be careful when trying to get in.

The man who was talking about the guide was in a wheelchair. He had a colleague with him who said, "I have arrived at Sandown Race course today and, as usual, the wheelchair has tipped over and I am flat on my face in the mud." He was brushing the mud off his clothes. He loves his racing, but having his wheelchair tip over is the reality that he faces regularly.

As I said earlier, the man was going to a race meeting at a course which had no access across the railway line. He had to go to the end of the journey, which was about another 45 minutes to an hour, to get off at a station at which they could take his wheelchair across the line. He had to get on another train to come back and get off on the right side of the track. That is absolutely wrong for disabled people. Why should not they enjoy racing and all the other sports? Like everybody else, they should be able to get on and off the train when necessary.

My right hon. Friend the Minister mentioned access to money. Gaining access to money through the various benefits is not the only thing that matters. It is the right to have one's views, wishes and abilities respected—limited though the abilities might be. My dispute with my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning) is that some disabled people laugh at their disabilities. They are not all deadly serious. They are not pushing for everything.

As I said, my disability is a small one. If I say the wrong thing, which I do most of the time, my colleagues threaten to kick my good leg away. That is not something to get upset about or react to. When I made an intervention this morning which was rather too long, Madam Deputy Speaker said that, obviously, my disability did not affect my tongue. I thought that that was quite funny and no insult was meant or taken. However, we must be careful not to think that all disabled people are so serious about life that they cannot see the funny side of their disability occasionally.

We need legislation that prevents discrimination against people. I simply wonder how many wheelchairs are in the Gallery. My guess is not many, given the steepness of the Gallery and the stairs. We have luxury offices at Derby Gate for some of my colleagues and, dare I say it, the Serjeant at Arms. We can provide those facilities for Members of Parliament, but we cannot give the public easy access to this place. It is a strange place.

To meet the costs that my right hon. Friend mentioned, why not do away with the Department of National Heritage immediately and all the savings that that would

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incur, including the subsidy to the arts of £600 million? That could go a long way. Indeed, we could make every station on the London Underground fit for disabled people if we took away the subsidy for the arts tomorrow.

I suggest discontinuing the prison building programme. In the past 11 years, we have spent £2 million on two prisons to provide leisure pursuits for prisoners. What a nice sum we could have to make some places accessible for disabled people. We give all the money and leisure facilities to the thugs and rogues of this world to help them out, yet we say that we are very sorry but it is difficult to find money for the disabled. I could go on, but I shall not.

Let me leave hon. Members with one thought in terms of Government spending. There is a move to increase spending on nursery schools and creches for working mothers. Those are needs which come from choice. Mothers choose to have children and they choose to go back to work early. Disability need does not come from choice. It comes because disabled people have no choice. That is another thing we must remember. The Government's policy of opposition to legislation is clear.

It is dictated by the Treasury; aimed at standing still; made without understanding; and not acceptable to disabled people. The first letter of each of those statements makes up the word "damn". Disabled people in Britain will remain damned to some extent unless and until we introduce legislation to give them the protection that they need.

I support the motion. I conclude by going back to the beginning of my speech. If I ever hear another speech about disabled people of the sort that I heard from the Opposition Front Bench, that will be the last time that I shall speak on the issue. It was the most appalling thing that I have ever heard.

2.9 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): The Minister said that he could not accept that the Bill should go into Committee because that would raise hopes that would be squashed. We should turn the argument round. Preventing the Bill from going into Committee will depress many people. Some of the avenues that they would otherwise seek to use may become less appropriate as a result of their considerable disillusion. There will be considerable hurt throughout the country.

All hon. Members have received representations from hosts of disabled organisations. A group came here yesterday from the Derbyshire Disabled Forum. The members of that group had all the problems of access to the building which have been highlighted. They had high hopes about what would occur today, but their hopes have been dashed. There will be deep anxiety about that.

I support the comprehensive measures that the Bill proposes. However, I hope that hon. Members will excuse me for talking about a limited and specific matter which could be regarded as a footnote to the debate. I hope that the Minister will examine the matter and discuss it with Ministers in the Home Office.

As Members of Parliament, we should be worried about access for the disabled to polling stations to exercise their right to vote. It has been said that disabled people can make use of postal and proxy vote facilities, but that misses the point. Disabled people wish, as far as humanly possible, to have open to them the methods of voting that are available to able-bodied people. Many people wish to use their right to vote at polling stations, as they have done throughout their lives and see other people do. They believe that it is the correct way to exercise their civic duty.

We should take effective action to give disabled people the opportunity to vote at polling stations. Action has been taken by the Home Office—circulars have been issued to returning officers and action has been taken to improve access to polling stations—but it is woefully inadequate.

The Spastics Society produced a report on arrangements made at the last general election. It examined 50 constituencies and more than half the polling stations in 26 of them—846 in total. It was said earlier that many of the details about disabled people came from anecdotal stories and information. The Spastics Society report is a piece of detailed research which illustrates the considerable problems experienced.

The hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) spoke earlier. In his constituency, 11 polling stations—more than half—were examined and only two were accessible according to the criteria used by the Spastics Society. Four had multiple access problems, while the rest had one or two serious problems, which should cause us considerable concern.

The conclusion to the Spastics Society report states:

> "Disabled people were 'polls apart' from the rest of society in the 1992 General Election. Many voted separately, either by post or outside the polling station or on a table set aside within the polling station, or they didn't vote at all."

People have a right to a secret ballot and to use the facilities contained in polling stations to exercise that right. Some disabled people cannot manage to get into polling stations and separate arrangements have to be made, which by no means meet the criteria for the operation of a secret ballot.

The report concludes:

> "Disabled people's issues were 'polls apart', rarely taken up by the political parties or the media. Disabled people's involvement in the election campaign was 'polls apart', many felt ignored by politicians and disillusioned by the whole process."

We have a responsibility in such matters.

The hon. Member for Colchester, North did not understand the problems that exist in his constituency, which are mentioned in the report. No survey took place in my constituency, which might have more serious problems, as some of the area is rural and it is therefore likely to be more difficult to find suitable facilities. We should all face up to the problem. If we bother about anything, it must be about getting our own house in order—getting the House of Commons in order to provide acccess for disabled people and getting the arrangements by which we arrive here in order.

The motion mentions the civil rights of disabled people and the need for anti-discrimination legislation dealing with access to public services, and one such service is clearly the right to vote. Today we have discussed the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill in great detail and a fortnight ago I introduced the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill to the House, which dealt—in part II and schedule 2—with physical access to polling stations and the problems reported by the Spastics Society and other organisations.

Mr. Sheerman: Was not the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) wrong, because disabled people want to be treated like any other citizens? They want to be able to come here as of right. They do not want special arrangements but the same access as every other citizen in our democracy. They also want to be able to go to the polling booth. The hon. Member for Colchester, North missed the point when he said that they were entitled to a postal vote, because they want the same rights as anyone else in a democracy and not different rights.

Mr. Barnes: That is correct. Disabled people should be able to have a choice. If they want a postal vote, they should be able to have one—as can able-bodied people if they are going to be away on holiday or if they feel that that is how they want to act. Do they wish to go to the polling station because they see it as a civic duty? Because many disabled people have had to fight with that disablement and against discrimination in society, they have a heightened sense of civic duty. If they gain appropriate employment, the employer usually gets a good bargain, because disabled people are dedicated to their jobs.

Ms. Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): My hon. Friend has drawn a precise analogy of what I regard to be the central flaw in the Minister's argument about the Bill. The Minister said that he rejected an over-arching concept of providing civil rights for disabled people and that he preferred to approach it in a compartmental way. Able people do not live in compartments; our lives interact, mix and melt. One of the difficulties that disabled people frequently raise with me is the way in which their lives do not meet their needs. Too often they are excluded from those blurred edges where able people constantly meet others as they conduct their lives in the public arena. The over-arching concept, which is intrinsic in the Bill that the Labour party would like to become law, would make that interaction possible for everyone.

Mr. Barnes: I agree with the over-arching concept and its essential nature. There will be a great sense of disappointment today that it has not been taken on board. Perhaps specific provisions should be introduced to meet specific problems in certain areas, just as I am pressing for specific provision now. The logic of acting on any specific provision, however, is that we can then tackle the whole range of problems that disabled people face.

Mr. Alfred Morris: Further to the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms. Jackson), does my hon. Friend agree that what will puzzle and concern disabled people is the impression that has been given about an alternative to the Bill? I am sure that they will ask how and on what time scale that alternative will help them to combat the discrimination from which they suffer. Does my hon. Friend agree that this is the unresolved question that will be in the minds of disabled people after the debate?

Mr. Barnes: This is not the first time that we have debated the issue, because my right hon. Friend introduced a version of the Bill in an earlier Session. The Bill before us has come from another place and there has been time for the Government to take action and for some plans and proposals to be put forward. The Government are attempting to push the Bill aside with promises of various discussions taking place here and there. At the same time, many people feel a growing sense of disillusionment.

Although we have only a few minutes left, it would be valuable if the Minister had second thoughts and gave us the chance to get the Bill through the House after 2.30, so that it can go to Committee for further investigation. Short of that, if the Minister is not willing to consider the over-arching concept, other more limited measures exist. What will be done, for example, about access to polling stations?

Mr. McMaster: Is not it the case that the voices to which we should be really listening are those of the 6·5 million disabled people and their carers who have expressed their strong support for the Bill and their desire for it to be enacted quickly? No arguments that have come from the Government will satisfy those of us who support the Bill or those 6·5 million people.

Mr. Barnes: I was presented with a petition about those 6·5 million people yesterday by the Derbyshire Disabled Forum, which wanted me to pass it to the Prime Minister. It called on the Government to give the Bill fair weather and asked for prime ministerial support. At the very least, the Minister could have reflected that prime ministerial support, but he failed to do so. There is deep concern.

Many favourable comments are made about the Minister and about how he responds in humanitarian terms. However, there have been many problems during the many years that he has been doing his job. There were difficulties about the way in which the disability living allowance fund operated and the establishment of the Benefit Agency. He is now presenting us with a problem by saying that he will not allow the Bill to proceed.

Mr. Skinner: Is not the basic reason why the rotten, lousy Tory Government will not help the disabled that they believe in the philosophy of letting the tall poppies grow tall and of people standing on their own two feet? That means that people who are born disabled cannot compete with those who make it to the top. The Government are prepared to shed crocodile tears by the bucketful because they believe in the market force philosophy of allowing people to tread on anybody else's neck in order to get to the top. The idea of giving rights to minorities, including the disabled, cuts across the Government's philosophy. That is why 250,000 people are not being paid their disability living allowance. The Government blame that on a computer—why is it that the income tax computer always works on time, but the computer for paying out benefits has caused a delay of nine months in payment? That comparison spells out the hypocrisy of this rotten, lousy Government.

Mr. Barnes: Political theorists talk about the vigorous virtues and propound individualism, the family and the notion that everyone should be able to stand on their own two feet—a particularly poignant phrase when one is dealing with disablement. There are a number of disabled people who cannot do that, but who should be able to gain access to everything on the same basis as able-bodied people.

As time is running out, I shall not be able to expand in detail on the subject of access to polling stations and the Spastics Society's report, but I shall mention one of the five key problems that it outlined. It highlighted problems inside the polling stations, including the number of steps, poor lighting and slippery floors—which accounted for 22

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per cent. of the problems. It said that there were narrow corridors and doors which people could not get through. Such problems must be taken seriously.

The Bill that I introduced was designed to improve electoral registration techniques, but such improvements are of little use to disabled people if, once they are included on the register, they cannot get into the polling stations to exercise their voting rights. The Minister should take that matter on board. He should carefully examine the report and the other matters raised by disabled organisations. He should hold discussions with the Minister of State, Home Office, with responsibility for electoral registration, the hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Lloyd), so that we can perhaps nudge forward.

Although there are important issues before the House, civil rights for disabled people must be considered by the Government. They should have responded to the issues, but they have not. Therefore, we must try to gain something from today's debate—perhaps the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People would like to make a quick intervention now to say that he will at least meet the Minister of State, Home Office to discuss the possibility of making progress.

Mr. Scott: In the few seconds remaining, I can give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. I will take it up with my hon. Friend.

Mr. Barnes: I thank the Minister.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House believes that anti-discrimination legislation is necessary to ensure equality of opportunity for people with disabilities; and calls for the early enactment of specific provisions relating to public transport and other public and private services, employment and housing.

Disabled Persons (North-West)

2.29 pm

Mr. Harold Elletson (Blackpool, North): I beg to move,

That this House notes the 173 per cent. real increase in public spending on benefits for long-term sick and disabled people since 1979; welcomes the extra help made available this year to 300,000 disabled people nationally, many of whom live in the North West; recognises the importance of the promotion by the Government of greater access to new buildings both in the North West of England and nationally, and recognises the need to continue to build a partnership between Government, business and the voluntary sector to improve further the quality of life of disabled people.

I do not want to take up any more of the House's time. I am well aware of the dangers of so doing, given the fact that a similar Bill was talked out last time—[HON. MEMBERS: "Sit down then."] That should not be allowed to happen again.

It being half past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Bills

CIVIL RIGHTS (DISABLED PERSONS) BILL *[LORDS]*

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred until Friday 26 March.

2.30 pm

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Noting the objection by the hon. Member for Berkshire, East (Mr. MacKay), I have had to nominate 26 March, but I should like to raise a further point of order at a conventient moment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): I thank the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Before the general election last year a similar Bill was before the House and was talked out by a Tory Member who then lost his seat in the election. What has happened today is an utter disgrace. We have debated the disabled for several hours, yet the hon. Member for Berkshire, East (Mr. MacKay) has objected to the Bill. It is time that this hypocrisy was ended——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows full well that that is not a matter for the Chair.

EMPLOYMENT PROTECTION (PARENTAL LEAVE) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred til Friday 26 March.

REGULATION OF WHEEL-CLAMPING BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred til Friday 26 March.

LICENSING (AMENDMENT) (SCOTLAND) BILL

Not amended (in the Standing Committee), considered. Order for Third Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be read the Third time on Friday 12 March.

NATIONAL SCHOOL HEALTH SERVICE BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 26 March.

EUROPEAN UNION (PUBLIC INFORMATION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 12 March.

HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS SHIPPING SERVICES

Resolved,

That the provisions of paragraph (2) of Standing Order No. 84 (Constitution of standing committees), paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 86 (Nomination of standing committees) and Standing Order No. 101 (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.) shall apply to the draft Undertaking by the Secretary of State for Scotland with the consent of Her Majesty's Treasury and of Orcargo Limited as if it were a draft statutory instrument; and that the said draft Undertaking be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. MacKay.]*

Mr. Alfred Morris: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. While the Select Committee on Procedure will always make its own choices, is there not a case for the Chair to request an examination of this problem? The hon. Member who blocked a private Member's Bill made a personal statement of apology to the House after the event, yet today the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill has been blocked again by a single person. Ought not the Select Committee to look at this disgraceful case? Disabled people feel badly cheated. Is there anything that the Chair can do to persuade the Select Committee?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman has been a Member of the House for nearly 30 years. With his experience, he knows the procedures of the House and where representations can be made. I am bound by the procedures as they exist.

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You and your colleagues in the Chair repeatedly tell us that you are the guardians of our rights as Back-Bench Members. When there has been adequate debate on a measure which has widespread support and for which there is a general willingness that it should go into Committee, but the Government Whip, acting under instructions, has deliberately attempted to kill it off, to where do we go for protection as Back-Bench Members—or do we not have any protection?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has the protection of the Chair under the procedures of the House as they exist, and he knows that it is up to the House to change those procedures if it so chooses. I am duty bound to enforce the procedures as they exist.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Labour Members blocked item No. 7 on today's Order Paper—the Licensing (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill —in a similar way——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot now make a plea for, or a speech on, that Bill.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We seek your protection. The Minister, in the debate on the motion, clearly said that the Government would instruct the Whip to say "Object" even after a long debate in which not one hon. Member said that he would vote against the Bill. Should we not throw ourselves on your mercy, as you are the Deputy Speaker, and ask you to ensure that the Minister says that he is the person who is objecting to the Bill rather than the poor Whip, who will take the rap?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members know full well that I am not responsible for what any hon. Member says. I cannot take responsibility for matters of policy.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can you confirm that, when an hon. Member objects at this stage of the private Members' Bill procedure, technically he is objecting to the Bill being given a Second or Third Reading without debate? When a Bill has received a whole day's debate, whether in this House or another, and it is held up by a single person objecting to it, is there any way whereby that hon. Member—he is a Member of Parliament and has been voted for in his constituency, whatever other office he may hold—can tell the House why he is doing so? If he cannot do that, is there any way in which his reason can be made public outside the House?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has been a Member of the House for many years, and he is aware that this morning we debated a motion, not a Bill.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have listened to your ruling. I think that you should initiate a full inquiry into the procedures for private Members' Bills on Friday afternoons when we come here either to object or agree to the Second Reading of a Bill. I ask you to do that in the interests of Back Benchers, who rarely have the opportunity to promote private Members' Bills. When they have that opportunity, the Government then try to stall a Bill's progress. We object strongly when, at the end of a debate on such an emotive subject as the rights of disabled people, which has gone on from 9.30 am to 2.30 pm, the House cannot come to a decision. In all probability, the Bill would have been supported by all hon. Members; nobody disagreed with it. Had it got on to the statute book, it would have introduced into legislation important rights for disabled people.

If the House is not prepared to act on behalf of disabled people, all right hon. and hon. Members should be in the Chamber on a Friday to object to all the other Bills that might be before the House but are less deserving of finding their way on to the statute book than a measure that would protect the disabled. I appeal to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to ask Madam Speaker to conduct an inquiry to ascertain whether we can properly resolve the issue and enable the House, at the end of a Friday sitting, to have its way and to make the decision it wishes to make.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member, too, has been a Member of the House for many years. He must know that the issue that he has raised is one for the Procedure Committee. If hon. Members feel strongly about the matter, as they clearly do, they should write in their numbers to that Committee to make the point. I shall be happy to have a copy of whatever submission they make. I hope that we can now leave that matter.

Mr. Skinner: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Is this a new point of order?

Mr. Skinner: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They are all new, are they not?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not necessarily.

Mr. Skinner: For the past 23 years, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have heard you and others tell Back-Bench Members on a Friday that they can go to the Procedure Committee and, somehow or other, get these matters resolved. Let us talk in this place as if we are grown-ups. The truth is that the Procedure Committee has refused to do anything to change the system whereby a Government Whip can object to a Bill by using one word, and one word only. By that means he is able to kill off a Bill that would help 6·5 million inhabitants of this country.

We know that the Procedure Committee has done nothing. It is no use talking like belly wams and saying, "Go to the Procedure Committee." We know that nothing is happening. I think that something should be done. Members who are now in the Chamber, headed by my hon. Friends the Members for Tooting (Mr. Cox) and for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), should make their proposals clear to the Procedure Committee. It would be helpful, Mr. Morris, if you were to give us a chuck-on —a helping hand. It would be helpful if you were prepared to join us and to say that the procedure should be changed. It is not good enough for us to keep complaining and for the occupant of the Chair to say, "Go to the Procedure Committee."

The result is that for 14 years or more this Tory Government have been stopping the disabled from enjoying the benefits that would flow from the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. Let us make a fresh start. Instead of telling us what to do, Mr. Deputy Speaker, why do you not—you are an elected Member—join in the campaign to stop a daft routine that is used to attack many of our constituents every Friday?

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall talk while wearing two hats: I shall speak as a former Government Whip who perhaps killed more private Members' Bills on the Floor of the House than any other Member who is now present and as the Chairman of the Select Committee on Sittings of the House, which reported almost exactly a year ago.

I wish to put the matter into perspective. When the Committee was set up, I thought that it would receive many complaints about the way in which private Members' Bills were handled. I think that I am right in saying that virtually no suggestions were put to the Committee by hon. Members, and I and the members of it wrote to every Member to ask for their views on the sittings of the House. It would have been extremely relevant to raise the issue with which we are now concerned. As I have said, virtually no one wrote to us to propose changes in the handling of private Members' Bills. Let us remember that.

Mr. Sheerman: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It seems that the water is becoming rather muddied. The Chair has a responsibility to protect Members. Surely it has a responsibility also to protect the ability of Members properly to represent their constituents. The situation with which we are faced on a Friday afternoon is not something that we want to take to a Committee. We want it to be known that when someone, say a Whip, shouts, "Object" behind his hand, our constituents, including disabled people, know that the order went from the Prime Minister to the Minister to the Whip. The procedure should be above board and clear, not hidden in a subterfuge, as we have seen this afternoon.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is certainly not a point of order for the Chair.

Holiday Hotels

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. MacKay.]*

2.44 pm

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): I am grateful for the opportunity to introduce this important subject in an Adjournment debate, and delighted that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment is to reply.

I am privileged to represent Eastbourne, along with Willingdon and Polegate. In large measure due to the foresight of successive Dukes of Devonshire, Eastbourne is an elegant and gracious resort which has retained its distinctive character and charm up to the present day. The seventh Duke, in particular, had a great influence on the planned development of the town.

Eastbourne has truly been described as conceived

> "by a gentleman for gentlemen",

and as the

> "Empress of Watering Places".

It was voted top resort only a couple of years ago, and in 1992 attracted some 2·25 million visitor nights and 1·35 visitor day visits. Total visitor spending was £95 million. It was rightly described recently by my hon. Friend, the Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage as

> "one of the country's premier tourist resorts".

The purpose of this debate is to highlight a problem that affects a great number of resorts in this country. In some places, it has already had a major effect. As I have already made clear, Eastbourne is a quality resort. The local council, my constituents and I intend to keep it that way.

Under the Town and Country Planning Act 1971, any material change in the use of buildings or land is deemed to be "development", which must be preceded by a grant of permission. However, that requirement may be eliminated in certain cases by the Secretary of State for the Environment. He is authorised by that Act to issue a statutory instrument, known as a class use order, which defines certain classes of use of buildings and land. Thereafter, if a landlord proposes to change the use of a property, but the proposed use falls within the same class of use as the existing use, the change is deemed not to constitute "development" and is accordingly exempted from the need to obtain planning permission from the local authority.

In simple terms, the order has the effect of streamlining the operation of the planning legislation where a specific change in use leaves the use class unaltered. The implication is, according to the Department of the Environment circular 13/1986, that the change is

> "unlikely to have planning impact".

A few years ago, the Government expressed their intention to broaden certain use classes to reduce the number of classes to a minimum, while retaining specific control over changes of use that substantially affect the environment or other uses, or that damage amenity. Under the resulting Town and Country Planning Use Classes Order 1987 (SI 1764) there are two categories relevant to this debate:

> C1—HOTELS AND HOSTELS:
>
> Use as an hotel, boarding or guest house, or as an hostel where, in each case, no significant element of care is provided.
>
> C2—RESIDENTIAL INSTITUTIONS:
>
> Use for the provision of residential accommodation and care to people in need of care . . .

[Mr. Nigel Waterson]

> Use as a hospital or nursing home.
>
> Use as a residential school, college or training centre.

Thus, the use classes distinguish between a hostel without a significant amount of care and a hostel with a significant amount of care, rather than between a hotel and a hostel.

The previous legislation was the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1972—SI 1385. The relevant classes in that order were as follows:

CLASS XI

> Use as a boarding or guest house, or an hotel providing sleeping accommodation.

CLASS XIV

> Use as a home or institution providing for the boarding, care and maintenance of children, old people or persons under disability",

—and so on.

In planning law, the definition of the word "hotel" normally includes the notion of a transient population. As was stated in the case of Mayflower Cambridge v Secretary of State for the Environment in 1975

> "The basic feature of a hotel, as the word is used in the English language, is that it contains a transient population because it is there to serve people travelling who require short stays only."

On the other hand, a hostel has been taken to mean a building in which people either live or stay and which provides communal facilities. I cite the case of Commercial and Residential Property Development Co. v Secretary of State for the Environment and Kensington and Chelsea Royal Borough 1982. There can be little doubt from a legal point of view that use as a hotel has consistently been regarded as different from use as a hostel. Under the previous rules—that is, prior to 1987—planning permission was certainly required. It must follow that class C1 includes within its ambit a range of different uses of particular properties.

The practical problem is that since the introduction of class C1 a significant number of resorts throughout the country have been powerless to prevent what they regarded as wholly unsuitable conversions of hotel accommodation into hostels. This may occur for more than one reason. A landlord, particularly in recessionary times, may feel that he will be better off by converting his hotel or guest house into a hostel, and seeking DSS residents. At least, he may consider that his income will be guaranteed by the welfare state. Sometimes a hotel is obliged to close and is then bought by a charity or similar organisation for conversion into a hostel for people with a range of social difficulties.

The British Resorts Association has been at the forefront of raising this problem. I can do no better than quote from a recent letter written to me by Mrs. Linda Jones, the BRA's administrator:

> "Whilst unemployment in many resorts is already at a high level, the use of tourist accommodation to house the homeless, especially the homeless from other areas, reduces the availability of good class tourist accommodation and downgrades the amenities of the Resort, thus leading to greater unemployment . . . this is a serious problem, as a continual raising of the numbers of unemployed in a resort area merely creates a downward spiral for a resort in that it discourages holiday makers thus making even more people redundant."

I can only endorse those sentiments. The "downward spiral" of which Mrs. Jones speaks is already painfully evident in some resorts around our country. The BRA has kindly provided me with correspondence showing that a considerable number of resorts are worried about this problem, including Margate, Blackpool, Bridlington, Great Yarmouth, Newquay, Ilfracombe, Weston-super-Mare and Weymouth, to name but a few.

The town of Margate and Thanet district council have been particularly energetic in bringing to light the inadequacies of the use classes order. Last August, they produced an excellent report on the problem, called "B & B Alert".

I shall describe two recent cases in my constituency, and I can provide my hon. Friend with full particulars should he so wish. In one of the cases, a pleasant street with some successful hotels along its length is located in a "tourist accommodation area", as designated in the draft borough plan. By way of parenthesis, I should remark that the purpose of designating areas of Eastbourne in this way was to reduce the loss of financially viable tourist accommodation in the town. In a previous appeal, the Secretary of State also recognised that this street provides tourist accommodation which is well related to the seaside, recreation facilities and conference centres, and that such accommodation should be retained.

Two hotels in the street were found on investigation by the council to provide permanent accommodation. The majority of tenants in the properties were in receipt of state benefits. It was felt that absentee landlords provided inadequate management, and in one of the properties the owners had appointed one of the tenants as their "manager". The council received many complaints from local residents about the activities of the tenants in the two properties. Their activities included loud music and shouting, often at unsocial hours, anti-social behaviour including making threatening and insulting comments to residents and tourists, and a deterioration in the appearance of the properties. The council's officers and the local police became frequent visitors to these hostels. Local residents and businesses banded together to form an association to combat what they called the "deteriorating quality of life" in the street.

Naturally, council officers had to draw the relevant committee's attention to the provisions of class C1 and the failure to distinguish between hotels and hostels. In due course, enforcement notices were served on the owners of the properties, both of whom have appealed to the Secretary of State.

The other case I shall recite concerns a pleasant, small street just off the sea front. Many of the properties are small hotels and guest houses, pretty and well maintained, with owners who work hard to give a good service at a reasonable price. The dominant property in the street is a hotel which unfortunately had to close down. It remained empty for some time. It was then bought by the Carr Gomm Society, an apparently reputable and well-run charity. It intends to reopen it as a hostel. It is perhaps instructive to quote from the society's allocation policy:

> "Applicants will be suffering loneliness and may have lost or never had their own homes. They may have suffered from psychiatric or addictive illness; from physical or mental handicap or from other personal problems; some may be ex-offenders."

The local residents were horrified and complained both to the local council and to me. Council officers investigated the matter, and particularly the extent of care that would be provided for the residents. Apart from a resident support worker, it appeared that there would not be a significant element of care. The council concluded that the proposed hostel came within class C1 and that no planning permission was required. In other words, it was powerless to act. This is so even though the proposed use is clearly contrary to both the spirit and the letter of the draft borough plan.

I have met the local residents affected. They are neither narrow-minded nor selfish. This is not a question of NIMBYism. The aims and objectives of the charity involved are worthy and important, but that is far from being the point at issue here. I have already mentioned that the site concerned is the dominant site in this particular small road. It is bound to affect the character of this pleasant little community. There are other locations in the area where the hostel would be less obtrusive.

I know that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will have received many representations not only from the BRA, but from individual resorts around the country. Some of them may feel reticent about raising the matter too publicly, fearing some effect on their local tourist industry. Therefore, it is perhaps appropriate that I should raise the matter on behalf of Eastbourne, which I am pleased to say has not yet been affected to anything like the degree that other resorts have. The matter is undoubtedly one of wide concern.

We have had well over five years in which to monitor the effectiveness or otherwise of the use classes order. That is ample time to be able to get a fair assessment of whether class C1 is working, and I have to say that there is mounting evidence that it is not working. There can be no doubt that in reality there is a significant difference between a hotel and a hostel, and that can and should be recognised in planning law. A sub-division should be established of C1a and C1b.

Are there other ways in which to address the same problem? It is true that local authorities have powers to control houses in multiple occupation—HMOs—including the setting up of registration schemes under section 346 of the Housing Act 1985. Eastbourne borough council has operated an informatory and regulatory HMO registration scheme since 1988. The council also applies HMO management regulations where appropriate. However, neither of these legal devices is appropriate for true holiday accommodation. If they were applied to true hotels, they would irrevocably convert the land use from holiday accommodation to houses in multiple occupation. This is the very result which councils such as my own wish to avoid.

As a final fall-back position, it has been suggested by the authorities that this is really a question about the identity of residents, which cannot be a planning matter. However, I firmly believe that the problem of including hostels with guest houses and hotels directly relates to land use. The existing C1 class allows land use for holiday accommodation to become converted into land use for properties in multiple occupation. By definition, holiday guests are transient, having a permanent address elsewhere. Tenants of HMOs are permanent with no other home. I shall be very interested to hear the comments of my hon. Friend, who, I know, takes a close and informed interest in such matters. I hope very much that he will institute a full review into the working of the use classes order 1987, with a view to bringing such changes of use fully into the planning process.

2.59 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tony Baldry): My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) has expressed his concerns and those of his constituents about the effects on the character of Eastbourne of the establishment of certain hostels and the increasing use of hotels by housing benefit claimants.

My hon. Friend clearly believes that those concerns can best be met through changes in the planning system. It may help if I make it clear that the purpose of the planning system is to regulate the use and development of land in the public interest. Many uses of land are interchangeable, because their impact on the local environment and amenity are broadly similar.

The use classes order groups together comparable uses and confers the freedom to change between them without planning permission. The order in general is designed to help relieve local planning authorities of the burden of having to determine a large number of unnecessary applications by excluding from the statutory definition of "development"—and hence from the need for planning control—changes of use within the same class.

The order is essentially an instrument of flexibility which enables the planning system to respond to changing patterns of demand for land uses. It helps to minimise the burden on property owners and planning authorities alike and is at the vanguard of deregulation of planning controls. It is, as my hon. Friend made clear, a device for ensuring that we can streamline planning.

Class C1 comprises use as a hotel, boarding or guest house, or as a hostel where no element of care is provided. Hostels include probation and bail hostels. The flexibility that enables hotels to become hostels without the need for planning applications is particularly beneficial to small hoteliers because it allows them to adapt more readily to changing market trends.

The introduction of the present order in 1987 followed extensive consultations about changes needed to reflect a different environment since the predecessor order of 1972. It is important to note, however, that the changes to what is now class C1 were minimal. Other than to define what was meant by "care", so as to distinguish between classes C1—hotels and hostels—and C2—residential institutions—the grouping remained the same as in 1972. Hotels and hostels have been within the same use class—and there has not been a requirement for planning permission in respect of a proposed change of use from a hotel to a hostel—for a quarter of a century.

Mr. Waterson: When I checked this very point with my borough council's chief planning officer this morning, he assured me that, before 1987, the borough council required a planning application to be made and adjudicated upon in respect of any proposed change of use from a hotel to a hostel and that he understood that that was also the practice of other authorities. What is more, if that were not the case, one wonders why it was necessary to change the rules to exclude unnecessary applications.

Mr. Baldry: As that point goes to the nub of my hon. Friend's concerns, let me deal with it. The use class orders generally were updated; it was not just the C1 class. Clearly, some use class orders were changed more than others. As regards the C1 order, what was done by way of clarification was to define what was meant by "care",

[Mr. Baldry]

which was clearly important. Otherwise, there was no change in the order. If any local authorities were requiring planning applications in respect of the conversion of a hotel to a hostel before 1987, on the face of it, that would have been ultra vires. Certainly, looking at the 1972 order and the present order, it is clear that they remain the same. Hotels and hostels were within the same use class and no change was brought about by the new order in 1987.

The use classes order is concerned only with considerations material to planning. It is the nature of the use of the land which is relevant. Land use is not about social, ethical or moral issues. The age, occupation and social background of residents are not material planning considerations. It would serve no useful purpose in land use terms to require a property owner to apply for planning permission in order to accommodate residents of a particular status. There could be no justification for differentiating between different sorts of people who find themselves living in hostels. To insist that hoteliers make a planning application before accommodating certain clients would place an undue burden on attempts to market rooms flexibly.

As I said earlier, it is the Government's view that hotel and hostel uses have essentially similar effects in land use terms. It is also worth bearing in mind that the provisions of the use classes order in their present form allow those premises that have changed to hostel accommodation to revert to use as a hotel without further consent when there are changes in demand.

The effects of the use classes order were the subject of a report commissioned by my Department from independent researchers, Wooton Jeffreys Consultants, which was published in 1991. The researchers found that, in general, planning authorities welcomed the clarification that the 1987 order brought. They also made a revealing comment about the C1 class, noting that in traditional resort towns

> "the hotel trade has been affected by changing patterns in holidays, with a decline in visitor numbers for other than short stay trips."

Where traditional locations are no longer popular holiday destinations, hoteliers will clearly want to consider and seek new markets. I appreciate the concerns of local residents about preserving the character of family holiday resorts. My hon. Friend has put that point extremely well.

In principle, applications for new hotels are the same as any other development proposals and are subject to the same development control procedures as any other planning application. It is, therefore, open to local planning authorities to consider whether to impose conditions regulating the development or use of any new hotel or hostel. But, in doing so, they must guard against placing unjustifiable burdens on the applicant.

The guidance issued by my Department makes it quite clear that, in order to be acceptable, conditions must be necessary, relevant to planning and the development in question, enforceable, precise and reasonable. The identity of the persons who will occupy premises is rarely a planning consideration. Conditions restricting occupancy to a particular person or people who meet certain criteria should therefore be used only when special planning considerations can be clearly demonstrated.

Occasionally, it may be acceptable to limit the use of land for a particular purpose to certain seasons of the year, but, in general, conditions of that sort will be acceptable only if they apply to premises or sites that are clearly unsuitable for permanent occupation.

Alternatively, it may be reasonable to impose a condition specifying that certain buildings may be used only as holiday accommodation. Again, that is likely to be acceptable only in exceptional cases, for example, where there is a need to reconcile the demands of the holiday market with policies to protect the countryside.

I turn to my hon. Friend's concerns about benefit claimants in bed-and-breakfast accommodation because that is part of the thrust of his concerns. The Government have made it clear for some time that local authorities should seek to minimise the use of bed-and-breakfast accommodation. That is why, in our revised code of guidance to local authorities on homelessness legislation, my Department advises:

> "It is essential that authorities should explore all alternatives to bed and breakfast hotels or other specialised bed and breakfast establishments, and use this type of accommodation only as a last resort".

Local authorities have made some real progress in reducing their use of bed-and-breakfast accommodation. Latest available figures for England show a fall of 23 per cent. I am glad to say that, instead, authorities are making greater use of other forms of temporary accommodation —in particular, housing on lease or licence from the private sector. So I reassure my hon. Friend that we are keen that everything should be done to reduce to the absolute minimum the use by any local authority of bed-and-breakfast accommodation. It is an expensive and ineffective way of meeting the needs of the statutory homeless.

For housing benefit purposes, it makes no difference whether a customer lives in a hotel, hostel or any other form of rented accommodation. The important factor is the amount of rent that is paid and the personal and financial circumstances of the recipient. I am aware that some people are worried that housing benefit is meeting excessive rents for sub-standard accommodation.

I am aware that some seaside hoteliers and guest house owners are letting their accommodation out to recipients of benefit on a long-term basis and that there are worries that the anti-social behaviour of some occupants is damaging the tourist trade. My hon. Friend has expressed those anxieties today. I appreciate those concerns, but I am sure that my hon. Friend and others would agree that it would be wrong to force people to live in certain places or certain types of accommodation. To do so would restrict freedom of movement, which forms an essential component of the labour market.

However, we have a duty to ensure that the social security system is not exploited. So local authorities, which administer the housing benefit scheme, have powers to prevent abuse. Benefit may be refused if it is felt that a tenancy has been created with the express intention of taking advantage of the housing benefit scheme. Local authorities also have powers to restrict the level of rent on which benefit is calculated if people occupy accommodation that is either larger or more expensive than is required. Vulnerable groups such as the elderly or families with responsibility for dependent children are exempt from this restriction unless it is reasonable to expect them to move to suitable alternative accommodation.

Local authorities are, naturally, best placed to know their local housing market and to assess benefit levels, taking into account individual circumstances. We encourage local authorities to take a positive attitude and fully to exercise their judgment in the matters in which they have the most scope to do so, with the twin aim of avoiding excessive benefit spending, while ensuring that help is available to those people who have genuine difficulties in paying their rent.

The other group that may have caused anxiety to, if not my hon. Friend, other Members for resort towns, is occupants of bail and probation hostels. I can understand that local residents may be worried about the change of use of an hotel to an approved bail or probation hostel. The purpose of approved hostels is to provide an enhanced level of supervision to enable certain bailees and offenders to remain under supervision in the community.

Hostels are placed in ordinary communities so that residents can maintain their contacts within the community and with their families. Hostel residents are also encouraged to continue or seek employment, or to attend training courses or treatment facilities in the community. There are some 113 bail hostels and probation hostels in England and Wales.

Under recently issued standards for the supervision of offenders in the community, hostels are required to provide a "structured and supportive environment". This includes promoting a responsible and law-abiding lifestyle, including respect for others; encouraging and enabling residents to use facilities available in the local community and, in doing so, to develop their ability to become self-reliant; and establishing and maintaining good relations with neighbours and the community in general. Indeed, if someone on bail behaved in an anti-social way, that would almost certainly put him in breach of his bail conditions and he could be brought back before the court. Approved hostels provide a supportive and structured environment within which residents can be supervised effectively. If there are concerns about them, they are more management concerns than planning concerns.

We have undertaken to look at the use classes order again in the coming years. I assure my hon. Friend that his anxieties and those of other hon. Members who represent resort towns will be fully considered, although they will have to relate to planning matters in terms of the nature and use of land.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fourteen minutes past Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 15 February 1993

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make it his policy to maintain the existing eligibility levels in respect of legal aid in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The financial eligibility criteria for civil legal aid have generally been set and maintained at the same levels in England, Wales and Northern Ireland for a considerable number of years. The Lord Chancellor is satisfied that as far as possible this policy of maintaining parity should be continued. He therefore proposes to introduce the same changes to the civil legal aid eligibility criteria in Northern Ireland as those announced for England and Wales. As to the timing of the changes, it will be possible for some of the proposals to be effected in April 1993, as in England and Wales.

It is intended to bring forward regulations which will enable the following changes to eligibility limits to be made in respect of civil legal aid, legal advice and assistance and advice by way of representation:

(a) lowering of the "free limit" for civil legal aid to income support levels;

(b) reduction of dependants allowances to income support level;

(c) additional provision to be made for the disregard of benefits;

(d) to increase in civil legal aid and advice by way of representation cases the maximum contribution from one-quarter to one-third of excess disposable income.

It is not possible, under current regulation-making powers, for the Lord Chancellor to bring forward regulations immediately to give effect to two other aspects of the proposals—namely, the extension of the payment of contributions over the lifetime of the case and the abolition of the contributory part of the legal advice and assistance scheme. Nevertheless, the Lord Chancellor intends, as soon as an opportunity arises, to bring forward legislation to enable the Northern Ireland eligibility criteria to be more full aligned with those in England and Wales.

Courthouse, Derry

Mr. Hume: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) if he will make a statement on the feasibility of providing accessible court facilities for Derry city while work is carried out on the courthouse; and what representations he has received from the legal profession in Derry, elected representatives and the community about the proposed transfer of sittings to Coleraine.

(2) if the director of the Northern Ireland Court Service will meet the Derry Solicitors Association for further discussion on the effect of the service's decision to relocate Derry's court proceedings in Coleraine for three years;

(3) what consideration he has given to using the large rooms available in the administration block adjacent to the courthouse in Derry city to accommodate proceedings while the courthouse undergoes refurbishment.

Mr. John. M. Taylor: Representations were received from elected representatives, the Derry city council and the Londonderry City Solicitors Association about the decision to transfer Crown court sittings to Coleraine during the period when the main courthouse at Londonderry is being refurbished and improved. I am pleased to say that the director of the Northern Ireland court service met with representatives of the Londonderry City Solicitors Association on 4 February 1993 when an agreement was reached which will ensure that the court facilities available in Londonderry will be used to full capacity during the period of refurbishment of the main courthouse building. One of the two large rooms in the administration block has been fitted out as a courtroom which can be used for civil proceedings. The second room can be used as either a tribunal room or a barristers' solicitors room as need arises.

Mr. Hume: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the arrangements for deciding where a court sits, including who makes the effective decision and the account taken of the views and preferences of the recorder.

Mr. John M. Taylor: It is the responsibility of the Lord Chancellor, under section 47(3) of the Judicature (Northern Ireland) Act, 1978, after consultation with the Lord Chief Justice, to decide the venues for the Crown court. Under the County Courts (Northern Ireland) Order 1980 it is for the Lord Chancellor to decide and give directions as to the places of sittings of the county court and as to the nature of the business to be transacted by any county court at any place. It is standard practice for the county court judge for the division concerned to be consulted before a final decision is taken and directions issued.

TRANSPORT

Railway Equipment

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment has been made of the current level of orders for rolling stock for British Rail relative to trends in the last 10 years.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail has on order 583 diesel and electric multiple unit vehicles and 441 power cars, locomotives, trailer units and coaches for channel tunnel services.

Locomotive and passenger rolling stock deliveries in the last 10 years were as follows:

Calendar year	*Number of new vehicles delivered*
1983	93
1984	220
1985	364
1986	331
1987	397
1988	519
1989	648
1990	751

Calendar year	Number of new vehicles delivered
1991	236
1992	365

Rail Services

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement outlining which functions under the railway proposals will control the means of production and delivery of rail services.

Mr. Freeman: Under our proposals the responsibility for the track and infrastructure will be for Railtrack, the new national track authority. Existing passenger services will be franchised to private sector operators who will bid competitively to run services. Freight services will be provided by private sector operators. On the question of vertical integration, I refer my hon. Friend to the statement which my right hon. Friend made in his speech on 2 February on Second Reading of the Railways Bill, *Official Report*, column 163.

Rail Investment

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 8 February, *Official Report*, column *420*, what is his forecast for capital investment by British Rail in 1993-1994, excluding spending associated with the channel tunnel.

Mr. Freeman: In his appearance in front of the Transport Select Committee on 27 January this year, the chief executive of British Rail, Mr. John Welsby, estimated that investment in the existing railway would be some £550 million in 1993-94. British Rail is currently refining its plans further in producing its budget for 1993-94.

Rail Freight

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he has been able to take since his recent announcements on the future arrangements for the carriage of freight by rail to enable private operators to have the opportunity of carrying rail freight which British Rail have declined to carry.

Mr. Freeman: The Railways Bill is needed in order to establish a proper framework for access to the railway network by private train operators. Meanwhile the British Railways Board has undertaken to respond positively to private sector initiatives which help to increase the amount of freight on rail, within the existing statutory framework, and British Rail managers have discussed several proposals with private firms. I have agreed with the chairman that we shall discuss whether anything more can be done to facilitate voluntary access for private train services in the run-up to freight privatisation.

Concessionary Fares

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has had from Manchester TUC pensioners in regard to concessionary fares; what reply he is sending; what action he will be taking; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: We have recently received a letter from Manchester TUC pensioners as well as several representations by Manchester Members of Parliament on their behalf. Responsibility for concessionary fares in Greater Manchester rests with the passenger transport authority and the district councils. It is for those authorities to decide what level of concessions is appropriate, taking account of their other local spending priorities.

Road Construction Materials

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give the quantity and type of aggregate that have been used in *(a)* the construction of new roads and *(b)* the maintenance of existing roads in each year since 1985; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The information requested is not held centrally.

Westway

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether a date has been set for the demolition of houses on the Westway to facilitate the road widening scheme at the junction of Westway and Old Oak.

Mr. Norris: It is planned to take possession of all the properties required for this scheme by February 1995. A few of them will, however, be required by August 1994 for advance works to divert public utility services. Formal notices will soon be given to owners and occupiers of these properties. The houses will be demolished as soon as possible after they are vacated to reduce risk of squatting.

Red Routes

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which Thames bridges are proposed to come under the responsibility of the director of traffic for London under the red routes scheme.

Mr. Norris: Twickenham, Kew, Chiswick, Battersea, Vauxhall, London and Tower bridges are included in the priority red route network on which the traffic director for London has responsibilities under the Road Traffic Act 1991.

Shipping Accidents

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the shipping casualties or accidents since 1 July 1983 in respect of which a formal investigation by a wreck commissioner or sheriff has been held under the provisions of the Merchant Shipping Act 1970.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 1 February 1993]:* The information is as follows:

Date of accident	Name of vessel
3 June 1984	Marques
6 March 1987	Herald of Free Enterprise
13 January 1989	Boy Andrew

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport in what circumstances he will require a formal investigation into a shipping accident by a sheriff or wreck commissioner in terms of section 56(1) of the Merchant Shipping act 1970, as amended; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 1 February 1993]:* The Secretary of State would be likely to order a formal investigation where an investigation under the Merchant Shipping (Accident Investigation) Regulations 1989 cannot fully determine the cause of the accident and where there is a reasonable prospect that a formal investigation will do so. A formal investigation might also be called if, for any reason, the Secretary of State considered that it would lead to the circumstances of the accident and the lessons to be learnt becoming better and more widely known.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Debt (Developing Countries)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been *(a)* the level of debt repayments to United Kingdom banks from developing countries and *(b)* the level of new United Kingdom bank lending to developing countries in each of the last five years.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: United Kingdom banks are required to report details of loans outstanding to developing countries, but not to show separately flows of new lending, repayments and reschedulings. It is therefore only possible to provide the net flows. These show net repayments to United Kingdom banks from developing countries over the last five years:

	Repayments (net) £ million
1987	1,500
1988	800
1989	850
1990	1,010
1991	680

Positive net financial transfers from banks to developing countries are not necessarily desirable. For example, if debtors were to receive new market rate loans to cover interest payments on old debt, this would show up as a positive transfer, but it would also increase the debt burden. The purpose of commercial bank lending is, rather, for loans to be invested on a productive basis, so as to finance interest and repayments when the time comes.

Aid Statistics

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the average value of United Kingdom aid to each recipient country per head of population in each of the last four years.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The information requested is in the table.

The levels of our development assistance to individual countries are based on a number of factors, of which population is only one. The cash levels of our assistance are given in "British Aid Statistics 1987-88—1991-92", which is available in the Libraries of the House.

Gross bilateral United Kingdom expenditure on aid per capita[1]

	1988 £ actual	*1989 £ actual*	*1990 £ actual*	*1991-92 £ actual*
Afghanistan	0·07	0·13	0·07	n/a
Algeria	0·02	0·02	0·02	0·01
Angola	0·05	0·14	0·12	0·13
Anguilla	199·88	249·61	162·82	n/a
Antigua and Barbuda	14·20	9·01	12·63	22·89
Bahamas	0·02	0·12	0·33	0·31
Bangladesh	0·40	0·50	0·50	0·51
Barbados	1·99	1·12	17·23	9·38
Belize	18·15	20·80	29·68	19·07
Benin	0·08	0·07	0·07	0·04
Bermuda	0·42	0·69	0·08	0·03
Bhutan	0·31	0·30	0·31	0·54
Bolivia	0·43	0·58	0·57	0·54
Botswana	7·20	6·68	6·84	9·25
Brazil	0·01	0·31	0·01	0·02
British Virgin Islands	193·68	317·73	184·96	16·88
Brunei	0·01	0·04	0·03	0·03
Burkina Faso	0·04	0·03	0·03	0·04
Burma[2]	0·06	0·02	—	—
Burundi	0·02	0·03	0·03	0·03
Cambodia	0·02	0·04	0·01	n/a
Cameroon	0·49	0·45	0·24	0·26
Cape Verde Islands	0·15	0·18	0·13	0·30
Cayman Islands	76·19	62·14	146·64	n/a
Central African Republic	0·01	0·02	0·02	0·02
Chad	0·05	0·04	0·03	0·04
Chile	0·02	0·02	0·03	0·05
China	0·03	0·02	0·02	0·02
Colombia	0·06	0·07	0·06	0·12
Comoros	0·00	0·02	—	0·04

	1988 *£ actual*	*1989* *£ actual*	*1990* *£ actual*	*1991-92* *£ actual*
Congo	0·15	0·13	0·10	0·16
Cook Islands	4·55	—	0·20	n/a
Costa Rica	0·57	2·18	1·80	3·62
Cyprus	1·09	1·01	1·66	0·71
Djibouti	0·34	0·20	0·16	0·30
Dominica	24·67	30·77	16·14	24·22
Dominican Republic	0·02	—	—	—
Ecuador	0·15	0·12	0·54	0·12
Egypt	0·37	0·21	0·17	0·26
El Salvador	0·03	0·03	0·02	0·01
Equatorial Guinea	0·04	0·21	0·15	—
Ethiopia	0·43	0·25	0·41	0·37
Falkland Islands	2,133·33	1,853·29	513·96	n/a
Fiji	1·67	6·32	5·96	3·09
Gabon	0·01	0·03	0·02	0·06
Gambia	8·19	6·14	8·61	6·64
Ghana	2·42	3·58	1·38	3·01
Gibraltar	317·40	13·96	13·60	n/a
Grenada	12·25	13·25	11·81	26·50
Guatemala	—	—	0·01	0·01
Guinea	0·10	0·07	0·08	0·17
Guinea-Bissau	0·06	0·04	0·04	0·03
Guyana	0·65	8·21	19·13	7·28
Haiti	—	—	—	0·01
Honduras	0·26	0·14	0·17	0·29
Hong Kong	0·05	0·04	0·05	0·07
India	0·13	0·12	0·11	0·16
Indonesia	0·10	0·12	0·13	0·19
Iran	—	—	0·01	0·05
Iraq[2]	—	—	—	1·08
Israel	—	—	0·01	—
Ivory Coast	0·65	0·76	0·90	0·44
Jamaica	8·51	8·36	6·17	2·51
Jordan	1·09	1·31	2·58	0·99
Kenya	2·24	2·34	1·91	1·56
Kiribati	28·57	24·97	24·09	23·24
Laos	0·03	—	0·01	0·01
Lebanon	0·01	—	0·05	—
Lesotho	3·01	3·59	3·37	3·64
Liberia	0·37	0·26	0·23	0·19
Madagascar	0·04	0·03	0·05	0·06
Malawi	6·09	5·29	4·52	2·72
Malaysia	0·61	0·51	1·21	0·89
Maldive Republic	4·44	2·95	3·79	2·98
Mali	0·15	0·14	0·12	0·16
Malta	0·27	0·47	0·34	0·79
Mauritania	0·10	0·08	0·03	0·15
Mauritius	6·12	11·67	4·70	2·86
Mexico	0·02	0·02	0·01	0·02
Mongolia	n/a	n/a	n/a	0·01
Montserrat	190·48	337·02	354·64	n/a
Morocco	0·03	0·02	0·43	0·08
Mozambique	2·09	1·50	1·66	1·15
Namibia	1·67	1·22	1·17	1·33
Nepal	0·62	0·96	0·82	0·87
Nicaragua	0·05	0·02	0·12	0·05
Niger	0·05	0·04	0·04	0·05
Nigeria	0·07	0·57	0·12	0·12
Oman	0·72	0·65	0·44	0·67
Pakistan	0·23	0·29	0·43	0·33
Panama	0·43	0·31	0·31	0·35
Papua New Guinea	4·19	3·01	2·36	1·30
Paraguay	0·13	0·09	0·12	0·11
Peru	0·07	0·05	0·06	0·07

	1988 *£ actual*	*1989* *£ actual*	*1990* *£ actual*	*1991-92* *£ actual*
Philippines	0·02	0·20	0·18	0·12
Pitcairn Island	1,625·00	—	—	n/a
Rwanda	0·05	0·05	0·07	0·03
Sao Tome and Principe	0·14	—	—	n/a
Senegal	0·14	0·43	0·13	0·21
Seychelles	25·99	16·72	13·77	22·84
Sierra Leone	0·96	0·71	0·63	0·55
Singapore	0·05	0·14	0·11	0·09
Solomon Islands	17·72	18·44	16·88	16·72
Somalia	1·17	0·90	0·28	0·47
South Africa[3]	—	—	0·18	—
Sri Lanka	1·33	1·42	1·02	0·66
St. Helena and Dependencies	3,036·40	4,777·83	2,173·50	n/a
St. Kitts-Nevis	44·57	16·52	22·77	25·93
St. Lucia	19·91	61·19	16·14	12·13
St. Vincent	7·76	8·95	11·72	8·58
Sudan	1·11	1·32	0·88	0·71
Surinam	0·03	0·01	—	—
Swaziland	7·09	8·29	6·49	4·43
Tanzania	1·40	1·54	0·91	1·32
Thailand	0·43	0·19	0·20	0·07
Togo	0·09	0·08	0·09	0·13
Tonga	2·84	3·68	2·30	2·40
Trinidad and Tobago	0·12	0·52	0·58	4·14
Tunisia	0·06	0·11	0·05	0·03
Turkey	0·05	0·07	—	0·30
Turks and Caicos Islands	604·72	748·51	702·02	n/a
Tuvalu	628·95	39·17	55·36	n/a
Uganda	1·83	1·75	1·43	1·55
Uruguay	0·01	—	0·02	0·05
Vanuatu	40·45	38·35	39·98	35·97
Venezuela	—	—	—	0·01
Vietnam	—	—	—	0·01
Western Samoa	0·30	0·25	0·98	0·49
Yemen (Republic of)	0·66	0·58	0·49	0·43
Yugoslavia	—	—	—	0·01
Zaire	0·02	0·20	0·06	0·04
Zambia	2·32	2·63	3·13	4·24
Zimbabwe	2·68	2·31	2·16	4·86

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[1] Figures are only provided for those countries and dependencies for which population figures are available and aid per capita is greater than £0·005 in one or more years.
"n/a" indicates that population figures are not available in that year.
"—" indicates that aid per capita is less than £0·005 in that year.

[2] Aid provided to these countries is for the purpose of humanitarian assistance only.

[3] No aid to South Africa is channelled through the South African Government.

Aid Programme

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many letters his Department has received from the public about the current level of the British aid programme since June 1992.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We receive regular correspondence on the level of the aid programme and related aid questions. There has been no central record kept of the numbers of letters received from the public which are concerned principally with aid volume.

Angola

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the latest situation in Angola.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We welcome the meeting between the Government of Angola and UNITA last month in Addis Ababa, but regret that UNITA did not return to talks on 10 February as agreed. We have strongly urged UNITA to do so. Dialogue is crucial if a ceasefire is to be agreed and the peace process resumed.

Peru

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what aid was given by the EC to Peru over the past three years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Commitments of Community aid to Peru were as follows: 1990, 31 mecu (£22 million); 1991, 36 mecu (£25 million); 1992, 49·5 mecu (£36 million). This included funding for rural development projects, emergency aid, food aid, co-financing with non-governmental organisations and assistance with drugs control.

New Community initiatives, with the exception of increased humanitarian assistance and support for NGOs, were suspended following the coup last April. In the light of recent progress towards restoration of democracy in Peru, the position is being kept under close review.

World Summit for Children

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the financial implications of the agreement made at the world summit for children, for all donor countries to re-examine their development assistance budgets, to ensure that programmes aimed at the achievement of the goals for the survival, protection and development of children will have a priority when resources are allocated.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The world summit for children was not planned as a pledging conference and no new programme was launched. The summit's goals are fully consistent with the priority areas for the British aid programme, which are explained in the departmental report published on 10 February (Cm 2202).

HOME DEPARTMENT

Extradition

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons living in the United Kingdom the Indian authorities have applied to extradite in each of the last 10 years; in how many cases such applications have been *(a)* accepted and *(b)* refused; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: We have received one such application, which was subsequently withdrawn.

Police Restructuring

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice he has given to police authorities regarding their possible re-organisation; and what plans he has for primary legislation to restructure the constabularies of England and Wales.

Mr. Charles Wardle: We have not given advice to police authorities on this matter. We are considering a range of issues relating to the future structure, organisation and funding of the police service.

When we have firm proposals for change we shall consult interested parties.

Foreign Enlistment Act 1870

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review the provisions of the Foreign Enlistment Act 1870.

Mr. Jack: The Foreign Enlistment Act 1870 was reviewed by the Diplock committee in 1976 (Cmnd. 6569). We have no current plans for a further review of the Act.

Cycle Lights

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on the number of cyclists in the Greater London area who have *(a)* been prosecuted and *(b)* been warned by a police officer for riding a cycle without lights during each of the last three years.

Mr. Jack: Information for the Metropolitan police district (including the City of London) is given in the table.

Number of persons cautioned and prosecuted for pedal cycle lighting and reflector offences in the Metropolitan Police District (including the City of London) 1989, 1990 and 1991[1]

Year	*Cautions*	*Prosecutions*
1989	—	—
1990	7	5
[1]1991	—	7

[1] Provisional.

Prison Department

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff have agreed redundancy payment in the supply and transport branch of the warehousing and distribution branch of the prison department.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: All the staff employed in the warehousing and distribution function to whom redundancy notices have been issued have been advised of the amount of redundancy payment to which they will be entitled. As the period of redundancy notice does not expire until 31 March 1993 and, as my right hon. and learned Friend said on 4 February at columns 285-86, while the implication of advice received on the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 (TUPE) is being considered no payments have yet been made.

Manchester Prison

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for the provision of welfare and probation services to HM prison Manchester; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Bidders for the management of HM prison Manchester are free to work up their own proposals for the provision of welfare services at the prison. They must do so in accordance with the standards laid down in section 0 of the "Manchester Operational Specification," a copy of which was placed in the Library of the House.

Fire Service

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how the fire service pay agreement will be implemented this year; and if he will make it his policy that the cost of meeting the agreement is fully funded.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Government's policy that pay settlements in the public sector this year should be restricted to between zero and 1·5 per cent. applies to the fire service as to other public sector groups. Pay and conditions of service in the fire service are matters for negotiation in the National Joint Council for Local Authorities' Fire Brigades on which the Government are not represented. My right hon. and learned Friend has written to the chairman of the fire service employers' representative organisation to make it clear that he expects the employers to comply with the Government's public sector pay policy when they come to settle any pay increases in 1993. The increase in the fire service's share of local authority total standard spending for 1993-94 has been based on the assumption that any pay increases during 1993 will not exceed 1·5 per cent.

Deaths in Custody

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all deaths since 1 January 1991 of persons detained in prison service custody stating in each case the age, sex and ethnic background of the deceased, the cause of death, the inquest verdict, whether the person was on remand or sentenced and the establishment concerned.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information is given in the table.

Deaths of prisoners in Her Majesty's prison service establishments between 1 January 1991 and 11 February 1993

Establishment	*Status*	*Age*	*Sex*	*Ethnicity of death*	*Cause verdict*	*Inquest*
1991						
Gloucester	S	42	M	1	Hanging	Suicide
The Mount	S	19	M	1	Hanging	Suicide
Norwich	S	36	M	1	Hanging	Suicide
Wandsworth	S	29	M	2	Cut throat	Suicide while balance of mind disturbed and aggravated by lack of care
Full Sutton	S	35	M	1	Hanging	Suicide
Blundeston	S	34	M	1	Myocardial dysplasia	Natural
Lincoln	S	62	M	1	Uraemia necrosis	Natural
Maidstone	S	61	M	1	Heart failure	Natural
Manchester	U	22	M	9	Hanging	Suicide
Stafford	S	40	M	1	—	Unlawfully killed
Cardiff	U	23	M	1	Hanging	Suicide
Brixton	U	37	M	8	Heart failure	Accidental
Liverpool	U	22	M	1	Hanging	Suicide aggravated by lack of care
Bristol	S	32	M	1	Hanging	Suicide aggravated by lack of care
Wakefield	S	59	M	1	Cardiac arrest	Natural
Wormwood Scrubs	S	56	M	1	Myocardial infarction	Natural
Oxford	U	29	M	1	Hanging	Accidental
Manchester	U	31	M	1	Overdose	Misadventure
Wandsworth	S	25	M	1	Cerebral infarction	Natural
Garth	S	38	M	1	Cut wrists	Suicide
Leeds	U	31	M	1	Hanging	Open
Camp Hill	S	51	M	1	Heart attack	Natural
Liverpool	S	30	M	1	Heart-lung failure	Suicide
Durham	U	33	M	1	Possible dystonic reaction to haloperidol	Open
Wakefield	S	49	M	8	Myocardial infarction	Natural
Littlehey	S	46	M	1	Cardiac arrest	Natural
Brixton	U	24	M	1	Hanging	Suicide aggravated by lack of care
Featherstone	S	34	M	1	Hanging	Suicide aggravated by lack of care
Wandsworth	S	64	M	1	Myocardial infarction	Natural
Wormwood Scrubs	S	21	M	2	Hanging	Open
Haverigg	S	31	M	1	Sclerosis of liver	Natural
Blantyre House	S	27	M	1	Overdose	Accidental
Durham	S	27	M	1	Hanging	Suicide
Pentonville	S	54	M	1	Hanging	Suicide while balance of mind disturbed
Wakefield	S	37	M	1	Stabbed	Not held
Parkhurst	S	29	M	1	Hanging	Suicide brought about by lack of care
Full Sutton	S	34	M	1	Hanging	Misadventure
Liverpool	S	41	M	1	Hanging	Suicide
Grendon	S	30	M	1	Hanging	Suicide
Durham	S	63	M	1	Acute myocardial infarction	Natural
Manchester	S	21	M	1	Hanging	Suicide
Birmingham	S	25	M	1	Hanging	Suicide
Preston	S	45	M	1	Hanging	Suicide
Dorchester	U	45	M	1	Hanging	Open
Wakefield	S	31	M	1	Hanging	Suicide
Birmingham	S	23	M	1	Hanging	Suicide
Feltham	S	18	M	1	Hanging	Suicide
Wakefield	S	65	M	1	Myocardial infarction	Natural
Nottingham	S	45	M	1	Hanging	Suicide
Winchester	U	42	M	1	Drug poisoning	Misadventure
Glen Parve	U	20	M	1	Hanging	Suicide
Feltham	S	15	M	1	Hanging	Accidental

Establishment	*Status*	*Age*	*Sex*	*Ethnicity of death*	*Cause verdict*	*Inquest*
Norwich	S	30	M	2	Asthma attack	Open
Kirkham	S	54	M	No trace	Heart attack	No inquest[1]
Grendon	S	37	M	1	Hanging	Suicide
Pentonville	IA	32	M	7	Acute cardiac failure[2]	Not yet held
Cardiff	U	33	M	1	Overdose	Suicide whilst balance of mind disturbed
Winchester	U	40	M	1	Hanging	Suicide
Haverigg	S	25	M	1	Hanging	Open
Leicester	S	65	M	1	Lung cancer	Natural
Stafford	S	29	M	1	Hanging	Open
Usk	S	52	M	1	Heart attack	Natural
Maidstone	S	64	M	1	Cerebral haemorrhage	Natural
Birmingham	U	41	M	1	Overdose	Suicide
Norwich	U	49	M	1	Overdose	Misadventure
Swaleside	S	41	M	2	Pulmonary aneurysm	Natural
Garth	S	49	M	1	Heart attack	Natural
Stoke Heath	U	19	M	1	Hanging	Suicide
Long Lartin	S	52	M	1	Overdose	Suicide
Leeds	U	30	M	1	Hanging	Suicide
1992						
Risley	U	24	F	2	Drug poisoning	Misadventure
Hull	U	30	M	1	Hanging	Suicide
Moorland	S	19	M	1	Hanging[3]	Not held
Winchester	S	72	M	1	Prostatic cancer	Natural
Bristol	U	40	M	1	Hanging	Suicide
Dorchester	S	31	M	1	Hanging	Open
Durham	U	21	M	1	Hanging	Suicide
Lincoln	S	44	M	1	Cardiac arrest	Natural
Feltham	U	18	M	1	Hanging	Open
Liverpool	S	53	M	1	Meningitis	Natural
Glen Parva	U	20	M	1	Hanging	Suicide
Pentonville	U	36	M	1	Hanging	Open
Wakefield	S	67	M	1	Cerebral infarction	Natural
Feltham	U	20	M	1	Hanging	Suicide due to abnormality of the mind
Pentonville	U	25	M	1	Hanging	Suicide while balance of mind disturbed
Wayland	S	46	M	1	Stabbed	Not held
Norwich	U	24	M	2	Hanging	Suicide while suffering from psychotic illness
Stafford	S	23	M	3	Hanging	Open
Wakefield	S	45	M	1	Brain haemorrhage	Natural
Norwich	S	25	M	1	Brain abscess	Natural
Cardiff	U	40	M	1	Overdose	Death by drug dependency
Wakefield	S	38	M	1	Hanging	Suicide while in a depressed state
Lincoln	S	65	M	1	Myocardial infarction	Natural
Deerbolt	S	16	M	1	Hanging	Suicide
Long Lartin	S	59	M	1	Respiratory failure	Natural
Liverpol	U	22	M	1	Hanging	Suicide
Pentonville	U	33	M	7	Overdose	Suicide
Hull	U	23	M	1	Hanging	Not yet held
Manchester	U	53	M	1	Myocardial ischaemia	Natural
Highpoint	S	54	M	1	Acute myocardial ischaemia	Natural
Leeds	U	21	M	1	Hanging	Accidental
Lewes	U	23	M	1	Hanging	Misadventure
Swaleside	S	30	M	2	Hanging	Misadventure aggrevated by lack of care
Wandsworth	S	68	M	no trace	Occlusive coronary atheroma	Natural
Styal	S	20	F	1	Hanging	Misadventure
Highpoint	S	28	M	7	Cardiac arrythmia	Natural
Birmingham	U	24	M	2	Hanging	Suicide
Brinsford	U	19	M	1	Hanging	Open
Manchester	U	31	M	1	Ischaemic heart disease	Natural
Wandsworth	S	39	M	1	Carcinoma of small intestine	Natural
Wellingborough	S	47	M	1	Hanging	Suicide
Kingston	S	45	M	1	Epileptic fit	Natural
Wakefield	S	69	M	1	Broncho-pneumonia	Natural
Ashwell	S	21	M	1	Hanging	Suicide
Bullingdon	S	61	M	1	Carcinoma tosis	Natural
Hindley	S	18	M	1	Hanging	Not yet held
Parkhurst	S	51	M	1	Epileptic fit	Accidental
Leyhill	S	49	M	1	Cardiac camponade	Natural

Establishment	*Status*	*Age*	*Sex*	*Ethnicity of death*	*Cause verdict*	*Inquest*
Maidstone	**S**	**37**	**M**	**1**	**Asphyxia**	**Suicide**
Send	**S**	**27**	**M**	**2**	**Haemolytic streptoccal septicaemia**	**Natural**
Elmley	**U**	**40**	**M**	**1**	**Hanging**	**Not yet held**
Belmarsh	**S**	**40**	**M**	**1**	**Pneumocystis carinii**	**Natural**
Wakefield	**S**	**60**	**M**	**1**	**Myocardial infarction**	**Natural**
Stocken	**S**	**50**	**M**	**4**	**Myocardial infarction**	**No Inquest[4]**
Liverpool	**S**	**39**	**M**	**1**	**Coronary occlusion**	**Not yet held**
Holloway	**S**	**30**	**F**	**1**	**Hanging**	**Not yet held**
Maidstone	**S**	**69**	**M**	**1**	**Carcinomatosis**	**Natural**
Wakefield	**S**	**47**	**M**	**1**	**Myocardial Insufficiency**	**Natural**
Pentonville	**U**	**21**	**M**	**1**	**Hanging**	**Not yet held**
Leyhill	**S**	**52**	**M**	**1**	**Gastro-intestinal haemorrhage**	**Natural**
Norwich	**S**	**32**	**M**	**1**	**Hanging**	**Suicide**
The Verne	**S**	**54**	**M**	**7**	**Pulmonary embolism**	**Natural**
Durham	**U**	**25**	**M**	**1**	**Hanging**	**Suicide**
Gartree	**S**	**51**	**M**	**1**	**Asphyxiation**	**Suicide**
Parkhurst	**S**	**43**	**M**	**1**	**Hanging**	**Open**
Belmarsh	**S**	**26**	**M**	**1**	**Brain haemorrhage**	**Not yet held**
Parkhurst	**S**	**56**	**M**	**1**	**Acute myocardial infarction**	**Not yet held**
Ashwell	**S**	**30**	**M**	**4**	**Hanging**	**Not yet held**
Littlehey	**S**	**21**	**M**	**1**	**Overdose**	**Not yet held**
Cardiff	**U**	**30**	**M**	**1**		**Not held[5]**
Long Lartin	**S**	**35**	**M**	**1**	**Hanging**	**Suicide**
Leeds	**U**	**22**	**M**	**1**	**Hanging**	**Suicide**
Leicester	**U**	**28**	**M**	**1**	**Hanging**	**Not yet held**
Brixton	**U**	**27**	**M**	**1**	**Hanging**	**Not yet held**
Ashwell	**S**	**28**	**M**	**1**	**Heart attack**	**Not yet held**
Wormwood Scrubs	**U**	**40**	**M**	**1**	**Hanging**	**Not yet held**
Bullingdon	**U**	**28**	**M**	**1**	**Hanging**	**Not yet held**
1993						
Highdown	**U**	**27**	**M**	**1**	**Hanging**	**Not yet held**
Leicester	**U**	**26**	**M**	**1**	**Hanging**	**Not yet held**
Canterbury	**U**	**36**	**M**	**1**	**Hanging**	**Not yet held**
Lancaster	**S**	**32**	**M**			**Not held[6]**
Risley	**S**	**44**	**M**	**1**	**Heart attack**	**Not yet held**
Durham	**S**	**27**	**M**	**1**	**Hanging**	**Not yet held**
North Sea Camp	**S**	**48**	**M**	**1**	**Peripheral neuropathy**	**Not yet held**
Norwich	**S**	**65**	**M**	**1**	**Hypertensive heart disease**	**Not yet held**
Wetherby	**S**	**20**	**M**	**1**	**Hanging**	**Not yet held**
Belmarsh	**U**	**29**	**M**	**1**	**Awaiting post mortem result**	**Not yet held**
Hollesley Bay	**S**	**21**	**M**	No trace	**Brain haemorrhage**	**Not yet held**
Hull	**S**	**44**	**M**	**1**	**Hanging**	**Not yet held**

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[1] Prisoner died in outside hospital where he had been for three weeks prior to his death.

[2] Post mortem failed to reveal the exact cause of death, but concluded there was a 'strong possibility of acute cardiac failure' and a more remote possibility of asphyxia.

[3] Cell mate charged with murder. Trial yet to be held.

[4] Died in outside hospital.

[5] Cell mate charged with murder.

[6] Two prisoners charged with murder.

Notes:

(1) Status:
- **S—Sentenced**
- **U—Unsentenced, including convicted prisoners who have not yet been sentenced**
- **IA—Detained under the Immigration Act**

(2) Ethnicity:
- **1—White**
- **2—West Indian or Guyanese**
- **3—Indian**
- **4—Pakistani**
- **5—Bangladeshi**
- **6—Chinese**
- **7—African**
- **8—Arab**
- **9—Mixed Origin**

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all deaths of people who have died in police custody or otherwise with the police since 1989 to include the age, sex and ethnic background of the deceased, the cause of death, offence charged with if relevant, and the inquest verdict.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Details of deaths in police custody during 1989 for all forces except the Metropolitan police were published in the annual report of Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary. Those for 1990 and 1991 were published in Home Office "Statistical Bulletins" 12/91 and 4/92 respectively. Figures for 1992 are currently being collated and will appear in a further bulletin.

Deaths which occurred in the Metropolitan police district are published in the Commissioner's annual report. Details of the ethnic background of the deceased are not recorded.

Carl Bridgewater Murder Trial

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps were taken to inform the prisoners, their families, and their solicitors of his decision not to refer the Carl Bridgewater murder trial back to the Court of Appeal; when this information was given to radio broadcasters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: My right hon. Friend made his decision known publicly at 10 am on 3 February. The solicitor representing Messrs. Michael and Vincent Hickey and Mr. Robinson was informed of that decision by telephone and letter. Letters were also sent to each of the three convicted men.

Immigration

Mr. Alison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the total numbers *(a)* applying for asylum in the United Kingdom, *(b)* being accepted for immigration in the United Kingdom and *(c)* emigrating from the United Kingdom, in each year since 1990.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 12 February 1993]:* Information on applications for asylum in the United Kingdom is given in table A. The fall in 1992 follows measures introduced in late 1991 to deter multiple and other fraudulent applications.

Information on persons accepted for settlement in the United Kingdom is published in table 3 of Home Office Statistical Bulletin Issue 29/92 "Control of Immigration: Statistics—First and Second Quarters 1992". Information for the second half of 1992 is not yet available.

The available information on emigration from the United Kingdom is produced by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys from the international passenger survey, which defines a migrant as a person leaving one country where he/she has been a resident for a year or more, with the intention of residing in another country for a year or more. This information includes British and other EC citizens, but excludes migration between the Irish Republic and the United Kingdom. Data for 1990 are given in table 2.1 of the 1990 issues of the OPCS publication "International Migration". Corresponding data for 1991 are given in table B; data for 1992 are not yet available.

Copies of both the publications are in the Library of the House.

Table A

Applications received for asylum in the United Kingdom, excluding dependants

	Number
1990	22,000
1991	44,800
1992	24,600

Table B

Migration to and from the United Kingdom[1] *in 1991*

	Number of persons, in thousands		
	Inflow	*Outflow*	*Net balance*[2]
All citizenships	267	239	28
British citizens	117	137	−20
Other EC citizens	31	32	−1
Non-EC citizens	119	70	49

[1] Excluding migration between the Irish Republic and the United Kingdom.

[2] A positive figure represents a net inflow, a negative figure a net outflow.

EC Visas

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department to which immigration category the format of the common EC visa will apply; and whether it will supersede the current formats of visas, entry clearances and letters of consent in those categories.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I have been asked to reply.

Under the terms of the Treaty on European Union the Council shall, acting by a qualified majority on a proposal from the Commission and after consulting the European Parliament, adopt measures relating to a uniform format for visas. The treaty is not yet in force and no proposal has been put forward by the Commission.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Market Testing

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Attorney-General how many staff in his Department are assigned to the market testing programme; how much the programme has cost his Department since November 1991; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The Crown prosecution service has assigned two staff (with support from other staff as required) to its market testing programme. The Treasury Solicitor's Department has assigned five staff, part-time, to its programme. No staff have been assigned specifically in the Serious Fraud Office or the legal secretariat to the Law Officers. The programme has cost £56,300 since November 1991.

Mr McAllion: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list all the market tests that have taken place in his Department since November 1991; whether the result was the maintenance of in-house provision or whether the service was contracted out; what was the name of the successful contractor where appropriate; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: Since November 1991 the Crown prosecution service has market tested its HQ reprographics service which was contracted out to Williams Lea F.M.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Corporation Tax

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much advance corporation tax was collected in 1991-92.

Mr. Dorrell: Advance corporation tax receipts in 1991-92 were £7,936 million.

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the latest estimate of the level of unrelieved advance corporation tax.

Mr. Dorrell: Unrelieved advance corporation tax carried forward is provisionally estimated to be about £5 billion.

Snack Foods

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many requests were received by Customs and Excise in their review of the savoury snack food market asking for different classification for VAT on products; and what similar products are taxed at zero and at standard rate of VAT in different outlets.

Sir John Cope: No requests have been received for reclassification of individual products to either the standard or the zero rate. The main thrust of the arguments advanced on the industry's behalf, mainly by the Snack, Nuts and Crisps Manufacturers Association (SNACMA) was for the introduction of a reduced rate of VAT for all savoury snack products. There are a number of snack products which are eligible for zero-rating under the provisions for food generally. Examples are tortilla chips, twiglets, corn chips, mini garlic breads and bagel chips. All food is standard-rated when supplied by way of catering, ie through outlets such as snack bars or public houses, hotels and restaurants.

Civil Servants

Mr. Cann: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people between the ages of 16 and 60 years began employment in Government Departments in 1992.

Mr. Dorrell: Some 28,000 people aged between 16 and 59 years began employment in the non-industrial home civil service during the period 1 January to 30 September 1992. Information for the final quarter of the year is not yet available.

Contracting Out

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide figures for the reduction in numbers of posts as a result of contracting out since 1979 in his Department and agencies for which he has responsibility.

Mr. Nelson: Readily accessible records do not exist as far back as 1979. Detailed records cover only the past two years. During that time there has been no reduction in the number of Treasury posts as a result of contracting out. Nevertheless, it is estimated that since 1979 there has been a reduction of eight Treasury posts as a result of contracting out.

Taxation

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will now make it his policy to provide in answer to parliamentary questions figures relating to tax paid by classes of taxpayers sufficiently large to preserve confidentiality with particular reference to businesses now privatised; and if he will publish his correspondence with the hon. Member for Eltham on the subject.

Mr. Dorrell: Published statistics about taxation are limited to aggregates which preserve the confidentiality of taxpayers' affairs.

Discount Rates

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy on discount rates.

Mr. Portillo: There are no plans for changes in public sector discount rates.

British Assets Abroad

Mr. Renton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the total size of British assets abroad; and what were the figures in *(a)* 1985 and *(b)* 1975.

Mr. Lamont: The estimates of identified United Kingdom external assets as shown are based on recording direct investments at book values, and other assets at estimated market values. To the extent that the valuation basis for direct investment reflects values in earlier periods, an up-to-date valuation is likely to be higher. These figures do not cover United Kingdom liabilities to overseas residents.

	£ billion
end-year 1975	98·5
end-year 1985	593·2
September 1992	1,065·0

Sources: United Kingdom Balance of Payments, 1992; CSO Databank.

EC Budgets

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions the European Council has established a budget in which the resources ceiling has been less than the declared commitments; by what percentage in each case the commitments have exceeded the resources ceiling; and what were the comparable percentages in respect of the resources ceiling and commitments agreed at the Edinburgh Council meeting.

Sir John Cope *[holding answer 10 February 1993]:* The 1988 own resources decision (88/376/EEC, Euratom) sets separate ceilings on the own resources available to finance payments from the Community budget, and on total commitments. The ceiling on commitments is set at 1·30 per cent. of Community GNP, which is higher than the 1·20 per cent. own resources ceiling specified for 1992. The difference reflects the fact that some commitments will in practice not be taken up and so will not result in payments being made. There is, also in some cases, a considerable time lag between commitments and payments. As long as the Community economy continues to grow such expenditure commitments will represent a smaller proportion of Community GNP when the payments are made than when the commitments were given. However, article 3 of the own resources decision also requires the Community to maintain a compatible relationship between commitment appropriations and payment appropriations to enable the own resources ceiling to be maintained.

The European Council held at Brussels in February 1988 agreed the figures shown in table 1.

The corresponding figures agreed by the Edinburgh European Council in 1992 are given in table 2. (In addition to agreeing to increase the own resources ceiling from 1·20 per cent. of GNP to 1·27 per cent. by 1999, the European Council also agreed to increase the limit on commitments from 1·30 per cent. to 1·335 per cent. of GNP).

Table 1

	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
(1) Own resources ceiling (per cent. of GNP)	1·15	1·17	1·18	1·19	1·20
(2) Payment appropriations as per cent. of GNP	1·12	1·14	1·15	1·16	1·17
(3) Commitment appropriations as per cent. of GNP	1·160	1·180	1·200	1·215	1·235
(3)-(1) Extent to which commitments exceed own resources ceiling (per cent. of GNP)	0·010	0·010	0·020	0·025	0·035
(3)-(2) Extent to which commitments exceed payments (per cent. of GNP)	0·040	0·040	0·050	0·055	0·065

Notes:

1. The figures for payment and commitment appropriations are based on the financial perspective set out in the Inter Institutional agreement which was agreed between the European Commission, Council and European Parliament following the Brussels European Council. They are expressed here as percentages of Community GNP on the basis of the GNP forecasts which were available to the European Council at the time.
2. In practice, the annual budgets agreed over the period 1988-1992 had payment and commitment appropriations which were considerably lower, as a percentage of GNP, than the European Council envisaged. This was mainly because the Community economy grew more strongly over the period in question than the European Council had assumed. The actual figures as budgeted were as follows.

	Payment appropriations as per cent. of GNP	*Commitment appropriations as per cent. of GNP*
1989	1·08	1·12
1990	1·00	1·04
1991	1·10	1·16
1992	1·11	1·16

Table 2

	1993	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
(1) Own resources ceiling (percentage of GNP)	1·20	1·20	1·21	1·22	1·24	1·26	1·27
(2) Payment appropriations as percentage of GNP	1·20	1·19	1·20	1·21	1·23	1·25	1·26
(3) Commitment appropriations as percentage of GNP	1·260	1·250	1·260	1·275	1·290	1·310	1·325
(3)-(1) Extent to which commitments exceed own resources ceiling (percentage of GNP)	0·060	0·050	0·050	0·055	0·050	0·050	0·055
(3)-(2) Extent to which commitments exceed payments (percentage of GNP)	0·060	0·060	0·060	0·065	0·060	0·060	0·065

Rugby Football

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what arrangements he makes for the taxation of income on benefits arising from the playing of Rugby Union football.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 12 February 1993]:* Under Rugby Union rules players are forbidden to receive payment for playing. If they were to do so they would be taxed in the same way as other professional sports men and women.

Incomes

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list the amount and share of income going to *(a)* the top 1 per cent., *(b)* the next 2 to 5 per cent., *(c)* the next 6 to 10 per cent. and *(d)* the next 10 to 20 per cent. and subsequent deciles of tax units for each year since 1978-79, revalued at 1978-79 prices;

(2) if he will list the tax take for *(a)* the top 1 per cent., *(b)* the next 2 to 5 per cent., *(c)* the next 6 to 10 per cent. and *(d)* the next 10 to 20 per cent. and subsequent deciles of income groups for each year since 1978-79, revalued at 1978-79 prices.

Mr. Dorrell *[pursuant to his reply, 11 February col. 741-42]:* Unfortunately there were two typographical errors in the table, which has now been corrected. Readily available estimates are in the table. For 1978-79 and 1989-90, married couples are counted as one taxpayer and their incomes are combined. Following the introduction of independent taxation, for 1990-91 onwards, husband and wives are counted separately. The estimates of total income relates to income subject to income tax and excludes non-taxable income such as certain social security benefits.

[1] *Quantile group of taxpayers*		*1978-79*			*[2] 1989-90*			*[2] 1990-91*	
	Tax liability	*Total income*	*Percentage of total income*	*Tax liability*	*Total income*	*Percentage of total income*	*Tax liability*	*Total income*	*Percentage of total income*
Per cent.	*£ million*	*£ million*		*£ million*	*£ million*		*£ million*	*£ million*	
Top 1	2,300	5,000	5	3,400	10,500	8	3,700	11,300	8
1 to 5	2,600	9,900	10	3,800	16,300	12	3,800	16,000	11
5 to 10	2,100	9,300	9	2,600	13,800	9	2,600	13,500	10
10 to 20	3,200	15,000	15	3,600	20,900	15	3,800	20,900	15
20 to 30	2,500	12,600	12	2,600	16,000	11	2,700	16,500	12
30 to 40	2,100	11,000	11	2,000	13,700	10	2,100	14,100	10
40 to 50	1,700	9,600	9	1,600	11,800	8	1,700	12,000	9
50 to 60	1,400	8,500	8	1,300	10,200	7	1,300	10,400	7
60 to 70	1,100	7,300	7	1,000	8,800	6	1,000	9,000	6
70 to 80	780	6,000	6	760	7,700	5	710	7,600	5
80 to 90	430	4,900	5	470	6,200	4	410	6,100	4
Bottom 10	130	3,700	4	170	4,800	3	130	4,800	3
All taxpayers	20,300	102,800	100·0	23,300	140,800	100·0	24,000	142,300	100·0

Quantile group of taxpayers[1]		*1991-92*[2]			*1992-93*[2]	
	Tax liability	*Total income*	*Percentage of total income*	*Tax liability*	*Total income*	*Percentage of total income*
Per cent.	*£ million*	*£ million*		*£ million*	*£ million*	
Top 1	3,600	11,100	8	3,400	10,500	8
1-5	3,900	15,900	11	3,700	15,200	11
5-10	2,600	13,400	10	2,500	12,900	10
10-20	3,700	20,600	15	3,600	20,000	15
20-30	2,700	16,500	12	2,600	16,000	12
30-40	2,100	13,900	10	2,000	13,500	10
40-50	1,700	11,800	9	1,500	11,400	9
50-60	1,300	10,200	7	1,200	9,800	7
60-70	1,000	8,700	6	870	8,400	6
70-80	700	7,300	5	580	7,000	5
80-90	400	5,900	4	300	5,600	4
Bottom 10	130	4,700	3	100	4,500	3
All taxpayers	23,900	140,000	100	22,200	134,800	100

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[1] Tax units for years prior to 1990-91.

[2] In 1978-79 prices.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Press Regulations

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list the statutory and other restraints on publication by the press.

Mr. Brooke: I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Disabled Employees

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what percentage of employees in his Department are registered disabled.

Mr. Key: The Department of National Heritage is still in the process of setting up its personnel and other central management information systems and the information to answer this question is not yet centrally available.

Football Trust

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the value of grants to football clubs made by the Football Trust in the last three years.

Mr. Brooke: The value of grants offered to football clubs by the Football Trust in the last three years is £75·5 million.

Art Collections

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the most recent estimate of the value of the Government's art collection; how many paintings are owned by the Government; and in which public buildings they are located.

Mr. Key: No market valuation of the Government art collection exists, because the art collection is not actively traded.

The Government art collection owns 2,464 paintings, as well as a number of other works of art located in approximately 600 United Kingdom Government buildings throughout the world.

Rugby League

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will introduce legislation to stop other sports preventing the participation of players who have played Rugby League football.

Mr. Brooke *[holding answer 12 February 1993]:* I have no plans to do so. It is for the individual governing bodies of sport to determine their own rules and regulations.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliamentary Television Service

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council, pursuant to his answer of 4 June, *Official Report*, column 636, what further developments have taken place regarding the provision of a live television feed of the Chamber of the House to hon. Members' offices.

Mr. Newton: As I indicated in my previous reply to the hon. Member, the Broadcasting Committee has agreed in principle to the supply of a television feed to Members' offices within the parliamentary estate. If the House approves this recommendation, the pace at which it can be implemented throughout the House and its outbuildings will depend on progress with proposals currently under consideration by the Information Committee for the establishment of a parliamentary data and video network, on which the television feed from the Chamber would be carried. These proposals will, of course, also require the approval of the House. For its part, the Broadcasting Committee will continue to keep the matter under review.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

China

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards a united China; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: In 1950 the British Government recognised the Government of the People's Republic of China as the sole legal Government of China. There is no change in that position.

Mr. Raja Ibrar Hussain

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer at 5 February, *Official Report*, column *394*, concerning Mr. Raja Ibrar Hussain, whether Mr. Hussain has lodged an appeal against the refusal of entry clearance to allow him to join his wife in the United Kingdom; whether an explanatory statement has been sent to the appellate authorities in London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Mr. Raja Ibrar Hussain lodged an appeal with the British High Commission in Islamabad on 22 November 1992 against the refusal of entry clearance to allow him to join his wife in the United Kingdom.

The entry clearance officer's explanatory statement of the refusal is in the course of preparation.

I shall arrange for the hon. Member to receive notification from the migration and visa correspondence unit of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office when the entry clearance officer's explanatory statement has been sent to the appellate authorites in London.

Belgium (Foreign Residents)

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the letter of 4 February from the migration and visa correspondence unit to the hon. Member for Ilford, South, what evidence he has of repeated applications for asylum and social security benefits by non-EC nationals resident in Belgium; how many such cases there have been in 1992 and 1993; what were the nationalities of those involved; identifying Commonwealth and community citizens separately; what length of visits had been applied for; how many had visited the United Kingdom in the previous year; how many non-EC nationals resident in Belgium have been refused visitors' visas in 1992 and 1993; what new practices have been put in place; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Applications for asylum in the United Kingdom are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department.

Social Security benefits are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security.

I understand that in 1992 a number of illgal immigrants were arrested and convicted in the United Kingdom. This is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department.

The numbers of non-EC nationals refused visas by the British embassy in Belgium in 1992 and 1993 were:

1992—126
1993 (January only)—12

No new practices have been put in place by the embassy. All visa applications are scrutinised to establish that they meet the requirements of the immigration rules.

Hong Kong

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the use of the Green Island reception centre in Hong Kong; and if he will make a statement on the comparison of conditions with those in the Tai A Chan detention centre.

Mr. Goodlad: The Green Island detention centre was originally used exclusively as a reception facility for Vietnamese migrants arriving in Hong Kong. It is now used principally for holding those who are scheduled for repatriation to Vietnam. The centre has a capacity of about 500. It has dormitory huts like all other detention centres but it does not have kitchen facilities; meals are provided by an outside caterer. The recreational area is limited. Non-government organisations provide services in the centre which is also visited daily by a medical team.

The Tai A Chau detention centre has a capacity of about 10,000. It is on a remote island and, because of both size and location, it is self-contained. Unlike other detention centres, the Vietnamese migrants are allowed out of the centre during the day and engage in a range of activities which include farming, poultry raising and fish breeding.

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total number of immigrants from Vietnam arriving in Hong Kong between 1975 and the end of 1992; how many of these were resettled in third countries; how many of them were returned to Vietnam *(a)* voluntarily and *(b)* compulsorily; and how many remained in Hong Kong on 31 December 1992.

Mr. Goodlad: A total of 183,542 Vietnamese migrants arrived in Hong Kong between 1975 and the end of 1992. According to figures from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, as at 31 December 1992, taking account of children born in the camps in Hong Kong, 138,023 had been resettled in third countries, 26,729 had been repatriated and 45,317 remained in Hong Kong.

A total of 418 were returned to Vietnam under the orderly repatriation programme or other bilateral arrangements.

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what were the total numbers on 1 February in Hong Kong for *(a)* Vietnamese refugees, *(b)* Vietnamese immigrants awaiting screening and *(c)* Vietnamese determined to be illegal immigrants.

Mr. Goodlad: On 1 February the total number of Vietnamese migrants in Hong Kong was 44,803. Of these 2,495 were refugees, 19,869 were awaiting screening or its results and 22,439 had been determined to be illegal immigrants.

Disabled Employees

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of employees in his Department is registered disabled.

Mr. Goodlad: Some 0·4 per cent. of employees in the diplomatic wing of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office are registered disabled and 1·49 per cent. in the Overseas Development Administration.

British Mercenaries

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance is provided by the consular department to British nationals in difficulty as a result of acting as mercenaries abroad.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Mercenaries are treated in the same way as any other British citizen requiring assistance from our consular offices abroad. Assistance would usually be limited to helping them to return to the United Kingdom at their own expense.

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give the instances and countries in which consular advice or assistance has been given to mercenary soldiers.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Mercenaries are not specifically identified in Foreign and Commonwealth Office records of consular assistance given to British nationals.

In seeking consular assistance mercenaries do not necessarily identify themselves as such.

Peru

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Council of Ministers has taken to encourage the restoration of human rights and democracy in Peru.

Mr. Garel-Jones: In response to President Fujimori's suspension of constitutional government in April 1992, the United Kingdom with its EC partners called on the Peruvian authorities to re-establish democratic institutions with the full participation of political parties and respect for human rights. Most aid to Peru was suspended. We continue to review with our European Community partners the measures taken last year in the light of progress towards the restoration of democracy.

Cyprus

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with *(a)* the Greek Cypriot and *(b)* the Turkish Cypriot communities about progress made by the United Nations on Cyprus; and at what levels within the leadership of each community he is in contact.

Mr. Garel-Jones: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs last discussed these matters directly with President Vassiliou of Cyprus at the EC-Cyprus Association Council on 21 December 1992. We are in continual touch with the leadership of both Cypriot communities at the highest level through our high commissioner in Nicosia.

Visas

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer at 5 February, *Official Report*, column *394*, concerning the children Shenaz Begum, Afsar Khan and Shaira Begum, what account was taken of doubts about their mother's relationship with their father when the mother, Mrs. Zartaj Begum, was issued with a visa to enter the United Kingdom; when the British High Commission in Islamabad requested the Home Office to make inquiries of her husband in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Ms. Martaj Bibi (Begum) applied for entry clearance at the British High Commission in Islamabad on 7 October 1991, accompanied by her daughters Bibi Nargas and Rehana Begum, on the basis of her marriage in Pakistan to Mr. Mohammed Gham Ghani on 18 April 1969.

Once the entry clearance officer (ECO) was satisfied that the relationships were as claimed, and that there was adequate support and accommodation available for the family in the United Kingdom without recourse to public funds, the ECO issued visas to Zartaj Bibi and Bibi Nargas, and a certificate of entitlement to Rehana Begum on 1 October 1992.

I shall arrange for the hon. Member to receive notification from the migration and visa correspondence unit of the Foreign and Commonwealth office of the date on which the high commission in Islamabad requested the Home Office to make inquiries of Ms Bibi's husband in the United Kingdom. This information is not currently available.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new practice has been followed by the visa section of the British embassy in Belgium in scrutinising applications for visit visas by non-EC nationals living in Belgium in 1992 and 1993; what is the reason for the new procedure; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: No new practice has been followed by the British embassy in Belgium.

All applications for visit visas by non-EC nationals are scrutinised as the entry clearance officer is obliged to be satisfied that applications meet the requirements of the immigration rules before visas may be granted.

Maritime Zones

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the maritime zones for *(a)* dependent territories and *(b)* other territories.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The information requested is as follows:

	Territorial sea	*Fisheries zone*	*Exclusive economic zone*
	(Distances are in nautical miles)		
(a) Dependent territories			
Anguilla	3	200	—
Bermuda	12	200	—
British Antartic Territory	3	3	—
British Indian Ocean Territory	3	200	—
British Virgin Islands	3	200	—
Cayman Islands	12	200	—
Falkland Islands	12	200	—
Gibraltar	3	3	—
Hong Kong	3	—	—
Montserrat	3	200	—
Pitcairn Islands	3	—	200
St. Helena, Ascension, Tristan da Cunha	12	200 each	—
South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands	12	12 each	—
Turks and Caicos Islands	12	200	—
(b) Crown dependencies			
Isle of Man	12	12	—
Bailiwick of Guernsey	3	12	—
Jersey	3	3	—

Iraq

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the latest report of the United Nations special commission investigating the Iraqi programmes of weapons of mass destruction, received by Her Majesty's Government; and when it was received.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We work closely with the UN Special Commission on Iraq (UNSCOM). It is not our practice to comment in detail on the information given to us by UNSCOM.

Contracting Out

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will provide figures for the reduction in numbers of posts as a result of contracting out since 1979 in his Department and agencies for which he has responsibility.

Mr. Goodlad: There has been a reduction of some 60 posts in the diplomatic wing of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office since 1984 as a result of contracting out. To check the position back to 1979 would involve disproportionate cost.

Wilton Park has reduced its number of posts by six as a result of contracting out. Neither the Overseas Development Administration nor the Natural Resources Institute have reduced their number of posts as a result of contracting out.

UNESCO

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consultations he has had with the incoming administration in the United States of America regarding membership of UNESCO; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have frequent contacts with the United States authorities on many aspects of UNESCO. My information is that, like us, they have reached no decision on membership of the organisation.

EC Association Agreements

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects the European Community's association agreements with Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland to come into effect.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The trade provisions of the association agreements with Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia came into effect on 1 March 1992 under interim agreements. The main agreements with Poland and Hungary, to which the European Parliament has already given its assent, will come into effect when national Parliaments in all EC member states have authorised their ratification. The presidency is pressing member states to do so rapidly. As well as the United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark have completed their ratification procedures. Following the dissolution of the Czechoslovak Federation on 31 December 1992, the Community has moved to begin negotiations on new association agreements with the successor Czech and Slovak Republics.

Bulgaria and Romania

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the European Community's association agreements with Bulgaria and Romania have yet been finalised.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The European Community concluded negotiations on association agreements with Romania and Bulgaria under the United Kingdom Presidency. The agreements were initialled on 17 November and 22 December 1992 respectively. EC Foreign Ministers signed the agreement with Romania in the margins of the Foreign Affairs Council on 1 February 1993. It is hoped the agreement with Bulgaria can be signed in the margins of the Foreign Affairs Council on 8 March.

Whaling

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to resist any attempt by Norway to negotiate a change in the current EC ban on whaling within EC waters as part of its application for full membership of the EC.

Mr. Garel-Jones: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made our views on whaling clear to Mrs. Gro Harlem Brundtland when she delivered Norway's application to join the EC. We would expect Norway to apply existing Community legislation on whaling and trade in whale products on accession to the Community.

Bhutan

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the situation in Bhutan and on arrangements for refugees from Bhutan in neighbouring countries.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Following the implementation of Bhutanese citizenship laws there are estimated to be about 72,000 refugees from Bhutan in camps in eastern Nepal. A further 10,000 refugees are in India. We are providing financial help for the refugees in Nepal through the Save the Children fund.

Non-proliferation Treaty

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his Department has had with non-governmental organisations concerning the first preparatory committee meeting of the non-proliferation treaty; what plans his Department has to involve non-governmental organisations in his Department's activities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Our Department has regular contacts with organisations which have an interest in the treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and intends to continue doing so.

Nuclear Testing

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 17 December, *Official Report*, column *355*, if he will place in the Library copies of the letters sent to Senators Hatfield, Mitchell and Exon.

Mr. Garel-Jones: A copy of the text of the letter sent to Senators Hatfield, Mitchell and Exon in August 1992 will be placed in the Library today.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affiars, pursuant to his answer of 17 December 1992, *Official Report*, column *355*, if he will list the senior members of the Democratic party contacted by Her Majesty's Government in connection with the nuclear testing programme; and what concerns they expressed about United Kingdom policy.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We have had many such contacts, but are now pursuing those with members of the new Administration. So far there have been only general exchanges about considerations bearing on the policies of both Governments.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Potatoes

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures he will take to ensure that the stock feed scheme is introduced for potatoes this year and that it will be uprated in line with the current rate of inflation.

Mr. Hanley: Under current arrangements Government may intervene in the potato market by way of a stock feed scheme if it appears that the average price for potatoes sold for human consumption over the marketing year will be less than the target price. The cumulative average price to date is significantly higher than the target price, consequently I have no plans to introduce a stock feed scheme. The target price is not linked to the rate of inflation.

Market Testing

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many staff in his Department are assigned to the market testing programme; how much the programme has cost his Department since November 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: There are two full-time and one part-time members of staff in a small central unit within the Department of Finance and Personnel assigned to the Northern Ireland market testing programme. Otherwise staff in this unit and in other Northern Ireland Departments and the Northern Ireland Office contribute to the market testing process as part of wider responsibilities. Under present arrangements, therefore, information on the cost of the programme cannot be accurately determined across the seven Departments covered by the Northern Ireland market testing programme, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Northern Ireland Departments and the Northern Ireland Office have set themselves challenging targets for market testing since the publication of the White Paper, "Competing for Quality", in November 1991, and will continue to play a full part in this initiative.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list all the market tests that have taken place in his Department since November 1991; whether the result was the maintenance of in-house provision or whether the service was contracted out; what was the name of the successful contractor where appropriate; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Eighteen tests have been completed in Northern Ireland Departments and the NIO since November 1991—of these seven were won by the in-house providers, five tests by outside contractors and six by a combination of both, as follows:

Transit (computer system)—contracted out
Sludge disposal (2 tests)—combination
Building maintenance—contracted out
Reservoir maintenance—retained in-house
Roads reinstatement—combination
Marine disposal of sewage sludge—retained in-house
Sewer maintenance—combination
Verge maintenance—combination
Car park management—retained in-house
Gully emptying—combination
Road marking—retained in-house
Strangford ferry—retained in-house
Street lighting—retained in-house
Cleaning—contracted out
Key holding—contracted out
Grounds maintenance—retained in-house
Catering—contracted out

In the unique circumstances of Northern Ireland I would not wish to disclose the names of successful contractors.

Market testing is part of the Government's strategy to increase the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the public service. Decisions on whether work continues to be carried out in-house or is contracted out are taken on the basis of value for money.

Crimes

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his policy on diverting offenders away from the courts and custodial sentences and towards community-based projects; and what assessment he has made of the effect of the use of community-based projects on the level of juvenile crime in Northern Ireland.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Cautioning schemes for both adult and juvenile offenders operate in Northern Ireland, aimed at avoiding prosecution where it is not required in the public interest. The courts also have a range of community-based disposals available to them for offenders of all ages.

We are currently reviewing these and other aspects of Northern Ireland's criminal justice arrangements and hope to announce our conclusions in the coming months.

Northern Ireland Select Committee

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to the oral answer by the Lord President of the Council, 25 June 1992, *Official Report*, column 395, what is his current policy on the establishment of a Northern Ireland Select Committee.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The establishment of a Northern Ireland Select Committee is a matter for the House. The Government, however, take the view that while such a Committee may be desirable in principle there remain a number of issues, including the extent of support from elected representatives from both sides of the community in Northern Ireland, needing further consideration.

Sheep Farmers

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many sheep farmers there are in Northern Ireland; and how many sheep farmers are in receipt of hill livestock compensatory amounts.

Mr. Hanley: In the latest agricultural census, sheep were recorded on 11,323 holdings. Hill livestock compensatory allowance in respect of sheep was paid to 9,802 farmers in 1992.

Water

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the sites proposed to him for classification as sensitive areas under the EC directive on urban waste water treatment, including the proposing body, by reason of *(a)* eutrophication and *(b)* inland water with a nitrate concentration greater than 50 mg/l.

Mr. Atkins: The Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive requires member states to identify sensitive areas, in accordance with the criteria set out in the directive, by 21 December this year. The Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland is at present compiling a final list of "candidate" sensitive areas. An announcement about the location of the areas to be formally identified as sensitive will be made before the deadline imposed in the directive.

Children Act

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many qualified officers are employed in each of the four health and social services boards responsible for registration and inspection of services under the Children Act 1989.

Mr. Hanley: The Children Act 1989 does not apply in Northern Ireland. However, under the Children and Young Persons Act (Northern Ireland) 1968, the number of qualified officers in the health and social services boards responsible for registration and inspection of day care services is as follows:

Health and social services board	*Number of qualified officers (whole-time equivalent)*
Eastern	13·0
Western	1·0
Northern	5·5
Southern	4·0

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consultations there have been with child care associations in Northern Ireland in applying the Children Act 1989, with particular reference to the setting of standards and the quality of service under the care of children provisions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: The Children Act 1989 does not apply in Northern Ireland, where child care services are currently governed by the Children and Young Persons Act (Northern Ireland) 1968. However, a proposal for a draft Children (Northern Ireland) Order to reform the law in Northern Ireland on the care and upbringing of children along the lines of the Children Act 1989 will be issued shortly for widespread public consultation.

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will set out in full the duties of registration officers engaged under the Children Act 1989 within the health and social services boards in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: The Children Act does not apply in Northern Ireland, where day care services in the non-statutory sector are regulated by the Children and Young Persons Act (Northern Ireland) 1968, by regulations issued under this Act and by departmental guidance. These regulations and guidance will be revised as part of the implementation of the proposed Children (Northern Ireland) Order and will take account, as appropriate, of the relevant requirements and advice on day care issued under the Children Act 1989.

Energy

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give details of the state aid to the energy sector within Northern Ireland as notified to the European Commission.

Mr. Atkins: There is no state aid to the energy sector in Northern Ireland.

General Practitioners

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will list the general practitioner fund holding practices granted in Northern Ireland in each board area;

(2) if he will give the number of applications pending for general practitioner fund holding practices in each board area.

Mr. Hanley: Fund holding will not commence in Northern Ireland until 1 April 1993. At present, 20 practices or groups of practices are preparing to become fundholders on that date and are expected to be granted fund holding status shortly. Expressions of interest in joining the second fund holding wave commencing in April 1994 were recently sought. Practices have until the end of February 1993 to register their interest. The practices who are preparing to become fund holders on 1 April 1993 are as follows:

Eastern Board
Dr. Brown and partners
Salisbury Medical Centre
Antrim Road
Belfast

Dr. Donnelly and partners
Clifton Street Surgery
Belfast

Dr. Rowan and partners
281 Ormeau Road
Belfast

Dr. Trimble and partners
Dunluce Health Centre
Dunluce Avenue
Belfast

Dr. Dick and partners
Dunmurry
Belfast

Dr. Kane and partners
Brook Street Surgery
Holywood
Co. Down

Dr. Jackson and partners
Dr. McAughey and partners
Skegoniel Health Centre
Belfast

Dr. Lowry and partners
Springfield Road
Belfast

Dr. Morrison and partners
Cherryvalley Health Centre
Belfast

Dr. Laird and partners
Bloomfield Road Surgery
Bangor
Co. Down

Dr. Lindsay and partners
Priory Surgery
Holywood
Co. Down

Western Board
Dr. Garvey and partners
Lower Strabane Road
Castlederg
Dr. Craig and partners
Bridge Street Medical Centre
Londonderry
and
Dr. Hetherington and partners
Eglington Health Centre
Eglinton
Co Londonderry

Dr. Gallagher and partners
The Health Centre
Strabane
Co Tryone

Northern Board
Dr. Hegan and partners
Rosehall Medical Centre
Glengormley
Co Antrim

Dr. Campbell and partners
The Health Centre
Greenisland
Co Antrim

Dr. McAteer and partners
The Health Centre
Ballyclare
Co Antrim

Dr. Stevenson and partners
The Health Centre
Whiteabbey
Co Antrim

Dr. Patterson and partners
The Health Centre
Portglenone
Co Antrim

Dr. Thompson and partners
Crumlin
Co Antrim
and
Dr. Gallagher and partner
Glenavy
Co Antrim

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total number of general practitioner practices in Northern Ireland at the latest available date.

Mr. Hanley: At February 1993 there were 354 general medical practices in Northern Ireland.

SCOTLAND

Dental Treatment

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many courses of dental treatment were undertaken in each health board area in Scotland in each of the last five years.

Mr. Stewart: The information is set out in the table. The figures from 1 October 1990 are for adults only, as under the new dental contract introduced from that date children are now treated under capitation arrangements to provide continuing care, and no longer undergo individual courses of treatment. At 31 March 1992, 622,000 children were registered with dentists in Scotland under capitation arrangements.

Numbers of courses of national health service dental treatment in Scotland by health board area

Health board	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*[3]	*1990*[1,4]	*1991-92*[2]
Argyll and Clyde	258,537	263,704	271,769	197,957	44,640	206,277
Ayrshire and Arran	250,239	250,350	254,617	186,728	42,018	187,757
Borders	72,514	74,807	78,839	59,132	14,646	65,622
Dumfries and Galloway	88,106	92,049	94,113	69,199	14,491	71,512
Fife	208,259	213,290	220,942	158,218	38,178	160,124

Health board	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*[3]	*1990*[1][4]	*1991-92*[2]
Forth Valley	150,978	157,174	160,965	117,794	26,838	130,389
Grampian	292,001	292,106	303,233	218,533	55,136	267,042
Greater Glasgow	513,945	527,965	537,454	393,481	93,387	441,154
Highland	101,489	104,525	111,009	82,916	19,793	94,050
Lanarkshire	300,227	306,231	309,381	224,996	48,213	219,558
Lothian	458,153	471,551	490,115	355,469	85,992	396,777
Orkney	8,147	8,231	8,598	6,599	1,968	7,438
Shetland	5,551	6,445	7,604	5,713	1,832	6,589
Tayside	268,986	275,142	284,822	210,381	47,108	222,697
Western Isles	10,029	9,347	9,239	6,116	1,307	7,553
Scotland	2,987,161	3,052,917	3,142,700	2,293,232	535,547	2,484,539

[1] New contract for general dental services introduced on 1 October 1990.

[2] With effect from 1 April 1991 the method of collecting statistical information was changed to reflect financial years.

[3] January to September.

[4] October to December.

Incomes

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to paragraph 1 of his letter of 20 January to Scottish hon. Members, what assessment he has made of the number of people in Scotland whose income will fall or remain constant in real terms during the coming year; and what proportion of these he classifies as being on a low wage.

Mr. Stewart: My right hon. Friend has not made any assessment of the number of people in Scotland whose real income will fall or remain unchanged during the coming year. Accordingly, my right hon. Friend has not assessed the proportion on low wages, however defined.

I note, however, that the independent forecasters, whose projections on the economy are regularly monitored by the Scottish Office Industry Department, expect that Scottish GDP will rise, on average, by 1·3 per cent. in 1993 and 2·3 per cent. in 1994. I am confident that this will be reflected in an overall rise in real incomes for the people of Scotland.

Trunk Roads

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a breakdown of the planned expenditure on *(a)* new construction and improvement, *(b)* structural maintenance and *(c)* current maintenance on trunk roads by his Department for 1993-94, 1994-95 and 1995-96.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 5 February 1993]:* Planned expenditure on trunk roads in Scotland for the forward year 1993-94 in the following categories is as follows:

	1993-94 *£ million*
New construction and improvement	167·2
Structural maintenance	33·0
Current maintenance	30·6

Corresponding figures for 1994-95 and 1995-96 are not yet available. The totals of *(a)* capital and *(b)* current planned expenditure on trunk roads in these years is as follows:

	1994-95 *£ million*	*1995-96* *£ million*
Capital	217	225
Current	33	34

Disadvantaged Areas

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the net farm income for sheep and sheep and cattle farms in severely disadvantaged areas, in both nominal and real terms, for each year since 1978.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 4 February 1993]:* Estimates of net farm income based on results of sample surveys are provided in the following table. Indices are shown in the table based on results from constant samples of farms to allow reliable year to year comparisons.

	Mainly sheep				*Sheep and cattle*			
	Cash terms	*Adjusted for inflation*	*Indices cash terms*	*Adjusted for inflation*	*Cash terms*	*Adjusted for inflation*	*Indices cash terms*	*Adjusted for inflation*
			Average 1989-90 to 1991-92=100				*Average 1989-90 to 1991-92=100*	
1978-79	8,100	21,500	74	184	6,900	18,400	48	120
1979-80	5,700	16,200	49	106	3,500	8,200	26	56
1980-81	5,800	11,300	52	97	3,100	6,100	27	51
1981-82	9,700	17,200	99	163	11,000	19,400	87	144
1982-83	7,400	13,400	75	115	9,500	15,600	74	113
1983-84	6,000	9,400	72	106	7,500	11,700	66	97
1984-85	8,400	12,600	94	132	6,100	9,100	60	84
1985-86	13,200	19,600	144	190	8,400	11,900	84	111
1986-87	7,100	9,700	79	101	3,600	4,900	34	43
1987-88	10,200	13,300	118	146	9,300	12,000	102	125
1988-89	10,700	13,300	105	122	12,500	15,500	129	150
1989-90	9,300	10,800	97	105	9,300	10,800	105	113
1990-91	9,300	9,700	95	93	8,400	8,800	92	91

	Mainly sheep				Sheep and cattle			
	Cash terms	Adjusted for inflation	Indices cash terms	Adjusted for inflation	Cash terms	Adjusted for inflation	Indices cash terms	Adjusted for inflation
			Average 1989-90 to 1991-92=100				Average 1989-90 to 1991-92=100	
1991-92	9,600	9,600	108	102	10,500	10,500	102	96
1992-93[1]	11,600	11,100	131	118	11,300	10,900	111	100

[1] Forecast.

Source: Farm Accounts Scheme.

Notes:

1. Cash figures deflated by the retail price index, 1991-92=100.
2. The levels of income have been rounded to the nearest hundred.
3. In 1983-84 the lower size limit for farms in the sample was reduced therefore the figures in 1983-84 and later are not fully comparable with earlier years.

Lothian Health Board

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of *(a)* nursing and midwifery staff, *(b)* managerial staff and *(c)* clerical and administrative staff in Lothian health board in each year since 1989.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 12 February 1993]:* The information requested is as follows:

Staff in Lothian health board at 30 September

	1989	1990	1991	[1]1992
(a) Headcount				
Nursing and midwifery[2]	10,891	10,577	10,668	10,592
Managerial[3][4]	93	119	135	183
Administrative and clerical	2,607	2,652	2,659	2,692
(b) Whole time equivalent				
Nursing and midwifery[2]	9,510·0	9,219·9	9,152·4	9,012·9
Managerial[3][4]	93·0	118·5	135·0	180·1
Administrative and clerical	2,180·9	2,221·6	2,220·2	2,230·8

[1] Data for September 1992 are provisional.

[2] Nursing and midwifery includes qualified, unqualified and staff in training. The decrease in numbers between 1991 and 1992 are largely accounted for by the Project 2000 student nurses who are excluded from the 1992 figures.

[3] 1989 figures include administrative and clerical staff on grade 18 and above. 1990-91 includes grades 7 and above.

[4] The increase in numbers in this group is partially accounted for by the transfer of some professional staff to senior manager grades.

Red Deer

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which public, voluntary and private sector interests he and his officials have met in order to discuss their responses to the Government's 1991 consultation paper on red deer legislation; when such meetings took place; and what conclusions were drawn from the exercise.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 12 February 1993]:* During 1992 my officials held meetings with representatives of the Association of Deer Management Groups, the British Deer Society, the Forestry Commission, the Red Deer Commission, the Scottish Landowners' Federation, Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Link and the World Wide Fund for Nature to discuss the review of deer legislation in the light of the responses to the consultation paper. I have also had subsequent discussions with the chairman of the Red Deer Commission. In the light of these meetings, and after scrutiny of all responses to the consultation paper, I announced on 21 December 1992 that I had asked the Red Deer Commission to give further consideration to the key points arising from the consultation exercise with a view to making detailed recommendations for possible legislative changes.

PRIME MINISTER

Smoking

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister what provisions govern the imposition of no-smoking policies by operators of *(a)* trains, *(b)* aeroplanes, *(c)* buses and *(d)* taxis.

The Prime Minister: The Government believe that decisions on whether or not smoking should be permitted on public transport are a matter for the operators concerned.

On the railways, British Rail has the power to ban smoking by virtue of British Rail byelaw 20. On the London Underground, smoking is banned under a London Transport byelaw made under section 67 of the Transport Act 1962, as amended by paragraph 5(1) of schedule 3 to the Transport (London) Act 1969 and section 37 of the Transport Act 1981.

Under article 53 of the Air Navigation Order 1989, the commander of an aircraft is empowered to decide on whether passengers should or should not be allowed to smoke.

Bus operators are entitled to ban smoking on their vehicles under section 6 of the Passenger Service Vehicles (Conduct of Drivers, Inspectors and Passengers) Regulations 1990.

There are no statutory provisions for taxi drivers to ban smoking in their vehicles. In line with their commitment in the "Health of the Nation" White Paper, the Government have undertaken to seek an opportunity to amend the relevant legislation to allow them to do so.

Mercenaries

Mr. Conway: To ask the Prime Minister what action the Government take to ensure that individuals known to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to have been mercenary soldiers to whom consular advice or assistance has been given are notified to the Ministry of Defence.

The Prime Minister: The Ministry of Defence would not expect the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to notify them routinely of individuals who had sought consular advice or assistance, unless there were reason to believe that the individual concerned might be a serving or former member of the armed forces.

Nuclear Materials

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to raise the matters of nuclear weapons testing, nuclear reprocessing and the international trade in nuclear explosive materials during his meeting with President Clinton on 24 February.

The Prime Minister: I expect to have wide ranging discussions with President Clinton and members of his Administration.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister how members of the public can contribute to the Scott inquiry.

The Prime Minister: Members of the public who have information to contribute to the inquiry may write direct to Lord Justice Scott at 1 Palace street, London, SW1E 5HE.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what resources Her Majesty's Government have made available to the Scott inquiry to pay for travel costs, overnight accommodation and subsistence of witnesses invited from *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* abroad.

The Prime Minister: Lord Justice Scott will be provided with the resources that he considers necessary to conduct his inquiry.

World Summit for Children

Mr. Battle: To ask the Prime Minister what specific targets his Government are setting for itself in terms of allocating resources for clean water, sanitation and basic education, in light of agreements made at the world summit for children.

The Prime Minister: In the financial year 1991-92, one quarter of our bilateral aid to developing countries allocatable by sector was spent on clean water, sanitation and education.

Rural Areas

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Prime Minister what responsibilities the Department of Trade and Industry has for trade and industry in rural areas.

The Prime Minister: The Department of Trade and Industry and its regional offices liaise closely in the delivery of services with other Government Departments and agencies where necessary. This includes the Department of the Environment which has responsibility for rural development policy and the Rural Development Commission.

Coastal and Marine Issues

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Prime Minister if he will unify departmental responsibility for coastal and marine matters including incidents of oil pollution.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 12 February 1993]*: No. The present division of responsibilities within Government for coastal and marine matters provides a comprehensive system of management. Coastal issues cannot be artificially isolated from the mainstream of policy-making across Government. Responsibility for preventing and responding to marine pollution lies clearly with the Department of Transport, which liaises with other Departments as appropriate.

EC Regulations

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had with his EC partners concerning transfer of undertakings and protection of employment regulations.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 12 February 1993]*: The Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 implement the EC acquired rights directive 1977. The European Commission is expected to make proposals to revise the directive shortly.

Departmental Library

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 9 February, *Official Report*, column *551*, what use has been made of the book by his Office; and what account the Government have taken of the substance of the final chapter of the book in considering possible prosecutions arising out of the case.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 12 February 1993]*: The matters discussed in the book are the subject of Lord Justice Scott's inquiry. It is necessary to await the judge's report and recommendations.

WALES

Quangos

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list each body in Wales run by a quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisation stating in respect of each of them the total budgeted public expenditure for 1992-93 and 1993-94 for which they are responsible.

Mr. David Hunt: There are 16 executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Welsh Office. They are listed in the following table which shows original plans for the current year, and planned expenditure for 1993-94 (where appropriate, expenditure is shown in both gross and net terms).

Welsh Office Executive NDPBs

£ million

Non-departmental Public Body (NDPB)		*1992-93 Plans*	*1993-94 Plans*
Welsh Development Agency	Gross	166·8	171·4
	Net	75·7	61·6
Development Board for Rural Wales	Gross	23·6	25·4
	Net	15·8	16·3
Cardiff Bay Development Corporation	Gross	40·0	53·0
	Net	35·1	45·0
Wales Tourist Board	Gross	15·4	15·3
	Net	13·5	13·7
National Museum of Wales	Gross	15·0	15·6
	Net	14·0	14·1
National Library of Wales	Gross	5·8	6·4
	Net	5·7	6·2
Sports Council for Wales	Gross	8·2	8·9
	Net	5·8	6·4
Land Authority for Wales	Gross	9·5	13·0
	Net	[1]Nil	[1]Nil
Housing for Wales[2]	Gross	132·4	139·6
	Net	124·4	132·1
Countryside Council for Wales	Gross	17·3	19·9
	Net	17·3	19·8
Curriculum Council for Wales		1·6	1·4
Welsh National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting[3]	Gross	9·9	1·6
	Net	9·8	1·5
Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales		1·2	1·1
Further Education Funding Council[4]		2·0	143·3
Higher Education Funding Council[4]		0·5	179·0
Wales Youth Agency		0·4	0·4

[1] The Land Authority's activities are funded by self-generated resources, supported by borrowing.

[2] Figures include special needs management allowance, but exclude capitalised interest, tax relief grants and local authority transfers.

[3] The decrease in provision from 1992-93 to 1993-94 reflects that from 1 April 1993, new arrangements for funding education and training will operate as the Welsh National Board ceases to be responsible for funding the salaries of teachers following changes introduced by the Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Act 1992.

[4] The increase in provision from 1992-93 to 1993-94 reflects that from 1 April 1993 the Funding Councils take on their full responsibilities.

Information and Publicity

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the value of the printing contracts won by the Wilprint Group in each financial year since 1988-89.

Mr. David Hunt: The value of all contracts awarded to the Wilprint Group by the Welsh Office for financial years 1988-89 and 1989-90 can be supplied only at disproportionate cost. The figures for succeeding years are:

	£
1990-91	255,266
1991-92	157,356
1992-93	46,470

Drug and Alcohol Abuse

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many residential places have been made available within specialist residential units for drug and alcohol abusers in Wales, as a whole and according to each local authority area, during each of the last 10 years;

(2) how many patients have been treated at residential specialist units for drug and alcohol abusers in Wales in each of the last 10 years, according to each local authority areas.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information is not available in the form requested. The following table gives details of places, and patients present on 31 March, in each year for which the information is available, in residential facilities registered with county social service departments offering places specifically for the treatment and/or rehabilitation of drug and alcohol misusers. It does not include in-patient facilities at medical establishments.

Facilities registered with Social Services Departments offering treatment and/or rehabilitation care for people who are alcohol and/or drug dependent

	1987	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
Dyfed						
Place	—	—	23	23	29	29
Residents	—	—	21	23	23	27
Gwent						
Place	—	—	19	19	19	19
Residents	—	—	13	17	16	11
Gwynedd						
Place	—	—	—	—	7	7
Residents	—	—	—	—	4	6
Mid Glamorgan						
Place	12	12	12	12	12	12
Residents	12	9	12	9	11	9
South Glamorgan						
Place	24	40	40	24	24	24
Residents	14	39	33	21	18	18
Wales						
Place	36	52	94	78	91	91
Residents	26	48	79	70	72	71

Note:—

There were no facilities registered with Social Services Departments offering treatment and/or rehabilitation for people who are alcohol and/or drug dependent in Clwyd, Powys and West Glamorgan.

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the percentage of the Welsh Development Agency's annual gross budget met by grant-in-aid in each year since 1986, as to *(a)* planned budget and *(b)* outturn.

Mr. David Hunt: The information is shown in the following table:

Year	*Percentage of WDA's planned gross budget met by grant-in-aid*	*Percentage of WDA's gross outturn met by grant-in-aid*
1986-87	41·3	44·0
1987-88	60·5	53·0
1988-89	54·8	53·8
1989-90	53·5	52·3
1990-91	54·1	54·4
1991-92	54·5	55·1
1992-93	44·9	[1]44·9

[1] Figure based on forecast outturn.

M4 (Bypass)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his current estimate of the completion date of the M4 Brynglas tunnels bypass schemes; and what provision has been made for penalty payments if the contracts are not completed on time.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The current contract completion date is August 1994. The conditions of contract for this scheme contain the normal provision for financial payments to the Department for late completion.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he proposes to make a statement on the Welsh Economic Council consequent upon his receipt of the formal response from the Equal Opportunities Commission.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave him on 11 February 1993, at column *731*.

Public Transport

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people have been employed in public transport in Wales in each year since 1979 by *(a)* bus services, *(b)* train services and *(c)* other.

Mr. David Hunt: Levels of employment in public transport[1] in Wales are given in the following table. Figures are available only for years when a census of employment was carried out and the results prior to 1981 are not comparable with later years. Separate figures for road and rail services are not available.

September	*Employees in employment*
1981	16,700
1984	13,800
1987	12,400
1989	13,100

Source: Employment Department

[1] Scheduled road passenger transport, urban railways, freight and passenger railways. (Standard Industrial Classifications) (Revised) 1989: 7100 and 7210)

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of *(a)* bus services and *(b)* train services in Wales in each year since 1979.

Mr. David Hunt: Information on the numbers of bus and train services in Wales is not available. The numbers of vehicle kilometres covered by local (stage) bus services for each year since 1982 are given in the following table:

Local (Stage) Bus Services[1]

Year	*Local (stage) bus services (million vehicle kilometres)*
1982	106
1983	106
1984	105
1985-86	95
1986-87	94
1987-88	105
1988-89	118
1989-90	119
1990-91	123
1991-92	120

Source: Department of Transport.

[1] Estimates for 1982 to 1984 are derived from various sources and may be less reliable than those for later years. Figures are based on sample surveys and are approximate. Data refer to the year end up to 1984 and to the annual average from 1985-86.

Water

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the sites proposed to him for classification as sensitive areas under the EC directive on urban waste water treatment, including the proposing body, by reason of *(a)* eutrophication and *(b)* inland water with a nitrate concentration greater than 50 mg/l.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The urban waste water treatment directive requires member states to identify sensitive areas, in accordance with the criteria set out in the directive, by 31 December this year. The National Rivers Authority is at present compiling final lists of possible sensitive areas which it will submit to the Welsh Office for consideration. An announcement about the location of the areas to be formally identified as sensitive will be made before the deadline imposed in the directive.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Citizens Charter

34. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement about his monitoring of the effectiveness of the citizens charters issued to date.

Mr. Robert Jackson: Each public sector organisation publishes information about its performance against its charter standards. A full account of overall progress was given in the "Citizen's Charter First Report" (Cm. 2101).

Market Testing

38. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proportion of the savings resulting from the Government's market testing programme will be made available for reinvestment in the public services.

Mr. Waldegrave: All of the savings can be ploughed back. This means more public services, at no extra cost. This is very good news for the taxpayer; and for the economy as a whole.

Open Government

40. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what progress he has made towards more open government.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have made progress on many fronts, and will follow up with further proposals in a White Paper later this year.

EDUCATION

Learning Difficulties

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list the further education colleges in England which run special transition courses for school leavers with learning difficulties; and what plans his Department has to promote the establishing of more of these courses.

Mr. Boswell: The Government recognise the part which link courses play in the transition from school to further education for pupils with learning difficulties. There is no central list of transition arrangements. We have promoted, through guidance to schools and further education colleges, the importance of transition arrangements, including link courses.

Nursery Education

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many nursery places have been lost through school closures in the primary sector in 1991-92.

Mr. Forth: Information on the effects of school closures on nursery places is not collected centrally in the form requested. The number of full-time and part-time pupils attending maintained nursery schools and nursery classes in maintained primary schools in England increased from 318,000 in January 1991 to 330,000 in January 1992.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what guidelines are issued to local education authorities in connection with reducing surplus places in the primary sector to protect *(a)* nursery places and *(b)* purpose-built nursery resources.

Mr. Forth: No specific guidelines have been issued. It is initially for LEAs to decide in the light of local circumstances the most appropriate means of rationalising school provision. We would expect LEAs to consult all interested parties before deciding on such action.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list the total number of *(a)* full-time nursery teachers and *(b)* part-time nursery teachers in state schools for each year since 1982.

Mr. Forth: Information on the numbers of qualified nursery teachers in nursery schools and nursery classes in maintained primary schools in England in January of each year from 1982 to 1992 are shown in the table.

Qualified teachers in nursery schools and nursery classes in maintained primary schools

	Full-time teachers	*Full-time equivalent of part-time teachers*
1992	6,815	492·1
1991	6,851	434·5
1990	6,784	364·8
1989	6,674	291·1
1988	6,687	240·5
1987	6,460	259·3
1986	6,333	220·0
1985	6,205	186·6
1984	6,094	167·1
1983	6,113	152·8
1982	5,989	150·3

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list the names of schools in each local education authority which have opted out of local education authorities and have not repaid debts to their local education authorities; and what estimate he has made of the total amount of unpaid debts.

Mr. Forth: The Department does not keep the information centrally. It is the duty of the Education Assets Board to identify the liabilities which transfer to grant-maintained schools and such matters need to be looked at on a case by case basis. All schools, including grant-maintained schools, should keep within their budgets.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) when he will announce his decision on the application by Grays school, Essex, for grant-maintained status;

(2) when he will announce his decision on the application by William Edwards school, Grays, Essex, for grant-maintained status.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend has today announced that he has approved the applications of both Grays school and William Edwards school, with minor modifications to their admission arrangements. They will become self-governing state schools (grant-maintained) on 1 April 1993.

Contracting Out

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will provide figures for the reduction in numbers of posts as a result of contracting out since 1979 in his Department and agencies for which he has responsibility.

Mr. Boswell: Since 1979 the reduction in the number of posts in the Department as a result of contracting out is some 28.

Statutory Instruments

Ms. Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many statutory instruments were laid before Parliament by his Department in each year since 1980.

Mr. Boswell: The number of statutory instruments laid before Parliament by the Department for the years 1980 to 1992 are as follows:

	Number
1980	23
1981	24
1982	15
1983	24
1984	12
1985	16
1986	12
1987	23
1988	38
1989	67
1990	50
1991	53
1992	49

Special Needs Education

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what guidelines are issued to local education authorities in connection with reducing surplus places in schools to protect integrated special needs facilities.

Mr. Forth: Circular 3/87, "Providing for Quality", reminded LEAs of the considerations in relation to special needs that they would need to take into account when considering the rationalisation of school provision. Copies of circular 3/87 are available in the Library.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many pre-school and nursery school children are undergoing formal assessments for special educational needs in each local education authority area.

Mr. Forth: This information is not collected centrally.

Business Names

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list those business names, including either of the words university or polytechnic, on the use of which his opinion has been sought under the Business Names Act 1985, with an indication where possible of whether approval has been given.

Mr. Boswell: The following business names which include either "university" or "polytechnic" have been approved under the Business Names Act 1985 following the consent of the Secretary of State:

University Holidays
Liverpool University China Business Consultancy
Somerset University
Eula Wesley University USA

Records of other names on which the Secretary of State's opinion has been sought under the Business Names Act 1985 could be compiled only at disproportionate cost.

Research Units

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what discussions he had recently had with directors of university-based research units on the current status of advanced research in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Boswell: Ministers have had no such discussions recently. The assessment of the quality of research in universities has been the responsibility of the Universities Funding Council (UFC). the UFC's 1992 assessment exercise shows that the average rating of UFC-funded universities has increased since the last assessment in 1989.

Cash Limits

Dr. Liam Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what changes he plans to announce to cash limits on votes within his responsibility for 1992-93.

Mr. Patten *[pursuant to his reply, 4 February 1993, columns 275-76]:* The revised cash limit for my Department's administration vote, class XI, vote 4, for 1992-93 is £109,994,000, not £110,994,000.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Statutory Instruments

Ms. Corston: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many statutory instruments were laid before Parliament by his Department in each year since 1980.

Mr. Heseltine: The information requested is as follows:

	Number
1980	121
1981	102
1982	79
1983	94
1984	70
1985	85
1986	66
1987	76
1988	104
1989	110
1990	114
1991	131
1992	[1]89

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[1] This figure includes SIs relating to the former Department of Energy. SIs laid in earlier years by Department of Energy are not readily available.

Slovenia

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade why the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Technology visited Slovenia recently; what contacts he made there; what opportunities for future trade he found; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: I visited Slovenia at the invitation of the Government of Slovenia. I held useful talks with Ministers of the new Government of Slovenia on ways to strengthen British Slovenian trade links; I also met representatives of the Slovenian business community. Slovenia is keen to increase trade and commercial links with the United Kingdom. In the first instance the most promising sectors look to be chemicals, information technology and telecommunications.

Contracting Out

Mr. McAllion: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will provide figures for the reduction in numbers of posts as a result of contracting out since 1979 in his Department and agencies for which he has responsibility.

Mr. Eggar: The information requested has not been systematically recorded. Since 1979 the number of staff in the Department of Trade and Industry or its predecessor Departments has fallen from over 18,000 to under 12,000. How much of this reduction came as a result of contracting out is not centrally recorded.

Electricity

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 9 February, *Official Report*, column *568*, what arrangements, other than the state aid inherent in the fossil fuel levy, were notified to the European Commission in the course of the electricity privatisation exercise.

Mr. Eggar: The other arrangements notified to the European Commission in the course of the electricity privatisation exercise in England and Wales were:

- the Regional Electricity Companies' agreement with Nuclear Electric forming part of the qualifying arrangements to meet the Nuclear Non-Fossil Fuel Obligation;
- the coal purchase contracts between the British Coal Corporation and National Power and PowerGen;
- the qualifying arrangements to meet the renewables Non-Fossil Fuel Obligation, and the arrangements relating to the Non-Fossil Purchasing Agency Ltd.;
- the Grid and Distribution Codes;
- the arrangements involving Electricité de France;
- the British Grid Systems Agreement;
- the Pooling and Settlement Agreement;
- the Master Connection and Use of System Agreement and the connection and use of system agreements;
- the initial contracts for differences.

Fossil Fuel Levy

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what figure he has agreed with the European Commission on the level of state aid inherent in the fossil fuel levy.

Mr. Eggar: In giving state aids clearance to the fossil fuel levy, the Commission took broad account of the premium payments that would be made under the contract between Nuclear Electric and the regional electricity companies.

Opencast Mining

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment has been made in his review of coal and energy policy of the change in value of property bought by British Coal Opencast in the Pwll Du area.

Mr. Eggar: None. Assessment of changes in the value of British Coal properties is not included in the terms of reference of the coal review.

Coal Industry

Mr. Mullin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the assessment of the cost of pumping at Westoe, Vane Tempest and Easington collieries.

Mr. Eggar: This is a matter for British Coal.

EC Funds

Mr. Illsley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much more sterling is available to the United Kingdom from the European social fund and European regional development fund as a result of the fall in the exchange rate.

Mr. Sainsbury: Payments in ecu from the funds are received at frequent but irregular intervals. Each is converted to sterling at the exchange rate on the date of receipt. Also, in the case of the European social fund, annual programmes are not finally valued in ecu until the date of submission of the final account of expenditure, some 18 months after the start of the programme. No single figure can therefore be given.

Radioactive Materials

Mr. Patchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will now prevent plutonium from being flown out of Carlisle airport by British Nuclear Fuels Limited; and if he will hold a public inquiry into the use of Carlisle airport for the transport of radioactive materials.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 5 February 1993]:* No. In its report on the transport of civil plutonium by air, the independent Advisory Committee on the Safe Transport of Radioactive Material (November 1988) assessed that, on extremely pessimistic assumptions involving a severe crash in a suburban area, the radiological risks from carrying such material would be less than one fatality in 50 years. This is much lower than the likely casualties arising from the impact of the aircraft itself.

Post Office (Privatisation)

Mr. Hain: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what plans he has, as part of his Post Office privatisation proposals, to sell off Parcelforce and Royal Mail as a single unit;

(2) what plans he has, as part of his Post Office privatisation proposals, to keep the counters business in the public sector.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 12 February 1993]:* No decision has been taken to privatise the Post Office. Therefore, I have no such plans.

EMPLOYMENT

Contracting Out

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will provide figures for the reduction in numbers of posts as a result of contracting out since 1979 in her Department and agencies for which she has responsibility.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information is not retained in a form that would allow such an analysis without disproportionate cost.

Merchant Shipping

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people were employed in the merchant shipbuilding industry in the United Kingdom in *(a)* 1974, *(b)* 1979 and *(c)* 1992.

Mr. McLoughlin: Merchant shipbuilding forms part of the shipbuilding and repairing industry (activity heading 3610 of the Standard Industrial Classification 1980). Estimates for dates nearest to those specified are as follows:

Employees in the shipbuilding and repairing industry in Great Britain[1]

	Thousands
June 1974	146
June 1979	135
September 1989	51

[1] Not seasonally adjusted.

Figures from the September 1991 census of employment will be available in April.

Social Fund

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what increase in European social fund moneys is available to the United Kingdom under objectives 2, 3 and 4 as a result of the rise in value of the ecu since 16 September 1992.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him today by my right hon. Friend, the Minister for Industry.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will list *(a)* the amounts of European social fund allocations to each European social fund sector under each of the objectives 3 and 4 operational programmes, *(b)* the amounts claimed by each European social fund sector under each of the objectives 3 and 4 operational programmes and *(c)* what has happened to funds allocated under these programmes but not claimed, for each year since 1989.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The amounts of European social fund money initially allocated to and claimed by the organisational sectors covered by objectives 3 and 4 are provided in the following tables.

Allocations	*1990* £	*1991* £	*1992* £	*1993* £
Local Authorities	49,251,200	60,500,000	59,000,000	83,450,000
Voluntary Sector	18,897,000	21,000,000	21,000,000	31,800,000
Higher Education	14,691,080	17,000,000	16,780,000	22,000,000
Industry Training Organisations	6,584,090	3,000,000	3,000,000	6,000,000
TEC/LEC	618,330	4,000,000	8,000,000	13,000,000
Government	142,500,000	157,500,000	150,400,000	209,800,000

	1990 £	*1991* £
Claims		
Local Authorities	—	55,114,200
Voluntary Sector	—	18,885,400
Higher Education	—	16,247,000
Industry Training Organisations	—	3,104,700
TEC/LEC	—	1,213,000
Government		156,700,700
Total	209,665,990	251,265,000

Information for 1990 broken down by sector could be obtained only by manual analysis and therefore at disproportionate cost.

Details of final claims for 1992 do not have to be submitted to the Commission until June 1993.

All moneys allocated in 1990 and 1991 which were not taken up in those years were carried forward for use in 1991 and 1992 respectively.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether the Croham directive applies to the availability of the report recently commissioned by the Employment Department on the use of technical assistance moneys under the European social fund.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Croham directive is not applicable to the availability of the report mentioned by the hon. Member.

Training for Work

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what guidelines she has issued, or intends to issue, to training and enterprise councils regarding training for work.

Mr. McLoughlin: Since the announcement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 12 November 1992 in a reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mr. Booth), *Official Report*, column 903-4, an initial briefing note on training for work, and a further note covering the initiative in more detail have been issued to training and enterprise councils. The planning guidance to TECs for 1993-94 set out the requirements for training for work and a draft version of the TEC operating agreement for 1993-94 has been issued. Regional presentations on the new initiative have been given to TECs. The contractual requirements for running training for work are comprehensively set out in the 1993-94 TEC operating agreement which will be issued shortly.

Youth Training

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will publish a table showing the destination of leavers from youth training schemes in London, giving the most recent figures, and figures for each earlier period since the scheme began to operate.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information requested is given in the following table.

Youth training outcomes in London
Leavers during April 1986 to March 1992

per cent.

	April 1986 to March 1987	*April 1987 to March 1988*	*April 1988 to March 1989*	*April 1989 to March 1990*	*April 1990 to March 1991*	*April 1991 to March 1992*
Total in a job	58	66	71	66	52	39
(same employer)	(10)	(21)	(32)	(31)	(24)	(21)
(different employer)	(44)	(40)	(35)	(31)	(23)	(13)
(self-employed)	(2)	(2)	(2)	(2)	(4)	(1)
(part-time up to 30 hours)	(3)	(3)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(3)
On another training programme	10	8	6	6	7	7
On a full-time course	4	4	4	5	8	9
Doing something else	4	3	3	4	7	7
Unemployed	23	18	14	16	25	34
Not answered	1	1	1	2	2	3

Notes: Percentage may not total 100 due to independent rounding
Figures in brackets may not equal 'Total in a job' due to independent rounding
Percentages shown as a proportion of total number of questionnaire responses
Source: YT Follow-up Servey

Labour Statistics

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will publish a table showing for Greater London the numbers of people employed in September of each year since 1988 in the retail and distribution sector; and what separate figures she has for the numbers employed in retailing, wholesaling, and transport, and other distributive services.

Mr. McLoughlin: Estimates for the retail distribution sector and wholesaling for September 1988 and all the industries specified for September 1989 are available from the NOMIS database in the Library. For later dates the estimates are aggregated with other industries and cannot be provided separately. Figures for the industries specified will be available when the September 1991 census of employment results are published in April.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will publish a table showing, for Greater London, the numbers of people employed in September of each year since 1988 in the finance and business services sector; and what separate figures she has for the numbers employed in banking, credit granting institutions, insurance, accountancy and management consultancy, legal services, software services, property services, and international and equity markets.

Mr. McLoughlin: Estimates for the finance and business services sector for all the dates specified are available from the NOMIS database in the Library. Estimates for software services and international and equity markets are not available. The other industries listed are available from NOMIS, for September 1988 and September 1989. Figures for all the industries specified will be available when the September 1991 census of employment results are published in April.

Biofuel Industry

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people in the United Kingdom are currently employed in the biofuel industry.

Mr. McLoughlin: There are no figures available. The biofuel industry has been interpreted to mean the production of liquid transport fuels from biomass crops—such as rapeseed oil.

DEFENCE

Trident

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the implication of the START II treaty on the price and specifications of Trident missiles purchased from the United States of America.

Mr. Aitken: The START II treaty has no such implications.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether Trident missile service units are designed for removing nuclear warheads from missiles on board Trident submarines;

(2) if he will make a statement on the function of Trident missile service units;

(3) how many Trident missile service units have been ordered from Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd. for service at RNAD Coulport.

Mr. Aitken: The Trident missile service unit is designed to provide an environmentally controlled working area for the removal and installation of nuclear warheads from Trident missiles on-board Vanguard class submarines. Three missile service units have been ordered.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether it is intended to remove nuclear warheads from Trident missiles on land or while on board Trident submarines;

(2) if he will make a statement on the procedures to be used for loading and unloading nuclear warheads on to and from Trident missiles and the hazards associated with these procedures.

Mr. Aitken: Installation and removal of United Kingdom nuclear warheads is planned to take place only when Trident missiles are on-board Vanguard class submarines. We envisage that United Kingdom procedures to install and remove warheads will mirror approved United States practice; the United Kingdom safety assessment is expected to endorse these procedures.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to include within the terms of reference of the new examination of the bids by Rosyth and Devonport for repair and refitting of Trident submarines the matters of direct revenue and capital costs, and local social and economic factors in each area as well as technical capability; if he will arrange for an element of scrutiny independent from the officers of his Department directly involved; and if he will publish the detailed assessment and report on the comparative bids.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: All relevant factors will be taken into account in our considerations, which continue to draw on a wide range of expertise including that of specialist consultants. Once we have formulated proposals these will be announced to the House, and we will release as much information as possible, subject to the constraints of commercial confidentiality and security.

Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many technical projects at his Department's chemical and biological establishment at Porton Down have been funded by the United States Department of Defence since 1963; what has been the total worth of these projects; and what were the aims of these projects;

(2) how many personnel from the United States Department of Defence have been stationed on a permanent basis at the Ministry of Defence's chemical and biological warfare establishment since 1963; and for what purpose and under which specific defence agreement these postings were arranged.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: These are matters for the chemical and biological defence establishment (CBDE) under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive of CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 15 February 1993:

Your Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence asking how many technical projects at his Department's Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down have been funded by the United States Department of Defense since 1963; what has been the total worth of these projects; and what were the aims of these projects (Question 8, Order Paper 5 February 1993) and what funding the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment will receive from the United States Department of Defense for research in the near future (Question 24, Order Paper 5 February 1993) have been passed to me to reply to as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

I would refer you to my letter of 16 July 1992 in reply to your Parliamentary Question asking how many research projects at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down have been funded by the United States Department of Defense since 1979 and their total worth (Question 24, Order Paper 15 July 1992) in which I said that there have been no research projects at CDDE Porton Down directly funded by the United States Department of Defense. I also said that CBDE had recently been tasked to carry out work under the provisions of the Memorandum of Understanding on the Strategic Defence Initiative which is being funded by the US Department of Defense through the SDI Participation Office in London. The value of that work at CBDE in the current financial year is £1·59M.

Since my letter to you of 16 July 1992, we have been awarded a contract from the United States Department of Defense to support the UK programme in aid of a NATO Project Group tasked with selecting a commercially available anti-emetic drug to protect servicemen against nuclear radiation induced nausea and vomiting. The value of this work is £250K.

The aims of these projects are as follows:

(a) The work in support of the Strategic Defence Initiative is to improve the effectiveness of such defences against the threat of chemical or biological weapons.

(b) The anti-emetic work is to improve the protection of servicemen against nuclear radiation induced nausea and vomiting.

Insofar as the future is concerned, it is not possible to estimate what future funding this Establishment will receive from the US Department of Defense as the annual defence budget in the United States is subject to extensive review and the outcome depends on the US Government and Congressional reviews of the budget.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) under which defence agreement information from the defence microbiology division of the chemical and biological defence establishment has been exchanged with the United States of America; to which United States governmental establishments this information has been passed; when this information was first exchanged; and with which other countries information from the defence microbiology division has been exchanged;

(2) what is the primary purpose of the Defence Microbiology Division at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment; when it was set up; how many staff are in the division; and in which publications and on what dates scientists in the Defence Microbiology Division published their research findings during 1991.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: These are matters for the chemical and biological defence establishment (CBDE) under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive of CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 15 February 1993:

1. Your Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him what is the primary purpose of the Defence Microbiology Division at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment; when it was set up; how many staff are in the Division; and in which publications and on what date scientists in the Defence Microbiology Division published their research findings during 1991 (Question 26 Order Paper 5 February 1993) and under which defence agreement information from the Defence Microbiology Division of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment has been exchanged with the United States of America; to which United States governmental establishments this information has been passed; when this information was first exchanged and with which other countries information from the Defence Microbiology Division has been exchanged (Question 10, Order Paper 5 February 1993) have been passed to me to reply to as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The primary purpose of the Defence Microbiology Division at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down is to carry out work on defence against pathogenic micro-organisms and toxins that are assessed to present a threat to the United Kingdom Armed Forces. The work of this Division contributes to the United Kingdom programme on chemical and biological defence which is aimed at ensuring that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them.

3. The Defence Microbiology Division was set up in 1979 when the Microbiological Research Establishment was transferred to the Public Health Laboratory Service and became the Centre for Applied Microbiology and Research. At that date, the then Chemical Defence Establishment at Porton Down took on the responsibility for biological

defence. Currently, the Division has 44 staff. A list of the research publications for scientists in the Defence Microbiology Division in 1991 is as follows:

The monitoring and detection of *Bacillus anthracis* in the environment. J. Appl. Bacteriol., Special Supplement, 1991 20:9S-18S.

Toxicity of *Clostridium perfringens* alpha-toxin is dependent on a domain homologous to an enzyme from the human arachidonic acid pathway. Infect. Immun. 1991 59:1872-1874.

Development of a detection test for *Herpesvirus simiae* (B virus) using the polymerase chain reaction, patent application GB 9102157.6 1991.

Epitope mapping of the alpha-toxin of *Clostridium perfringens*. Infect. Immun. 1991. 59:4338-4342.

Quantitative and qual-itative analysis of airborne spora. Grana. 1991. 30:407-408.

Microorganisms in Aerobiology. Grana. 1991. 30:17.

Roles of Maillard Reactions in Diseases. 1991. HMSO Publications.

Evaluation of a small-scale method for the extraction of the K88 antigen from *Escherichia coli*. FEMS Microbiol. Letts. 1991. 78:81-84.

Production and characterisation of monoclonal antibodies directed against the lipopolysaccharide of *Francisella tularensis*. J.Clin. Microbiol. 29:1407-1412.

4. Insofar as the exchange of information with the United States of America is concerned, I would refer you to my letter of 10 August 1992 in response to your Parliamentary Question asking under what defence agreement information from the Defence Microbiology Division at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down, is passed to the United States Department of Defence (Question 9, Order Paper 16 July 1992). In that response I referred you to the reply of the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, the Right Honourable Archie Hamilton, MP, of 21 May 1992, Official Report, Columns 255-256 which indicated that there are a number of agreements with NATO allies covering research, development, deployment and standardisation of chemical and biological defence equipment. The purpose of these agreements is to exchange information and to promote co-operation and collaboration with our allies in the field of chemical and biological defence. The work of the Defence Microbiological Division at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down contributes to the United Kingdom programme on chemical and biological defence and such information is exchanged with the United States Department of Defence under the agreements listed in the reply of 21 May 1992.

5. The United States Governmental Establishments to which this information has been passed include the following:

a. The United States Army Medical Research Institute for Infectious Diseas, Fort Detrick, Maryland.

b. The US Army Chemical Research Development and Engineering Center at Edgewood, Maryland (now known as the US Army Chemical and Biological Defence Agency and the US Edgewood Development and Engineering Center).

c. The US Army Chemical School at Fort McClellan, Alabama.

In addition, information has been exchanged from time to time with the appropriate US Navy and US Air Force establishments as well as with the Department of Defence in Washington DC. Most of the collaboration and information exchange has taken place with the US Army as they have the lead US responsibility for chemical and biological defence.

. The information from the Defence Microbiology Division has been exchanged since its establishment in 1979. Information from the Defence Microbiology Division has also been exchanged with the other allied nations identified in the reply of 21 May 1992, Official Report, Columns 255-256.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what tests and studies his Department has conducted on the chemical agents bromacil, monuron and 2,4,5-Trichlorophenoxyacetic acid; when these tests and studies were carried out; whether they were carried out on humans; and whether the results of these tests and studies have been passed on to the United States Department of Defence.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The substances bromacil, monuron and 2,4,5-trichlorophenoxyacetic are commercially available herbicides and not chemical agents. Our records indicate that no work has been carried out on bromacil or monuron; 2,4,5-trichlorophenoxyacetic acid was, however, used operationally in Malaya in the 1950s. Details are available on files held by the Public Records Office.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when his Department produced the nerve agent VX; where it was produced; for what purpose; and in what quantity;

(2) how the results of the collaborative programme between his Department and the United States Department of Defence on the thermal stability and analytical research of VX nerve gas were used by the United States Department of Defence; in what year these collaborative programmes ended; and what United States military establishments took part in these programmes.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: These matters are for the chemical and biological defence establishment (CBDE) under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive of CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 15 February 1993:

1. Your Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him when his Department produced the nerve agent VX; where it was produced; for what purpose; and in what quantity (Question 14, Order Paper 5 February 1993) and how the results of the collaborative programmes between his Department and the United States Department of Defense on the thermal stability and analytical research of VX nerve gas were used by the United States Department of Defense; in what year these collaborative programmes ended; and what United States military establishments took part in these programmes (Question 28, Order Paper 5 February 1993) have been passed to me to reply to as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. In order to carry out this work, it is necessary to have available small quantities of the materials which may be used as chemical or biological warfare agents by a potential aggressor.

3. VX was first synthesised on a laboratory scale in the early 1950s and subsequently produced in appropriate quantities for the research carried out into its toxicological characteristics, thermal stability and analytical research. Synthesis has been carried out at the then Chemical Defence Establishment at Porton Down and at the Chemical Defence Establishment at Nancekuke, Cornwall.

4. The purpose of producing VX was stated in my letter to you of 10 August 1992 replying to your Parliamentary Question asking in which years the Department of Defence's scientists carried out studies and tests on quantities of VX nerve gas prepared by the United States of America, what was the purpose of these tests and studies and how many British Service personnel have been subjected to tests involving VX nerve gas (Question 26, Order Paper 14 July 1992). As I indicated in that letter, the purpose of the tests and studies of VX, although initially to assist the UK programme into producing nerve agents, was subsequently to evaluate the potential threat to the UK Armed Forces should an aggressor produce and use the nerve agent VX. The UK programme into offensive CW was abandoned in the late 1950s and since

then our work has been wholly concerned with the provision of effective protective measures. No studies involving British Service personnel have been carried out using VX nerve agent.

5. In respect of the quantity of the nerve agent VX, I would refer you to my letter of 10 August 1992 in answer to your parliamentary question asking what quantity of VX nerve gas is currently stocked by his Department (Question 12, Order Paper 14 July 1992). In that I stated that small quantities of the nerve agent, VX, are held at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment in order to enable us to carry out our work to ensure that the protective measures for the UK Armed Forces are effective. It would not be in the national interest to disclose the precise quantity of VX nerve gas; it is, however, a small quantity and is very much less than the aggregate quantity of chemical warfare agents that will be permitted to be held for protective purposes under the terms of the Chemical Weapons Convention that opened for signature in Paris on 13-15 January 1993.

6. The way in which the results of the collaborative programmes and information exchnage between the Ministry of Defence and the United States Department of Defence on the thermal stability and analytical research of VX nerve gas were used by the United States Department of Defence is a matter for the United States Government. Insofar as the duration of these collaborative programmes and information exchange is concerned, I would refer you to the reply given by the Minister of State for Defence Procurement, Mr. Jonathan Aitken, MP of 16 July 1992, Official Report, Column 936, which stated that research information had been exchanged on a continuing basis on the potential hazard from chemical and biological agents including VX nerve gas under the agreements listed in the reply of 21 May 1992, Official Repot, Columns 255-256 concerning international agreements on chemical and biological defence.

7. The United States military establishments that took part in this information exchange and collaboration were primarily the US Army Chemical Research Development and Engineering Center At Edgewood Arsenal, now known as the US Army Chemical and Biological Defence Agency and the Edgewood Research Development and Engineering Center, and the US Army Medical Research Institute for Chemical Defence also located at Edgewood, Maryland. Most collaboration has taken place with the US Army as they are the US lead agency for chemical and biological defence.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the lodger units at the chemical defence and biological defence establishment referred to on page 11 of the establishment's latest annual report.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: This is a matter for the chemical and biological defence establishment (CBDE) under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive of CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livinstone, dated 15 February 1993.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking which are the lodger units at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, referred to on page 11 of the Establishment's latest Annual Report (Question 15, Order Paper 5 February 1993) has been passed to me to reply to as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The lodger units at CBDE referred to on page 11 of the 1991/92 Annual Reports and Accounts were:

a. Hunting Engineering Ltd

b. Royal Ordnance Plc who have now left the site

In addition, receipts are received for services provided to two colocated units at Porton Down.

c. The Department of Health

d. The Centre for Applied Microbiology and Research.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many staff from his Department's chemical and biological defence establishment at Porton Down have been stationed on a permanent basis at United States Department of Defence establishments and for what purpose; and at which United States Department of Defence establishments they were;

(2) under which defence agreements the chemical and biological defence establishment arranged the current visit of the United States Navy scientist for a collaborative project to improve detection capabilities; and from which United States defence establishment this scientist came;

(3) what funding the chemical and biological defence establishment will receive from the United States Department of Defence for research in the near future.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: These matters are for the chemical and biological defence establishment (CBDE) under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive of CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 15 February 1993:

1. Your Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence asking how many staff from his Department's Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down have been stationed on a permanent basis at United States Department of Defense Establishments and for what purpose; and at which United States Department of Defense Establishments they were (Question 16, Order Paper, 5 February 1993), how many personnel from the United States Department of Defense have been stationed on a permanent basis at the Ministry of Defence's Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment since 1963; and for what purpose and under which specific defence agreements these posting were arranged (Question 31, Order Paper 5 February 1993) and under which defence agreements the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment arranged the current visit of the Unites States Navy scientist for collaborative project to improve detection capabilities; and from which United States Defense Establishment this came (Question 23, Order Paper 5 February 1993) have been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. Our records do not allow us to readily determine the numbers of staff stationed in the United States or at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment over an extended period. During the past nine years, three members of staff from the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down have been stationed for an extended period at United States Department of Defense Establishments to carry out collaborative work in the field of chemical and biological defence. The United States Department of Defense Establishments were the US Army Chemical Research, Development and Engineering Center located at Edgewood, Maryland (now known as the US Army Chemical and Biological Defense Agency and the US Army Edgewood Research, Development and Engineering Centre) and the US Army Medical Research Institute for Infectious Disease at Fort Detrick, Maryland.

3. Over the same period four United States Department of Defense personnel have been stationed for extended periods at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment. These attachments have been to carry out collaborative research in chemical and biological defence under the defence agreements identified in the reply by the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, the Rt. Hon. Archie Hamilton, MP of 21 May 1992, Official Report, columns 255-256.

4. The current visit of the United States Navy scientist for a collaborative project to improve the detection capabilities was arranged under the Memorandum of Understanding on Chemical and Biological Defence between the UK, US and Canada pending agreement of a bilateral arrangement with the US Navy. This scientist came from the United States Navy Medical Research and Development Command in Bethesda, Maryland.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) which United States Department of Defence establishments have sent staff on visits to his Department's chemical and biological defence establishment at Porton Down in each year since 1979; under which specific defence agreements these visits have been organised; and which other United States Government departments and agencies have visited Porton Down during this period;

(2) how many staff from the chemical and biological defence establishment at Porton Down have visited United States Department of Defence establishments in each year since 1979; what was the purpose of these visits; which United States Department of Defence establishments they visited; which grade were the staff; and whether the visits included academic working for his Department.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: These are matters for the chemical and biological defence establishment (CBDE) under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive of CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 15 February 1993:

1. Your Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence asking which United States Department of Defense Establishments have sent staff on visits to his Department's Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down in each year since 1979; under which specific defence agreements these visits have been organised; and which other United States Government Departments and Agencies have visited Porton Down during this period (Question 20, Order Paper 5 February 1993) and how many staff from the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton have visited United States Department of Defense Establishments in each year since 1979; what was the purpose of these visits; which United States Department of Defense Establishments they visited; which grade were the staff; and whether the visits included academics working for his Department (Question 37, Order Paper 5 February 1993) have been passed to me to reply to as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The principal United States Department of Defense Establishments which have sent staff on visits to the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down are:

a. The US Army Chemical Research, Development and Engineering Center at Edgewood, Maryland (now known as the US Army Chemical and Biological Defense Agency and the Edgewood Research, Development and Engineering Center).

b. The US Army Medical Research Institute for Infectious Disease at Fort Detrick, Maryland.

c. The US Army Medical Research Institute for Chemical Defense at Edgewood, Maryland.

d. The US Army Chemical School at Fort McClellan, Alabama.

e. The Department of Defense at the Pentagon.

3. In addition, representatives occasionally visit the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment from the US Navy, US Air Force and other Defense Establishments. Most visits are made by representatives fro the Department of Defense in Washington DC and from the US Army Establishments as the US Army have the lead responsibility in the US for chemical and biological defense.

4. The specific defence agreements under which these visits have been organised are those referred to in the reply by the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, The Rt. Hon. Archie Hamilton, MP, of 21 May 1992, Official Report, Columns 255-256. Occasionally visits are made to the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment by other representatives of the United States Government from time to time. These include the State Department and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency.

5. In respect of visits by staff from the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down to the United States Department of Defence Establishments, we do not maintain records in a way that enables us to identify how many staff have visited United States Department of Defence Establishments in each year since 1979. In the last five years the following are the number of CBDE personnel who have visited the United States of America on official duty:

	Number
1988-89	36
1989-90	35
1990-91	40
1991-92	56
1992-93	56

6. The purpose of these visits was to promote information exchange and collaboration between the United Kingdom and the United States and on occasion to attend international conferences held in the United States. The principal United States Department of Defence Establishments visited are the following:

a. The US Army Chemial Research, Development and Engineering Center at Edgewood, Maryland (now known as the US Army Chemical and Biological Defence Agency and the Edgewood Research, Development and Engineering Center).

b. The US Army Medical Research Institute for Infectious Disease at Fort Detrick.

c. The US Army Medical Research Institute for Chemical Defence at Edgewood, Maryland.

d. The US Army Chemical School at Fort McClellan, Alabama.

e. The Department of Defence at the Pentagon, Washington DC.

In addition other US Navy, US Air Force, US Army and Department of Defence Establishments are visited. Most visits are to US Army Establishments as the US Army has lead responsibility in the US for chemical and biological defence. The grade of staff ranged from Senior Scientific Officer up to Grade 3. Visits very occasionally have included academics working for the Department but this is exceptional.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what tests and studies his Department has carried out with the United States of America with regard to *(a)* the incapacitating agent BZ and *(b)* binary nerve gases; what was the aim of these tests and studies; and when these tests and studies were carried out.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: This is a matter for the chemical and biological defence establishment (CBDE) under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive of CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 15 February 1993.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what tests and studies his Department has carried out with the United States of America with regard to *(a)* the incapacitating agent BZ and *(b)* binary nerve gases; what was the aim of these tests and studies; and when these tests and studies were carried out (Question 22, Order Paper, 5 February 1993) has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. I would refer you to my letter to you of 10 August 1992 in answer to your Parliamentary Question asking how many tests had been carried out since 1967 involving the incapacitating agent BZ and British Service personnel, when these tests were carried out, whether all the personnel were volunteers and whether BZ is currently stocked by any of his Departments, Establishments (Question 32, Order Paper, 14 July 1992). In that reply I said that the role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton down is to ensure that the United Kingdom Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. This work involved the evaluation of the potential hazard of possible agents such as the incapacitating agent BZ. No tests and studies have been carried out with the United States of America with regard to the incapacitating agent BZ.

3. In respect of binary nerve gases, I would refer you to the answer by the Minister of State for Defence Procurement, Mr. Jonathan Aitken, MP of 16 July 1992, Official Report column 936 which indicated that research information had been changed on a continuing basis on the potential hazard from chemical and biological agents including VX nerve gas and possible binary gases with the aim of ensuring that the protective measures for the United Kingdom Armed Forces are as effective as possible. No tests and studies have been carried out on binary nerve gases with the United States of America.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the United Kingdom exchanged information about its research into CR gas with the United States of America.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: This is a matter for the chemical and biological defence establishment (CBDE) under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive of CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 15 February 1993.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him when the United Kingdom exchanged information about its research into CR gas with the United States of America (Question 29, Order Paper 5 February 1993) has been passed to me to reply to as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. I would refer you to my letter to you of 10 August 1992 in answer to your Parliamentary Question asking what information about defence research into CR gas the United Kingdom has passed to the United States of America, under which defence agreement this information was exchanged and when the information was transferred (Question 36, Order Paper 14 July 1992). In my letter of 10 August 1992, I stated that research into CR commenced in 1962 at the then Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down. The information gained in the research programme during the subsequent years has formed part of the chemical and biological defence programme and has been the subject of information exchange and collaboration with the United States Department of Defence on a continuing basis.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many patents the chemical and biological defence establishment at Porton Down has filed since 1962; and what are the numbers of each of these patents.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: This is a matter for the chemical and biological defence establishment (CBDE) under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive of CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 15 February 1993.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him how many patents the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment has filed since 1962 and what are the numbers of each of these patents (Question 32, Order Paper 5 February 1993) has been passed to me to reply to as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The number of patents filed by this Establishment and its precursors, the Chemical Defence Establishment and the Microbiological Research Establishment, since 1962 is 63 and their numbers are as follows:

Number	*Number*	*Number*
1173142	1538056	2081744
1206581	1512536	2072873
1571799	1558183	2074995
1149042	1571799	2103564
1310011	1530714	2113672
1301101	1567606	2164327
1341550	4228598	2187725
1206340	1487612	2183207
1376888	1558153	2223411
1340343	1588442	2203543
1360277	1588441	2212149
1429476	2014452	2229527
1415664	2015531	2229526
1605289	2021594	2231404
1478463	2042099	2239740
1605296	2042100	2224114
1438651	2025006	2222370
1456231	2048052	2225251
1464368	2062929	2257017
1476761	2134228	US 5082540
1487611	2059677	2252323

Several other patent applications are still being processed.

Arms Transfers

193. **Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of his Department's staff have been allocated to prepare the United Kingdom submission to the United Nations register of arms transfers; what additional costs have been incurred in preparing the submission; and by what date Her Majesty's Government intend to submit the report to the United Nations.

Mr. Aitken: No staff have been specifically allocated to the preparation of the British contribution to the United Nations register; the work will be accommodated within existing responsibilities and budgets. On the third point, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 5 February at column *373*.

Challanger Tanks

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many powerpacks had to be changed in Challenger I tanks during the Gulf operation; who that powerpack differs from the one in Challenger II; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: A total of 279 powerpacks were changed during the deployment of Challenger I to the Gulf. The majority of engine failures were caused by dust ingestion.

The Challenger II powerpack comprises of CV12 engine coupled to a TN54 gearbox which has six instead of the four forward ratios of the Challenger I gearbox. The powerpack, which is controlled by a new digital automotive system control unit, represents a significant improvement in reliability. In addition to a totally new main engine cleaner design, numerous reliability modifications have been embodied in the engine and the gearbox.

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what response he made to the request of the manufacturers for the release of a Challenger II battle tank in order to seek to win the Swedish Army order.

Mr. Aitken: Vickers Defence Systems made no request for the release of a Challenger II prototype in order to participate in the Swedish competition.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been achieved in the plans announced in June 1991 for an upgrade programme on the Challenger 1 fleet.

Mr. Aitken: A detailed study has been undertaken by Vickers Defence Systems and this is now under evaluation by the Department. A range of options is being considered.

Market Testing

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many staff in his Department are assigned to the market testing programme; how much the programme has cost his Department since November 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: Market testing is being handled as part of the Department's devolved management strategy. Its central market testing service, which offers advice and assistance to managers, currently comprises nine officials at an annual cost in salaries and ERNIC of about £260,000. Conduct of the market testing programme is the responsibility of the management areas themselves: some staff are dedicated to market testing but most carry out this function as part of their normal duties. It is not practicable to identify staff numbers or costs without incurring disproportionate cost.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all the market tests that have taken place in his Department since November 1991; whether the result was the maintenance of in-house provision or whether the service was contracted out; what was the name of the succesful contractor where appropriate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: The information requested is as follows:

Activity	*Result In-house/ Contractorized*	*Successful contractor*
RN Simulator helicopter control operations Royal Naval Air Station Portland	Contract	Hunting Aircraft Ltd.
Works Services Management, Royal Naval Air Station Culdrose	Contract	PSA Building Management, South West
Food Distribution in BAOR	Contract	NAAFI
Freight Services BAOR	Contract	Edmond Depaire
Air Weapon Ranges, RAF Cowden	Retained in house	
RAF Holbeach	Contract	Assessment Services Ltd.
Engineering and Supply/Multi-activity RAF Scampton	Contract	Hunting Aircraft Ltd.
Recruitment exhibition production, RAF Henlow	Contract	Serco Ltd.
Elementary Flying Training School, RAF Topcliffe	Contract	Hunting Aircraft Ltd.
Aircraft Support Services—A&AEE, Boscombe Down	Retained in-house	
Catering Royal Naval Air Station, Yeovilton	Contract	ARA Services Plc
HMS Drake, Devonport	Contract	RCO Support Services Ltd.
Engineering and other activities Ground radio/radar maintenance, Royal Naval Air Station, Portland	Contract	Hunting Aircraft Ltd.
Parachute servicing	Contract	Irvin G.B.
Andover aircraft maintenance	Contract	FLS Aerospace (Lovaux)
Wessex helicopter maintenance, RAF Shawbury	Contract	Serco Ltd.
Engineering support No. 60 Squadron RAF	Contract	FLS Aerospace (Lovaux)
Printing services BAOR	Contract	HMSO
Helicopter maintenance and engineering at Royal Naval Air Stations Yeovilton, Culdrose and Portland	Contract	Hunting Aircraft Ltd.

Activity	*Result In-house/ Contractorized*	*Successful contractor*
Aircraft maintenance		
Royal Naval Air Station Yeovilton	**Contract**	**Hunting Aircraft Ltd.**
Guarding at Abbey Wood site Bristol	**Contract**	**Chubb Wardens Ltd.**
Reconnaissance Visits to Bristol new site	**Contracts**	**Property Spectrum** **Peter Carol Coaches** **Bristol Moat House** **Bristol Hilton** **Swallow Royal Hotel** **British Rail**
Property Management Central London	**Contract**	**Planned Maintenance Engineering Ltd.**
Escorts for School Children's Visits	**Contract**	**Universal Aunts Ltd.**

Invergordon Depot

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress towards the disposal of his Department's fuel depot and pier facilities at Invergordon, with particular reference to the likely time scale involved.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Bids for the surplus oil fuel depot Invergordon complex are under consideration following competitive tender action in October 1992 and in the light of subsequent negotiations. We hope to be able to announce a decision soon.

Submarines

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects each of the Upholder class of submarines to enter service with the Royal Navy; what is the final cost estimate for each Upholder class submarine; what general plans he has for deployment of the submarines; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: HMS Upholder was accepted by the Royal Navy in December 1990 and re-entered service, following completion of modifications to her weapon handling and discharge systems (WHDS), last month. HMS Unseen and HMS Ursula were accepted by the Royal Navy in July 1991 and June 1992, respectively and are due to have their WHDS modifications carried out later this year, allowing them to re-enter service in early 1994. Unicorn is planned to enter service, with WHDS modifications already incorporated, this summer. For commercial reasons, it is not our practice to disclose the cost of individual warships. The overall programme cost is however, expected to be similar in real terms to that shown in table 3·2 volume 2 of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1991." It is not our practice to disclose details of the operational deployment of Royal Navy submarines.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are for sale of Upholder class submarines; and what discussions he has had with the Government of Canada about such sales.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No decisions affecting Upholder class submarines have been taken.

Wizard Generator

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are to upgrade the Wizard generator at RAF Edzell; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A contract has been placed to refurbish power generation at RAF Edzell and work will begin on the site on 1 March 1993.

Drug Abuse

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what was the total expenditure on drug abuse prevention programmes for the Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force in each year since 1985, in constant 1992 prices; and how many people were employed to administer these programmes, in each year since 1985;

(2) pursuant to his answer of 5 February, *Official Report*, columns *373-74*, how many service personnel dismissed from the services for drug-related offences were stationed overseas at the time; and in what countries.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member.

Ministry Land

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to whom Ministry land at Berry Head, Brixham, has been sold; and if conditions were attached to the sale to ensure that the land will continue to be a refuge for wildlife.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The sale has not yet been completed and the name of the potential purchaser, therefore, remains commercial in confidence. No conditions on future use have been attached by the Ministry of Defence; however, consultations with the local planning authority clearly indicate that it will strenuously resist development for use other than for agriculture, leisure/amenity or open space.

Composite Signals Organisation Station

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the tendering arrangements for the contract to build an antenna at CSOS Morwenstow.

Mr. Hurd: I have been asked to reply.

The competitive tender exercise for the procurement of an antenna for the composite signals organisation station Morwenstow was carried out in accordance with the standard Government procurement guidelines. Companies with the relevant capabilities were invited to submit tenders by the end of December 1992.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce the winner of the contract to build an antenna at CSOS Morwenstow.

Mr. Hurd: I have been asked to reply.

The contract should be awarded before the end of February.

HEALTH

District Health Authorities, Manchester

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her policy with regard to the merger of district health authorities within Greater Manchester; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: We are prepared to consider mergers where they are clearly in the interests of patients.

North Western regional health authority has encouraged district health authorities to form purchasing consortia. From 1 April 1993, the following consortia will operate within Greater Manchester:

North, Central and South Manchester and Salford DHAs;
Oldham and Tameside and Glossop DHAs;
Bolton and Wigan DHAs;
Bury and Rochdale DHAs.

Any proposals to merge these, or any, DHAs would be subject to full public consultation.

High Blood Pressure

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many national health service prescriptions were written for products used in the treatment of high blood pressure in each year since 1987; and what assessment has been made of the effects of her Department's initiative in encouraging doctors to screen more patients on the number of prescriptions written for these products.

Dr. Mawhinney: It is not possible to calculate to what extent any increase is due to doctors carrying out screening programmes. The remaining information is given in the table

Products used in the treatment of high blood pressure
England
(as defined by British National Formulary chapters 2.2, 2.4, 2.5 and 2.6)

Thousands

Year	*Prescriptions*
1987	51,088·8
1988	51,860·1
1989	53,247·0
1990	54,308·6
1991	59,626·3

Notes:

1. The data for 1991 is not directly comparable to those for earlier years because of a change in the way in which these data are collected.
2. From January 1991, the data are based on:
   (a) items. Previously they were based on prescription fees and some items may attract more than one fee.
   (b) prescriptions dispensed by community pharmacists and appliance contractors, dispensing doctors and personal administration by doctors. Previously they only covered prescriptions dispensed by community pharmacists and appliance contractors.
3. Figures for 1992 are not yet available.

Prescriptions

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment has been made of the extent any increase in the number of NHS prescriptions written so far this year has resulted from her Department's policy of *(a)* encouraging doctors to carry out screening programmes for certain detectable conditions and *(b)* requiring doctors to achieve target levels for patients needing vaccination against a variety of various diseases.

Dr. Mawhinney: It is not possible to calculate to what extent any increase is due to these policies.

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what are her Department's plans for doctors to indicate on a prescription form, FP10, the diagnosis for which a medicine is being prescribed, other than for a licensed indication; and how she will be able to protect patient confidentiality;

(2) what consultations she has held with consumer and patient organisations over her plans for requiring doctors to indicate on the FP10 prescription form the diagnosis for which a particular medicine is being prescribed, in order to meet the requirement of the new terms of reference for the Advisory Committee on NHS drugs.

Dr. Mawhinney: There are no such plans.

London School of Hygiene

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the publications and research projects funded by her Department at the small area statistics unit of the London School of Hygiene.

Dr. Mawhinney: The small area health statistics unit is funded jointly by the Department of Health, the Department of the Environment, the Health and Safety Executive, the Scottish Office, the Welsh Office and the Department of Health and Social Services, Northern Ireland. A list of the unit's publications and of the research projects completed and in progress will be placed in the Library.

Oral Health

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what was the national public expenditure on oral health promotion in the last five years; and what are the projected figures for 1992-93 and 1993-94;

(2) how much money in real terms was spent in each of the last five years on oral health promotion in each district.

Dr. Mawhinney: Responsibility for arranging for the provision of dental health education and preventive programmes is for district health authorities. Information on the total cost of such programmes is not available centrally.

Since the publication of the 1987 White Paper "Promoting Better Health", more than £1·8 million has been provided from central funds to support innovative local projects. This includes £265,000 in 1992-93. Final decisions about any central funding for 1993-94 have not yet been made.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what total allocation of additional resources she has made to implement the oral health strategy targets in the "Health of the Nation" White Paper in the coming five years; and when she will publish details of the implementation plan for the strategy.

Dr. Mawhinney: The "Health of the Nation" White Paper does not include oral health strategy targets.

Dentists

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists have deregistered, or have refused to accept for NHS treatment *(a)* adults, *(b)* children under 18 years, *(c)* families with a certificate for full help with cost of NHS services, *(d)* those in full-time education under 19 years, *(e)* expectant mothers, *(f)* mothers with babies up to the age of 12 months and *(g)* anyone receiving income support or family credit.

Dr. Mawhinney: Between 3 July 1992 and 5 February 1993, 1,586 dentists (of a total of 15,433 at 30 September 1992) gave notice to family health services authorities of their intention to deregister 358,300 (1·74 per cent.) adult patients and 182 dentists gave notice of their intention to deregister 1,196 (less than 1 per cent.) child patients. During this same period there was a net increase of 600,000 in the number of adult registrations. Dentists are independent contractors and are free to accept or refuse patients for national health service treatment. The remaining information requested is not held centrally.

Tobacco Advertising

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many complaints are received, per year, about alleged breaches of the voluntary agreement on tobacco advertising; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: The number of alleged breaches referred to the committee for monitoring agreements on tobacco advertising and sponsorship since its inception is set out in the table.

Number of alleged breaches of voluntary agreements

Year	*Number*
1987-88	462
1988-89	65
1989-90	168
1990-91	120
1991-92	119

Further information is set out in the annual reports of the committee, copies of which are available in the Library.

Market Testing

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff in her Department are assigned to the market testing programme; how much the programme has cost her Department since November 1991; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: A market testing unit of two people has been set up to co-ordinate the Department's programme. A number of other staff working within the functional areas affected are spending part of their time on work associated with market testing.

Between November 1991 and the end of March 1993 it is estimated that the programme will have cost in the region of £830,000. This includes consultancy costs, staff costs and associated overheads.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list all the market tests that have taken place in her Department since November 1991; whether the result was the maintenance of in-house provision or whether the service was contracted out; what was the name of the successful contractor where appropriate; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Since November 1991, the market testing of office and building services for the new buildings of Skipton house in London and Quarry house in Leeds (a joint DH/DSS building) has been completed. It has resulted in the award of the following service level agreements or contracts for services which had previously been provided wholly or mainly in-house in the Department's other buildings:

For Skipton house
Facilities management—Procord Ltd
Reception and conference room booking—In-house team
Office support services—In-house team

For Quarry house
Facilities management—P and O TFM Ltd
Office support services—Manpower UK

Blood Donors

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of blood donor donations in each national health service region since 1988; and if he will express this figure as a percentage of the population in each region.

Mr. Sackville: The table gives the numberof donations collected in each region from 1988 to 1991 together with the populations which fell into the age band eligible to give blood. The numbers of donors making these donations are not known centrally and so cannot be expressed as a percentage of each region's eligible population.

	Number of blood donations				*Population eligible to give blood*[1,2]
	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	
Northern	122,267	127,275	124,332	133,756	1,887,820
Yorkshire	133,088	139,147	144,189	146,926	1,949,900
Trent	197,746	207,713	189,554	207,508	3,097,330
East Anglia	92,195	91,920	96,454	97,758	1,248,000
North West Thames	192,004	187,832	195,357	214,953	2,350,220

	Number of blood donations				Population eligible to give blood[1] [2]
	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	
North East Thames	142,716	151,786	118,155	159,950	2,215,160
South Thames	282,188	296,158	276,028	306,402	4,189,360
Wessex	95,484	104,751	100,405	109,169	1,406,540
Oxford	107,805	114,415	122,717	123,304	1,709,810
South Western	182,000	184,195	177,798	187,818	2,205,170
West Midlands	216,485	231,075	242,077	250,688	3,264,500
Mersey	108,387	110,931	109,116	124,123	1,698,120
North Western	176,328	177,200	183,421	200,922	2,824,200

Notes:

[1] The eligible age band for blood donors is 18 to 65 inclusive.

[2] The eligible donor population figures are for 1988, the latest year available.

Limited List

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what studies she has commissioned among practising clinicians to look into the clinical implications of extending the limited list to include 10 additional therapeutic categories; and if she will publish the results;

(2) what specific steps are being taken by her Department to ensure that pharmaceutical companies are not deterred from bringing forward applications for new product licences by uncertainty about the possibility of a subsequent inclusion in the limited list.

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies she commissioned among practising clinicians to look into the clinical implications of extending the limited list proposals to 10 additional therapeutic categories; and whether she intends to publish the results of those studies.

Dr. Mawhinney: No such studies were commissioned. The changes do not affect the basic structure of the selected list scheme which has been in operation since 1985. It will be for the advisory committee on national health service drugs, when it considers individual drugs in the new categories, to ensure that the clinical needs of patients continue to be met.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health at what stage in the regulatory process involving the Committee on the Safety of Medicines, and the relevant expert advisory committees on *(a)* the existing categories and *(b)* the 10 new proposed categories of the limited list prescribing system for pharmaceutical products, a new product for which a product licence was being sought would be considered for inclusion in the limited list; what timetable would be followed for such consideration; and whether such consideration would be automatic.

Dr. Mawhinney: The advisory committee on national health service drugs would only consider a new product which had been licensed and was available for prescription. New products in the specified categories are normally drawn to the committee's attention by its secretariat and the committee is asked whether it wishes to review them.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment has been made in respect of *(a)* the existing categories and *(b)* the 10 new proposed categories of the limited list prescribing system for pharmaceutical products, of the impact of the deterrent effect of a possible limited list inclusion upon the decision of companies considering whether or not to incur the costs of bringing forward a product licence application;

(2) what specific steps are being taken by her Department to ensure that pharmaceutical companies are not deterred from bringing forward applications for new product licences by uncertainty about the possibility of a subsequent inclusion in the limited list.

Dr. Mawhinney: The advisory committee on national health service drugs is required to ensure that drugs to meet all clinical need in the specified categories can be provided as economically as possible. There is nothing in the provisions of the selected list scheme which need deter companies from bringing forward applications for new product licences.

Advisory Committee on NHS Drugs

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she has invited the Royal College of General Practitioners to make nominations for membership of the advisory committee on NHS drugs.

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether she has invited the Royal College of General Practitioners to make nominations for membership of the newly constituted advisory committee on national health service drugs.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Royal College of General Practitioners was one of the professional bodies which we consulted before appointing the new members of the committee whose names I announced in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Mr. Alexander) on 10 February at column *697*.

Disabled Employees

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of employees in her Department is registered disabled.

Mr. Sackville: At 11 February 1993 1·3 per cent. of the Department's employees were registered disabled. In addition, a number of staff have a disability but are not registered disabled.

Advisory Group on Rehabilitation

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current membership of the advisory group on rehabilitation; what are its revised terms of reference; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: The current membership of the advisory group on rehabilitation is: Lord Holderness *(Chairman)*, Mrs. Mary Baker, Professor Anne Chamberlain, Mrs. Anne Davies, Miss Nadia Deadman, Dr. Pamela Enderby, Mr. Stuart Fletcher, Lord McColl, Professor Lindsey McLellan, Miss Carol Underwood, Miss Anne Walker and Dr. Karen Waters.

The task of the advisory group on rehabilitation is to advise the Department of Health on the most effective means of promoting the development of rehabilitation in England and achieving its recognition as a key area in the strategy for health. This will cover topics such as collaboration between statutory and voluntary bodies; the tasks which fall to health authorities in their purchasing role; research; specialised education and training of rehabilitation professionals and the conduct of a programme of collaborative development work with the national health service.

HELIOS Programme

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has made to the EC Social Affairs Committee concerning the reduction in funding of the HELIOS programme.

Mr. Yeo: There has been no reduction. The first HELIOS programme finished in December 1991 and discussions on the second programme, including its overall budget, are continuing. The European Commission originally requested 5·6 million ecus for the second HELIOS programme in 1993. The Council has put that sum in reserve, at the request of the European Parliament.

Medical Confidentiality

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will introduce regulations or produce guidelines on medical confidentiality covering the subject matter of the draft National Health Service Functions (Preservation of Confidentiality) Regulations 1987; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on Thursday 29 October at column *841*.

Doctors

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information she has on the number and percentage of doctors who drink alcohol while on duty; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available centrally.

Xenotransplantation

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment she has made of *(a)* the ethics and *(b)* the virological dangers of xenotransplantation;

(2) what research has been undertaken into xenotransplantation and the breeding of baboons; and if she will place copies in the Library.

Mr. Sackville: Transplanting organs from animals into human beings has been attempted in some countries but not in the United Kingdom. In 1992 two attempts were made in the United States to transplant organs from baboons into human beings, but both human patients died following immunological rejection.

The Department of Health and the Medical Royal Colleges are watching developments and will scrutinise closely any proposed research of this subject. Additionally any proposed research involving national health service patients would have to be referred to the appropriate local research ethics committee.

Neither the Department of Health nor the Medical Research Council has any reports or published evidence of research into xenotransplantation and the breeding of baboons.

Organ transplantation has developed cautiously and responsibly in the United Kingdom. I am confident that this will continue.

Viruses

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what study she has made of *(a)* Lassa fever, *(b)* Marbury disease and *(c)* other illnesses with respect to their possible causation by viruses from a different species.

Mr. Sackville: Many viruses that affect humans have an animal host and are termed zoonoses. Information on the host range comes from regular monitoring of journals and discussions with scientific and medical experts. The results of studies into the causes of Lassa fever and Marburg disease have been published. The Medical Research Council also has a simian virus committee which is attended by a Department of Health observer.

Vitamin Supplements

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the vitamin supplements which are currently widely used to supplement the diets of young babies are available over the counter; and what steps are being taken by her Department to ensure the continued availability of such products in the event of the introduction in the future by the European Commission of a directive on dietary supplements.

Mr. Sackville: Vitamin preparations suitable to supplement the diets of young babies are available over the counter. The Government continue to safeguard the nutritional status of young children in income support families by making supplementary vitamins available free under the welfare foods scheme. The EC Commission is now reviewing its work programme and the future of any initiative on dietary supplements will be dependent on that review. The Government's policy remains to strike a balance between ensuring public health and maintaining the availability of safe products for which there is clearly a strong public demand.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance is given by her Department to mothers with young babies about the advisability or otherwise of vitamin supplementation, the range of vitamins which should be used, and the age of the children for whom such supplementation is appropriate.

Mr. Sackville: Expert advice from the Committee on the Medical Aspects of Food Policy is that vitamin supplementation of Vitamins A, C. D should be given to infants and young children aged from six months to at least two years and preferably up to five years.

The guidance has been promulaged to health professionals and incorporated in the Health Education Authority booklet "Birth to Five" which is given free to all first-time mothers.

West Midlands RHA

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what new resources she plans for the west midlands regional health authority.

Dr. Mawhinney: In 1993-94 an additional £53 million has been made available to West Midlands regional health authority in respect of services for its resident population. This is a 1 per cent. increase above inflation once measures on public sector pay restraint have been taken into account. In addition to this amount a further £43 million from centrally held budgets (including AIDS and joint finance) has been issued to West Midlands as part of its initial revenue cash limit. During the course of the year the regional health authority will receive a share of other centrally held budgets including those for general medical services and Project 2000.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the terms of reference for the new chairman of the West Midlands regional health authority.

Dr. Mawhinney: Sir Donald Wilson, in addition to carrying out all the duties of all regional chairmen, has been asked to:

1. ensure that patients and staff in the West Midlands are properly served by an efficient and effective regional organisation;
2. oversee important management changes proposed in the West Midlands.

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will give details of the terms agreed for the retirement of Sir James Ackers as chairman of the west midlands regional health authority.

Dr. Mawhinney: With the agreement of the Treasury, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has decided to make a payment of £10,000 to Sir James Ackers under the provisions of paragraph 9(3) of schedule 5 of the National Health Service Act 1977.

Health Districts (Boundaries)

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 4 February, *Official Report*, column *335*, what is her policy on making boundaries of district health and local authorities co-terminous; and how this was applied to her decision to approve the merger of the Kingston/Esher and Richmond/Twickenham/Roehampton health districts.

Dr. Mawhinney: The achievement of common boundaries between local authorities and district health authorities, whilst a highly desirable aid to joint working, is not essential. It is one of the potential benefits which may accrue from DHA mergers, and must be considered in the light of local circumstances.

The merger of Kingston and Esher with Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton was approved for 1 April 1993 to enable the development of a more effective purchasing agency. Further adjustments to boundaries, in order to achieve co-terminosity at this stage, could have delayed the merger. South West Thames RHA now proposes to consult to make the new Kingston and Richmond DHA co-terminous with local authorities by 1 April 1994.

Walsgrave Hospital

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the results of her public consultation exercise carried out recently regarding the trust status of Walsgrave hospital.

Dr. Mawhinney: Public consultation on the application for a combined Coventry, Warwickshire and Walsgrave National Health Service Trust was completed on 25 September 1992. Of the 28 responses received, 10 were in support, nine in opposition and nine were neutral. Formal consultation on the dissolution of the Walsgrave NHS Trust involving all staff and staff organisations was completed on 8 January 1993. There was only one response and this expressed satisfaction with the conditions agreed for the transfer.

Specialised Medical Services

Dame Angela Rumbold: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans she has for ensuring that changes to specialised medical activity will continue to maintain close links with primary and secondary levels of medical care;

(2) what steps she has taken to ensure that the special needs of children in hospital who are suffering from an acute illness or requiring a specialised service should be protected; and what plans she has for an investigation prior to changes arising from the Tomlinson report;

(3) what plans she has to continue funding for the specialised medical services at current levels if they are relocated following the Tomlinson report.

Dr. Mawhinney: We will take account of all relevant factors and announce our proposals for London's health services in the light of the Tomlinson recommendations shortly.

State Registered Nurses

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans there are to increase the numbers of conversion courses for state enrolled nurses and what funding will be made available nationally for this; what are the current numbers of SENs for the current and previous five years; and how many conversion courses were available in each of those years.

Mr. Sackville: It is for regional health authorities, in consultation with employers, to plan for enrolled nurse conversion, now known as level two to level one conversion, as part of their responsibility for identifying the level of demand for qualified nurses and for allocating appropriate budgets.

In addition, we are committed to increasing the number of places available for second level nurses conversion as part of the Project 2000 reforms. An announcement has recently been made concerning additional funding for Project 2000 in 1993-94.

The English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting has been encouraged to develop flexible options which have made it possible to reduce both the length and cost of conversion courses.

Details of the current numbers of second level nurses for the current year are not yet available. The figures for the previous five years are given in the table. The number of conversion courses available in each of these years is not held centrally by the Department of Health.

Numbers of second level nurses England: at 30 September each year (to the nearest hundred)

Year	*Number*
1986	71,930
1987	71,050
1988	69,430
1989	59,270
1990	56,200
1991	52,100

Source: Department of Health (SM13) Annual census of NHS Non-Medical Manpower.

East Cumbria Community Health Authority

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received from the East Cumbria community health council about the chairman of the East Cumbria health authority; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: I have received one letter from the chairman of the East Cumbria community health council. I am satisfied that Mr. Carr should continue to carry out his duties as health authority chairman.

Operating Theatres

Mr. Eastham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operating theatres in the north-west of England are not operational.

Mr. Sackville: Information about operating theatres is published annually by the Department in "NHS Operating Theatres: Availability and Use: England". A copy of the edition for the year ending 31 March 1991 is available in the Library.

The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir Bruce Martin, chairman of North Western regional health authority, for further details.

Tobacco Consumption

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the fall in tobacco consumption in the United Kingdom since *(a)* 1975, *(b)* 1977, *(c)* 1989 and *(d)* 1990.

Dr. Mawhinney: Figures on tobacco products for home consumption with necessary duty paid are given below. Comparable figures are not available for earlier years.

Tobacco products released for home consumption

	Thousand million		*Million kilogrammes*	
Year	*Cigarettes*	*Cigars*	*Handrolling*	*Other*
1979	124·5	3·3	5·7	4·0
1989	96·0	2·4	4·4	2·3
1990	97·5	2·3	4·1	2·2
1991	95·6	2·1	4·2	2·1

Source: Customs and Excise.

Hospitals (Ministerial Visits)

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the dates of each ministerial visit to hospitals which has taken place since 25 January or is planned to take place.

Mr. Sackville: The following ministerial visits have been made to hospitals since 25 January:

25 January—Breakspear hospital, Abbots Langley, Herts.
29 January—East Birmingham hospital (Yardley Green health centre).
5 February—Hope hospital, Salford.
11 February—Leicester Royal infirmary.

Further visits are planned.

Wessex RHA

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the recommendations in the District Auditor's report on losses on computer contracts by Wessex regional health authority on which no action has been taken.

Mr. Sackville: The Wessex regional health authority has taken into account all the recommendations of the district auditor set out in paragraph 93 of the report in the public interest published in July 1992; and has referred to Hampshire fraud squad all material on regional information systems plan, including all the information provided in confidence by the district auditor. The only recommendation which has not been implemented is, after reference to independent legal advice, the one regarding the possibility of taking legal action against Arthur Andersen and IBM.

Staff Costs

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what was the total pay bill for *(a)* managerial staff, *(b)* administrative and clerical staff, *(c)* nursing and midwifery staff, *(d)* medical staff and *(e)* ancillary staff in each region of the NHS in each year since 1989;

(2) what is the average cost of employing each managerial staff member in the NHS;

(3) what was the total pay bill for *(a)* managerial staff, *(b)* administrative and clerical staff, *(c)* nursing and midwifery staff, *(d)* medical staff and *(e)* ancillary staff of the NHS in England in each year since 1989.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 18 January 1993]*: Analyses of the annual total salaries and wages costs for hospital and community health services (HCHS) in England are shown in the tables. The figures for 1991-92 are provisional.

The average gross pay costs of employing a whole-time general or senior manager in 1991-92 was approximately £31,000.

HCHS—Expenditure on salaries and wages
1989-90 £000 (cash)

Region	*General and Senior Managers*	*Administrative and Clerical staff*	*Nursing and Midwifery staff*	*Medical staff*	*Ancillary staff*	*All other staff*	*Total*
Northern	9,809	59,873	327,831	93,683	59,834	103,285	654,315
Yorkshire	13,035	68,955	355,540	103,543	58,598	130,941	730,611
Trent	9,183	90,140	451,088	125,776	86,490	156,349	919,025
East Anglian	8,505	36,648	193,638	54,868	35,166	71,833	400,658
North West Thames	13,778	77,690	350,313	111,860	51,511	154,204	759,357
North East Thames	19,180	101,809	431,427	138,033	85,665	203,574	979,688
South East Thames	12,959	98,880	381,547	114,443	71,195	157,768	836,792
South West Thames	9,230	72,451	304,296	85,108	49,876	153,005	673,966
Wessex	8,648	52,498	278,293	74,506	46,679	93,274	553,899
Oxford	5,402	48,151	216,270	65,414	32,244	79,021	446,501
South Western	11,573	59,830	326,431	84,687	51,142	111,667	645,330
West Midlands	17,007	110,015	503,545	145,171	92,504	177,848	1,046,090
Mersey	8,399	52,959	258,812	74,885	42,625	87,762	525,442
North Western	9,773	90,513	448,128	129,066	76,097	145,171	898,747
SHAs	2,362	18,245	66,060	36,636	10,426	50,805	184,534
England Totals	158,844	1,038,657	4,893,219	1,437,676	850,053	1,876,506	10,254,955

HCHS—Expenditure on salaries and wages
1990-91 £000 (cash)

Region	*General and Senior Managers*	*Administrative and Clerical staff*	*Nursing and Midwifery staff*	*Medical staff*	*Ancillary staff*	*All other staff*	*Total*
Northern	15,301	68,294	351,182	103,492	61,433	116,663	716,365
Yorkshire	23,502	76,647	380,633	115,336	59,614	146,208	801,940
Trent	14,969	102,750	484,754	139,725	89,687	175,125	1,007,009
East Anglian	11,232	43,159	211,961	62,127	37,190	80,766	446,435
North West Thames	19,568	94,959	373,184	120,722	50,384	163,728	822,545
North East Thames	29,011	116,802	467,107	148,854	85,613	216,304	1,063,691
South East Thames	19,933	111,716	412,477	127,686	72,806	167,778	912,397
South West Thames	16,167	83,251	328,232	93,518	51,097	161,443	733,708
Wessex	15,718	58,770	299,341	82,274	46,918	103,738	606,760
Oxford	10,123	55,314	234,391	72,106	32,804	87,900	492,638
South Western	15,670	70,223	353,054	92,927	54,289	125,014	711,177
West Midlands	23,498	123,706	543,884	160,645	97,803	204,872	1,154,408
Mersey	13,801	58,602	270,931	83,382	42,288	97,028	566,032
North Western	18,870	100,325	477,019	142,292	71,874	163,833	974,213
SHAs	4,111	22,513	70,730	40,263	11,185	53,927	202,729
England Totals	251,475	1,187,029	5,258,882	1,585,351	864,985	2,064,325	11,212,046

HCHS—Expenditure on salaries and wages
1991-92

£000 (cash)

Region	*General and Senior Managers*	*Administrative and Clerical staff*	*Nursing and Midwifery staff*	*Medical staff*	*Ancillary staff*	*All other staff*	*Total*
Northern	21,007	74,453	357,000	104,844	59,979	121,775	739,058
Yorkshire	27,129	71,166	346,178	93,480	46,275	127,696	711,923
Trent	24,547	110,586	488,210	143,992	84,816	179,762	1,031,912
East Anglian	14,833	47,768	221,075	69,079	39,527	83,692	475,974
North West Thames	25,020	103,337	366,548	117,086	46,246	149,101	807,338
North East Thames	33,824	112,462	417,118	126,804	69,135	176,245	935,588
South East Thames	27,186	115,472	414,065	125,237	65,765	155,083	902,807
South West Thames	19,595	84,719	285,757	80,749	44,964	149,365	665,149
Wessex	21,698	66,360	309,975	88,333	46,354	111,118	643,838
Oxford	15,622	62,209	255,309	79,346	32,989	96,428	541,903
South Western	14,860	52,830	243,011	62,379	36,749	90,818	500,647
West Midlands	34,907	136,390	567,466	184,334	96,743	230,994	1,250,833
Mersey	12,391	42,190	172,056	57,076	22,207	62,420	368,340
North Western	28,864	106,841	490,832	143,869	67,196	169,232	1,006,835
SHAs	5,440	26,702	84,210	43,910	12,950	56,224	229,436
NHS Trusts	54,538	168,578	747,160	294,836	129,352	344,072	1,738,536
England Totals	381,461	1,382,064	5,765,968	1,815,353	901,248	2,304,024	12,550,118

Sources:

(a) Annual accounts (1989-90 and 1990-91) and annual financial returns (1991-92) of regional and district health authorities in England and

those of the special health authorities for the London postgraduate teaching hospitals. (Annual financial returns of the first wave national health service trusts—1991-92.)

(b) Annual census of manpower as at 30 September 1991 (Department of Health).

Notes to the tables:

1. HCHS covers the total expenditure by the health authorities and the national health service trusts including hospital, community health, patient transport (i.e. ambulances), blood transfusion and other services.
2. The figures are for gross pay costs including employers' national insurance and superannuation contributions. Some columns and rows may not add up precisely because of roundings.
3. The figures for "all other staff" include dental, ambulance, maintenance and professional and technical staff together with the total costs of all the categories of non-national health service (agency, etc.) staff.
4. Salaries and wages costs incurred by family health services authorities and special health authorities providing central services to the national health service are excluded.
5. The decrease in nursing and midwifery pay as a proportion of total is partially attributable to senior nurses being regraded to senior manager pay scales.

Radiation

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to adopt the recommendations of the International Commission of Radiological Protection on the adoption of a gut uptake factor of 0·001 to be used in radiation dose calculations.

Mr. Curry: I have been asked to reply.

Gut uptake factors used by the authorising Departments (the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution) in radiation dose calculations are based on advice from the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB), which in turn takes account of the recommendations of the International Commission on Radiological Protection. Details of NRPB recommended gut uptake factors are published in "Documents of the NRPB" Volume 1, No. 2 (1990), a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to take account of the findings of the radiobiology department of St. Bartholomew's hospital medical school, London in relation to the gut uptake factor levels adopted by her Department to calculate radiation dose levels.

Mr. Curry: I have been asked to reply.

The findings referred to have been submitted to MAFF and Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution in a response to public consultation on proposed new authorisations for the discharge of radioactive wastes from British Nuclear Fuel's Sellafield plant. They will be considered by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Secretary of State for the Environment along with all other responses received in the light of advice from the National Radiological Protection Board.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Market Testing

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many staff in his Department are assigned to the market testing programme; how much the programme has cost his Department since November 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The number of full-time staff in the market testing unit is currently 15. But a further 175 staff in various other parts of the Department have contributed to the programme, either in the identification of candidates for market testing or in the actual conduct of tests and the activities associated with them. The total cost of this to date is estimated at some £875,000, including external consultancy support.

Agricultural Training Board

Mr. Conway: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he requires the Agricultural Training Board to abide by the procedures set out in general circular 262 of 28 April 1986.

Mr. Curry: Yes.

Mink

Mr. Peter Griffiths: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps his Department is taking to identify the owners of mink which have escaped from licensed fur farms into the wild.

Mr. Soames: If a mink that is believed to have come from a mink farm is captured, inquiries are made to establish its origin. Should evidence be presented that mink are escaping from a particular farm, Agricultural Development Advisory Service officers will be asked to visit the site to ensure security arrangements are satisfactory.

Mr. Peter Griffiths: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what consideration he has given, following the approval of the Mink Keeping Order 1992, to bring forward proposals requiring animals farmed under licence to be identified by a tattoo or the implanting of a microchip to aid in the identification of animals caught in the wild.

Mr. Soames: None. I have no plans to introduce such a requirement.

Set-aside Land

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was *(a)* the acreage and *(b)* the percentage of farmland in set-aside in each EC country at 1 January; and what are the estimated equivalent figures for 1 January 1994.

Mr. Curry: The latest available information on land set-aside under the five-year set-aside scheme in each EC country is set out in table I. Information on the area of land set aside this year under the new arable area payments scheme will not be available until growers have to declare the area later this year. Table II contains estimates of the area which might be set aside under the new scheme, derived from budgetary estimates of expenditure on the CAP reform package prepared by the Commission last year. There is no reason to expect that the area set aside in 1994 will be significantly different from that in 1993.

Five-year set-aside scheme

Country	*Total arable area (thousand ha)*	*Five year SA area (ha)*[3]	*Five year SA area (acres)*[3]	*Five year SA area as per cent. of national arable area*
Belgium	326	880	2,170	0·3
Denmark	1,909	12,810	31,650	0·7
France	11,859	235,490	581,670	2·0
Germany[1]	8,218	374,370	924,700	4·6
Greece	1,523	710	1,760	—
Ireland	359	3,450	8,530	1·0
Italy	5,429	721,850	1,782,960	13·3
Luxembourg	33	90	220	0·3
Netherlands	226	15,370	37,970	6·8
Portugal[2]	833	—	—	—
Spain	8,978	103,170	254,830	1·1
United Kingdom	4,396	155,120	383,150	3·5
Total	44,087	1,623,310	4,007,440	3·7

[1] Excludes former GDR.

[2] Portugal was exempt from the requirement to introduce a five year scheme.

[3] The figures for the five year scheme do not take account of withdrawals either after three years or in order to enter the new arable regime.

New arable support system

Country	*Total arable area (thousand ha)*	*Total estimated SA area (thousand ha)*	*(thousand acres)*	*As a percentage of arable area*
Belgium	326	27	67	8
Denmark	1,909	226	558	12
France	11,859	1,463	3,614	12
Germany[1]	8,218	915	2,260	11
Greece	1,523	27	67	2
Ireland	359	33	82	9
Italy	5,429	236	583	4
Luxembourg	33	1	2	3
Netherlands	226	22	54	10
Portugal	833	34	84	4
Spain	8,978	764	1,887	9
United Kingdom	4,396	634	1,566	14
Total	44,087	4,381	10,821	10

[1] Includes former German Democratic Republic.

Note: Minor discrepancies are due to rounding.

Source (both tables): Commission statistics.

Chlorpropham

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what publicly funded toxology tests on CIPC have been carried out in the United Kingdom; and what notification he has had of toxology tests on CIPC carried out in the United Kingdom by companies.

Mr. Soames: No publicly funded toxicology tests on CIPC, also known as chlorpropham, have been carried out in the United Kingdom. It is the rule that an applicant for approval of a pesticide product is responsible for carrying out the necessary toxicology tests.

Reports of toxicity tests performed in the United Kingdom on formulations containing CIPC have been submitted as part of a number of approvals for products containing CIPC. But the majority of studies submitted on the toxicology of CIPC are based on work performed in Europe, north America and Japan.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of whether the chemical CIPC is suitable for use in crisp manufacturing.

Mr. Soames: There is evidence that CIPC, also known as chlorpropham, is effective as a means of preventing sprouting of potatoes in store, and so helping to ensure a year-round supply of potatoes suitable for crisp manufacture. The EC pesticide review programme will in due course consider all aspects of the approval of CIPC, including its effectiveness and its toxicology.

Following recommendations from the independent Advisory Committee on Pesticides, an average daily intake figure of 0·1 mg per kilogram body weight per day for CIPC has provisionally been set for consumer risk assessment purposes. Residues of CIPC found in total diet studies indicate that CIPC presents no risk to health.

Agriculture Council

Mr. Hague: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Agriculture Council held on 9 and 10 February.

Mr. Gummer: I represented the United Kingdom at the meeting of the Agriculture Council which started on 9 February and, after a suspension, finished in the early hours of Saturday 13 February.

The most difficult item was concerned with bananas, where the Council had before it a text which put into legal form the political agreement on a Community regime agreed at the December Council. That agreement fully protected United Kingdom interests and our traditional suppliers in the Caribbean and was therefore highly satisfactory for Her Majesty's Government.

Unfortunately, two delegations refused to confirm their earlier positive votes and opposed the adoption of the legal text. They sustained this position through many difficult hours of negotiation. Eventually matters were resolved, and the text adopted, because two other delegations, which had previously opposed the agreement, including the Danish delegation now in the chair, voted in favour so that the necessary qualified majority could be found. By this means the Danish presidency in particular ensured the maintenance of that integrity of Council decisions without which the Community could not function effectively. It is most unfortunate that two delegations changed their votes in this way. Such an attitude can only make future negotiations in the Council more difficult. However, on the substance, as indicated above, the regulation is a very satisfactory one for the United Kingdom.

The Council also had a first discussion of the 1993 farm price proposals. I regretted that these do not include reforms of those sectors such as sugar, wine, olive oil and fruit and vegetables where this is still outstanding.

In conclusion with the Commission in the margins of the Council, I was able to confirm that the supplementary ewe premium for flocks in our less favoured areas should be paid at the green rate applicable on 3 January. This means that this year United Kingdom producers will receive some £10·4 million more than previously expected.

This was not an easy Council, but the outcome was a good one for the United Kingdom.

Sheep Dips

Ms. Corston: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what reports or information his Department has received concerning links between exposure to organo-phosphate sheep dips and chronic illness.

Mr. Soames: The veterinary medicines directorate operates a suspected adverse reaction reporting scheme for all veterinary medicines, including sheep dips. All reports are fully investigated. The results of those involving humans are assessed by an appraisal panel of Government doctors and scientists who evaluate potential links between human health and exposure to organophosphate sheep dips, before consideration by the Veterinary Products Committee, an independent scientific advisory committee.

In addition, a project to investigate possible chronic effects on farmers of occupational exposure to organophosphate dips is currently being carried out by the institute of occupational health at Birmingham university.

Ms. Corston: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what advice is currently given by his Department to people in the use of organo-phosphate sheep dip.

Mr. Soames: The manufacturers of all licensed organophosphate sheep dips are required, as a condition of approval, to provide advice to users via product labels and product literature on the safe use of these products, including the need for protective clothing. Further advice is contained in the free leaflet "The Safe Handling and Disposal of Sheep Dips" published by the veterinary medicines directorate which has been distributed to all sheep farmers in England and Wales.

It is important that this advice is carefully followed by those using these products.

Young Farmers

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of people employed in agriculture are under 30 years of age; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The results of the 1990 EC structure survey show that in England about 20 per cent. of people employed in agriculture are under 30 years of age. This includes farmers, working spouses and regularly employed workers. The survey is based on a sample covering approximately one quarter of all main holdings in England and is therefore subject to sampling error.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans there are to increase the number of young people entering farming; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The numbers of those becoming working farmers is entirely a matter for individual choice in response to personal circumstances and market forces.

Drainage Authorities

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what guidance is given to drainage authorities when they give information on the value for money and economic efficiency of the maintenance works that they carry out to interested parties;

(2) what rules drainage authorities follow upon the disclosures to interested parties of the investment appraisal submitted to his Department when seeking grant-aid; and if he will extend the depth and quality of information made available to interested parties.

Mr. Curry: The Ministry encourages authorities to make aggregated results of appraisals of grant-aided flood defence works available to interested parties on request. Such works can include not only new construction and improvements, but also major repairs. Guidance on the form in which the information should be presented was set out in a Ministry paper on investment appraisal issued to drainage authorities in 1985, a copy of which was placed in the Library of the House at the time. The Ministry plans to publish revised and updated project appraisal guidelines next month. Separately, consideration is being given to whether guidance on the provision of results of appraisals to interested parties should be revised.

There is no separate Ministry guidance on the economic appraisal by authorities of their own maintenance work.

Sheep Scab

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list the number of sheep affected by sheep scab, by county and divided into less favoured areas and non less favoured areas in each month from October 1991 to the last month for which figures are available;

(2) if he will list the number of outbreaks of sheep scab, by county, by flock and divided into less favoured areas and non less favoured areas in each month from October 1991 to the last month for which figures are available.

Mr. Soames: The table below lists the number of recorded outbreaks on a flock basis by county for the months October 1991 to May 1992, which is the last month for which figures are available. The remaining information is either unavailable or could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

	October	*November*	*December (1991)*	*January (1992)*	*February*	*March*	*April*	*May*
England:								
Avon	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Buckinghamshire	1	1	—	—	1	—	—	—
Cheshire	—	—	—	1	—	—	1	—
Cornwall	1	—	1	1	2	—	1	2
Cumbria	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Derbyshire	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Devon	1	—	1	2	3	1	2	5
Dorset	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	1
Hereford and Worcester	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Lancashire	4	6	—	1	2	3	1	—
Leicestershire	1	—	2	—	4	—	—	—
Lincolnshire	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	1
Manchester MC	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
North Yorkshire	—	—	—	1	3	—	1	—
Northumberland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Nottinghamshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Shropshire	—	—	—	—	1	—	1	1
Somerset	—	—	—	—	1	1	1	2
Staffordshire	—	—	1	1	1	—	1	—
Suffolk	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Warwickshire	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—
West Yorkshire MC	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Wiltshire	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	1
Wales:								
Clwyd	—	—	—	1	—	—	1	—
Dyfed	—	—	1	2	2	2	—	—
Gwynedd	—	—	1	3	—	1	—	—
Powys	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
Scotland:								
Borders	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Central	—	—	—	5	—	—	—	—
Dumfries and Galoway	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
Grampian	—	—	—	3	2	—	—	—
Lothian	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	1
Strathclyde	—	—	—	2	1	—	—	—
Tayside	—	—	2	1	—	—	—	—
Total	9	9	12	27	29	8	12	17

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if all vehicles used by teams trapping badgers under the bovine tuberculosis control policy carry his Ministry's markings; and whether personnel involved carry identification identifying themselves and giving them authority for their work at all times.

Mr. Soames: Ministry vehicles used in bovine TB control operations do not carry Ministry markings. All Ministry personnel are issued with identification cards bearing their photograph and written authority to carry out their official duties.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the culling of badgers under the bovine tuberculosis control policy has been contracted out.

Mr. Soames: No.

Training Board (Wales)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received regarding the future of the Agricultural Training Board in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: In response to the consultation document on the future status and operation of the Agricultural Training Board issued on 25 September 1992, representations were received from 80 organisations and individuals in Wales. Ministers expect to be in a position to make a statement on the future of the board later this month.

Fishing Vessels

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many fishing vessels were recorded in International Council for the Exploration of the Seas areas *(a)* vii(a), *(b)* vii(f) and *(c)* vii(g) in each month during each year since 1986.

Mr. Curry *[holding answer 11 February 1993]*: The information requested is set out for numbers of individual vessels recorded during routine fishery surveillance within British fishery limits in the ICES areas stated. Surveillance is not continuous, so the figures do not represent total numbers of boats fishing the areas in question. Over the period, surveillance effort in ICES area VII has increased. This, together with an improvement in the quality of surveillance data, contributes to the increased numbers of vessels reported in more recent years.

	1986		
	VIIa	*VIIf*	*VIIg*
January	60	53	54
February	121	78	22
March	175	71	65
April	180	109	61
May	250	95	90
June	263	81	100
July	306	104	94
August	154	89	52
September	212	107	103
October	116	58	78
November	123	57	58
December	45	38	48

	1987		
	VIIa	*VIIf*	*VIIg*
January	48	16	1
February	234	35	34
March	215	93	54
April	270	127	66
May	318	104	90
June	311	85	40
July	327	116	121
August	198	79	121
September	269	78	117
October	205	89	130
November	152	46	87
December	173	54	72

	1988		
	VIIa	*VIIf*	*VIIg*
January	173	61	66
February	186	125	102
March	282	176	114
April	456	189	104
May	423	144	126
June	342	95	172
July	234	78	83
August	264	153	151
September	242	121	126
October	165	93	131
November	247	95	137
December	159	61	61

	1989		
	VIIa	*VIIf*	*VIIg*
January	164	107	107
February	188	93	87
March	134	192	120
April	416	139	164
May	268	173	238
June	275	99	159
July	220	154	181
August	243	150	144
September	270	84	88
October	212	82	126
November	242	71	107
December	113	23	90

	1990		
	VIIa	*VIIf*	*VIIg*
January	100	89	75
February	34	101	77
March	264	291	206
April	220	130	207
May	326	196	209
June	173	138	196
July	287	119	184
August	268	109	214
September	337	123	202
October	172	100	147
November	141	116	150
December	42	77	142

	1991		
	VIIa	*VIIf*	*VIIg*
January	138	122	78
February	181	177	94
March	268	166	63
April	279	133	140
May	448	94	187
June	131	99	128
July	104	127	136
August	341	101	179
September	181	87	170
October	113	65	96
November	233	49	107
December	257	91	142

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disability Living Allowance

9. **Mr. Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement about the administration of claims for disability living allowance.

Mr. Scott: Introducing disability living allowance at a stroke was always going to be a difficult task. But since April 1992, the Benefits Agency has received over 1·25 million claims to disability living allowance and attendance allowance. Almost 1·2 million of these have been cleared and over 800,000 awards of benefit have been made.

17. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to introduce any initiatives to speed the delivery of the disability living allowance to recipients.

Mr. Scott: The Benefits Agency, which is responsible for the administration of disability living allowance, is reviewing the procedures for processing claims, setting up additional processing centres and increasing the training of staff.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to complete the review of the disability living allowance care component for Mr. Trevor Fowler, applied for on 22 October 1992.

Mr. Scott: The administration of disability living allowance is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Bob Cryer, dated 12 February 1993.

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to the points raised in your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security, about Mr. Trevor Fowler's application for review of the Disability Living Allowance (DLA) care component made on 22 October 1992.

I am pleased to tell you that the outstanding action was completed on Mr. Fowler's case on 10 February 1993 and the Disability Living Allowance Unit (DLAU) have already written to you separately and in greater detail about this.

The delay has resulted from the heavy volumes of work following the successful launch of the new benefit. Latterly delays were due to the backlog of reviews which had been building up. You will be aware from my letter of 19 October 1992 to all MPs of the problems the Benefits Agency has faced since the launch of DLA and the positive steps I have taken to improve the situation. Further steps taken to recruit additional, and redeploy existing, staff to clear the backlog of reviews.

I am sorry for the delay in dealing with Mr. Fowler's case. Mr. Fowler has clearly not received the standard of service to which he is entitled from the Agency. Such matters are not taken lightly when they fail to come up to the standard of service the Benefits Agency is trying to give all its customers and I offer my sincere apologies to Mr. Fowler for any distress and inconvenience caused by the delays.

I hope that you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the Official Report. A copy will also be placed in the Library.

European Court of Justice

13. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many recent cases in the European Court of Justice have been won by his Department.

Mr. Burt: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) on 23 November 1992, at column *532*.

Independent Living Fund

14. **Mr. Mandelson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the cost of extending the replacement fund for the independent living fund to cover people over retirement age.

Mr. Scott: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) on 11 December 1992, at column *153*.

Mortgage Interest

15. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what consideration he has given to a scheme to enable unemployed households in receipt of income support covering mortgage interest payments to take up job opportunities that may be available to them.

Mr. Burt: We have considered carefully the proposals which have been made to pay mortgage interest for those in work. We have no plans for such a scheme.

Homelessness

16. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what studies his Department has made of the impact of the present benefit arrangements for 16 and 17-year-olds on homelessness among that age group.

Mr. Burt: The benefit arrangements for 16 and 17-year-olds are, like those of other recipients, kept under review. The Department of Employment guarantees a youth training place to all 16 and 17-year-olds who want one. Income support is not generally payable as youth training allowances are usually more generous. Income support is available to others who are vulnerable, either because they fulfil particular criteria, or by way of the severe hardship provision.

Pension Age

18. **Mr. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what progress has been made on equalising the pension age, and introducing flexible retirement for men and women.

Miss Widdecombe: The Government are committed to the equalisation of state pension age. No decisions have been taken as to what option should be adopted but we shall be announcing our proposals for equalisation in due course following full consideration of the views both the public and interested organisations have expressed.

Housing Benefit (Lodgers)

19. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to change housing benefit entitlement to include lodgers who are close relatives.

Mr. Burt: Housing benefit is payable only in respect of a commercial rent liability. Most people living with close relatives do not have a rent liability, but instead make contributions to the household's costs. It has never been the Government's intention that housing benefit should be payable for such contributions.

Pensions

20. **Mr. Legg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of his Department's policies to encourage personal pensions.

Miss Widdecombe: The success of the Government's policy in encouraging personal pensions is amply demonstrated by the fact that 5 million people are currently personal pension holders.

22. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures his Department is planning to encourage personal choice in pensions.

Miss Widdecombe: The Government are committed to encouraging choice and flexibility in pension provision. We have introduced measures to ensure that individuals are able to obtain the information they need to make informed choices, and we are considering whether more can be done in this area. It is clear that individuals wish to take advantage of the choices available to make provision for their own retirement—5 million people have used personal pensions to contract out of the state earnings-related pension scheme since we introduced the option in 1988.

Care Allowances

21. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many women are in receipt of mobility care allowance; and what was the comparable figure in 1978-79.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is not available.

23. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total number of people in receipt of the carer premium as a percentage of those who are eligible.

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to the information given in my reply to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) on 25 January 1993, at columns *585-86*.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, how much his Department spends on invalid care allowance and the carer premium; and what percentage of the total social security budget this figure makes up.

Mr. Scott: Pursuant to my reply of 25 January at column *583*, the percentage of the total social security budget spent on invalid care allowance and the carer premium in 1991-92 was 0·4 per cent.

Means Testing and Private Pensions

24. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received about proposals to means test universal benefits and about his policies towards private pensions provision; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: From time to time we receive representations relating to various aspects of the Government's benefits and pensions policies. These cover a wide range of topics and include suggestions for changes in the current schemes.

Pensioners

25. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received about the percentage of pensioners retiring *(a)* in 1979 and *(b)* in the latest year for which figures are available, who had incomes from savings; and what was the real average level of savings on each of those two dates.

Miss Widdecombe: My ministerial colleagues and I receive representations from many people about pensioner issues. I am able to inform them that 68 per cent. of pensioners who had recently retired in 1979 had income from savings, rising to 78 per cent. by 1988. The average income from savings of all recently retired pensioners, at 1988 prices, was £12 per week in 1979 and £26·30 in 1988. Reliable information on the level of savings is not available in the form requested.

Source: Family Expenditure Survey.

Pensions (Married Women)

26. **Mr. Brandreth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which EC countries provide a separate pension to married women who have never made their own contributions towards a pension.

Miss Widdecombe: The United Kingdom is the only country in the Community to pay a separate pension to a pensioner's wife in her own right on the strength of her husband's contributions. However, Denmark and the Netherlands also pay a pension to a wife on the basis of residence.

Disability

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures his Department has taken to maintain support for disabled people.

Mr. Scott: Since 1979 we have introduced a wide range of improvements, aimed at providing a wide ranging and coherent system of disability benefits. These improvements culminated in the introduction of disability living allowance and disability working allowance in April last year.

By the end of 1992-93, we expect expenditure on benefit for long-term sick and disabled people to have risen by more than 170 per cent. in real terms to £13·7 billion.

Income Support

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are currently estimated to be receiving income support; what is the total cost to the Exchequer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: It is estimated that for 1992-93 there are 5·3 million claims for income support at a total benefit cost of £14·5 billion. This level of expenditure demonstrates our commitment to protect those on a low income.

Source: Social Security—Departmental Report—The Government's Expenditure Plans 1993-94 to 1995-96 (Cm 2213).

Housing Benefit, Lambeth

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much refund of housing benefit was paid to Lambeth council in each of the 12 months of 1992.

Mr. Burt: Monthly payments on account of housing benefit subsidy made to Lambeth council in 1992 are shown in the table.

Month (1992)	*Rent Allowances*[1] £	*Rent Rebates (Non-HRA)*[1] £	*Rent Rebates (HRA)*[2] £	*Total* £
January	1,450,750	268,599	3,688,722	5,408,071
February	2,006,221	268,599	3,688,723	5,963,543
March	2,006,221	268,599	no payment	2,274,820
April	2,516,687	330,750	no payment	2,847,437
May	2,516,687	330,750	4,277,595	7,125,032
June	2,516,687	−786,190[3]	4,277,595	6,008,092

Month (1992)	*Rent Allowances*[1] £	*Rent Rebates (Non-HRA)*[1] £	*Rent Rebates (HRA)*[2] £	*Total* £
July	2,516,687	−1,177,119[3]	4,277,595	5,617,163
August	2,516,687	163,209	4,277,595	6,957,491
September	2,516,687	330,750	4,277,595	7,125,032
October	2,516,687	210,714	4,730,835	7,458,236
November	2,516,687	313,602	3,311,740	6,142,029
December	2,516,687	313,602	4,353,135	7,183,424
Total	28,113,375	835,865	41,161,130	70,110,370

Notes:

[1] paid by the Department of Social Security

[2] paid by the Department of the Environment

[3] negative amounts, due to recovery from 1991-92

In addition, the Department paid £110,361 to Lambeth council in 1992 in respect of the direct administration subsidy for housing benefit. The monthly profile of this subsidy was as follows:

	£
January	36,787
February	36,787
March	36,787
April	79,179
May	79,179
June	79,179
July	79,179
August	79,179
September	79,179
October	79,179
November	79,179
December	79,179
Total	110,361

The above table shows administration subsidy payments on account made by DSS. Administration subsidy for housing benefit is paid in two parts: 50 per cent. direct grant from DSS and 50 per cent. through the revenue support grant.

Mobility Allowance

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to respond to the application by Mr. Stanley Vauvert for mobility allowance, sent on 13 July 1992.

Mr. Scott: The administration of disability living allowance is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Bob Cryer, dated 12 February 1993.

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to the points raised in your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security, about Mr. Stanley Vauvert's application for review made on 13 July 1992 of the decision to disallow his Mobility Allowance claim.

I am pleased to tell you that a decision was made on Mr. Vauvert's application on the 10 February 1993 and the Disability Living Allowance Unit have already replied to you separately and in greater detail about this.

I am concerned about the delay in the handling of Mr. Vauvert's review application. You will be aware from my letter of 19 October 1992 to all MPs of the problems the Benefits Agency (BA) has faced since the launch of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and the positive steps I have taken to improve the situation. Since then further steps have been taken to recruit additional, of and redeploy existing staff to clear the backlog of reviews by, amongst other things, the setting up of four additional processing units.

Mr. Vauvert has clearly not received the standard of service which he has every right to expect from the Agency and I offer my sincere apologies to him for any distress and inconvenience caused by the delays.

I hope that you find this reply helpful and I thank you for the opportunity to explain this matter. A copy will appear in the Official Report and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

ENVIRONMENT

Energy Policy

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to delay the MPG 3 review until after the House has debated the recommendations in the first report from the Trade and Industry Select Committee 1992-93 (HC 237) on British energy policy and the market for coal, in so far as they relate to open cast coal mining.

Mr. Baldry: My Department intends to issue draft revised guidance for public consultation as soon as possible following the outcome of the coal review. We shall give careful consideration to the recommendations of the Trade and Industry Select Committee in preparing the draft guidelines and before the guidelines are finalised we will take into account the outcome of debates and all other representations we receive during the public consultation period.

Market Testing

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all the market tests that have taken place in his Department since November 1991; whether the result was the maintenance of in-house provision or whether the service was contracted out; what was the name of the successful contractor where appropriate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: None of the projects in my Department's market testing programme which involves exposing in-house functions to competition has yet reached the stage where a contract or service level agreement has been awarded.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many staff in his Department are assigned to the market testing programme; how much the programme has cost his Department since November 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: There are six staff in my Department directly assigned to the market testing programme.

From November 1991 to end December 1992, the total cost of the programme amounted to £650,480.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the compliance of the current application by British Nuclear Fuels for a revision of its authorisation to discharge radioactive waste from its Sellafield site with clauses on the justification of the production of radioactive waste within the 1986 White Paper on radioactive waste.

Mr. Maclean: This is a matter for the chief inspector of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who have recently completed the statutory public consultation exercise into BNFL's applications. Following consideration of the numerous responses received by HMIP, they will be submitting their consultation response document to the Secretary of State and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for consideration.

Noise Monitoring

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps have been taken by his Department towards developing a co-ordinated noise level monitoring database for the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maclean: None. However, we have recently completed the national noise incidence study which involved noise measurements being made outside 1,000 homes in England and Wales during 1990 and has provided a benchmark on how noisy the country is. The results of the study will be published later this year.

Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant, Sellafield

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to receive the report from Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution on the consultation exercise conducted by the inspectorate on British Nuclear Fuels' application for discharge authorisations for the thermal oxide reprocessing plant and associated plants.

Mr. Maclean: HMIP and Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food currently expect to submit their report on the consultation exercise by the beginning of April 1993.

Landfill Gas Flares

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has about air pollution from landfill gas flares; what techniques are available to reduce emissions; and whether he will make gas flares subject to local authority air pollution control.

Mr. Maclean: Flaring of landfill gas serves to destroy the flammable components of the inlet landfill gas and reduce the trace components which are responsible for odour problems. Carbon dioxide would constitute the bulk component of flared gas since methane is a flammable gas. However, in order to have a better understanding of emissions from flare systems, my Department has commissioned the Environmental Safety centre at Harwell laboratory to carry out research on the fate of landfill gas components when flared, to compare the potential environmental impact of both source and flared landfill gas, and provide technical recommendations on the key design factors in flare systems to ensure complete combustion. The final report is expected this year.

Pollution control legislation applies through the provisions of the Control of Pollution Act 1974 under which a landfill site requires to be licensed before operations can commence. The most recent advice on appropriate requirements for flare stacks is contained in chapter 8 of the Department's "Waste Management Paper No. 27". Since emissions are controlled through the waste disposal licence, it is not necessary for flares to be additionally controlled under the air pollution legislation.

EC Environmental Action Programme

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what resource commitment was agreed by the Council of Ministers in support of the European Commission's fifth environmental action programme.

Mr. Maclean: The Council has agreed a commitment of 13 million ecu (£10·4 million) to support environmental action including the fifth action programme.

Methane Emissions

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion, in carbon dioxide equivalent, of the United Kingdom's contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions arises from methane emissions; and whether he plans to introduce a strategy to reduce emissions of methane gas.

Mr. Maclean: The most recent edition of the "Digest of Environmental Protection and Water Statistics" estimates United Kingdom methane emissions in 1990 at 4·371 million tonnes. The direct global warming effect of these emissions is estimated at around 7 per cent. of that of United Kingdom emissions of carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide. Indirect effects add to methane's relative contribution; the intergovernmental panel on climate change estimates that these could be of similar magnitude to the direct effect. The estimate of United Kingdom methane emissions is currently under review.

The UN framework convention on climate change requires developed country parties to draw up a programme of measures aimed at returning emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, including methane, to their 1990 levels by 2000. We are aiming to produce the United Kingdom's first national programme under the convention by the end of this year.

Emissions

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how he expects the introduction of new vehicle emission standards to influence emissions of oxides of nitrogen from road vehicles over the next 30 years; and what projections he has commissioned to demonstrate the possible effects.

Mr. Maclean: The introduction of three-way catalytic converters, now required on all new petrol-engined cars, should lead to a significant decrease in NOx emissions over the next 10 years.

Projections by Warren Spring laboratory to 2010 were published in September 1992 in the report "Pollution in the Atmosphere: Future Emissions from the UK". I am arranging for a copy to be placed in the Library of the House. They suggest a fall in NOx emissions from road transport of between 30 per cent. and 36 per cent. by 2010 compared with 1991.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing the total estimated emissions of oxides of nitrogen in the United Kingdom in each year since 1980.

Mr. Maclean: Estimated emissions of oxides of nitrogen (NO_x) in the United Kingdom since 1980, as reported in my Department's 1991 Digest of Environmental Protection and Water Statistics, and are as follows:

	NO_x Emission (thousands tonnes)
1980	2,312
1981	2,242
1982	2,221
1983	2,234
1984	2,216
1985	2,327
1986	2,416
1987	2,544
1988	2,626
1989	2,717
1990	2,729

Eco-labelling

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those EC member states that have indicated they will continue with national eco-labelling.

Mr. Maclean: I understand that France, Germany and the Netherlands are currently continuing with national eco-labelling schemes.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list those environmental organisations that have been involved in eco-labelling consultation;

(2) what percentage of the market will be required for qualification in each of the markets under consideration by the United Kingdom Eco-Labelling Board; and if he will list them;

(3) if he will include in the environmental impact statement for eco-labelling of product contents the effect of sourcing of ingredients on third world cultures and ecosystems as well as the presence of volatile organic compounds;

(4) what studies he has made of the different energy mixes used in manufacturing throughout the European Community when developing eco-label criteria for the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maclean: The United Kingdom Eco-Labelling Board has been established to administer and promote the European Community eco-labelling scheme nationally and has responsibility for dealing with the operational aspects of the scheme. I have therefore asked the board to reply to my hon. Friend direct.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps is taking to encourage the European Commission to issue clear guidelines on eco-labelling.

Mr. Maclean: We have consistently pressed the European Commission to implement the scheme as quickly as possible and to issue whatever guidance may be required.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what studies he has made of the effectiveness of eco-labelling as opposed to fiscal measures on *(a)* energy use sources, *(b)* waste disposal, *(c)* incentives for energy efficiency, *(d)* tax breaks for recycling or re-use or *(e)* tax breaks for clean of non-renewable technology.

Mr. Maclean: The eco-labelling scheme aims to create a market advantage for manufactures and retailers who make and stock greener products. The scheme is a European Community commitment and it is complementary to any fiscal measures which might be taken in particular sectors.

Press Releases

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in order all his Department's press releases since 1 September 1992.

Mr Howard: Monthly summaries of this Department's press releases for the period 1 September 1992 to 31 January 1993 have been placed in the Library.

Housing

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent talks he has had with financial institutions about their potential involvement in the private rented sector in housing.

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend, the Minister for Housing and Planning, has had a series of meetings with financial institutions to discuss a wide range of issues, including the potential for their involvement in the private rented housing sector to a greater degree than at present. We envisage that these will continue.

Aggregates

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will now publish in full his Department's revised approach to sand and gravel extraction in England and Wales.

Sir George Young: The Department has published revised planning guidelines for aggregates provision in England and Wales for public consultation. The consultation period ends on 31 March and the guidelines will be published once the public response has been assessed.

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research has been carried out by his Department into the use of recycled material as an alternative to aggregate extraction; what other examination his Department has made of ways of reducing the demand for aggregates in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: My Department has commissioned a number of studies into ways of achieving more efficient use of aggregates, including research into the occurrence and utilisation of mineral and construction wastes. No research has been undertaken into reducing directly the demand for aggregates, which is a reflection of the demands made by society on the construction industry.

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what investigation he plans to carry out into the comparative environmental problems and benefits between developing coastal superquarries and inland sources of aggregates; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: Regional commentaries produced by the regional aggregates working parties indicate that traditional sources of primary aggregates will not be able to meet all anticipated demand over the next 20 years without some unacceptable environmental implications. My Department is therefore considering a range of options for meeting future demand. Any proposals for the development of coastal superquarries will be assessed on their merits and full regard will be had to their possible environmental impact.

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the figures for the consumption of the different types of aggregates including crushed rock, sand and gravel, marine dredged sand and gravel, secondary aggregates and recycled materials, as used by different industries in each year since 1985; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The proportions of the total consumption of primary aggregates (sand and gravel and crushed rock) accounted for by particular sectors of the construction industry in England and Wales in 1990 have been estimated by ECOTEC Research and Consulting Ltd. as:

	Per cent.
Housing	20
Roads (including Bridges)	24
Private Industrial	11
Private Commercial	12
Other Public	13
Road Repair and Maintenance	8
Housing Repair and Maintenance	8
Other	3

No detailed statistics are available on the use of different types of aggregates by these separate sectors.

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what expertise exists in the national co-ordinating group and each of the regional aggregates working parties to assess the potential for synthetic and waste materials as alternatives to aggregates; what consultations each of these bodies has with environmental and other interests in carrying out their duties; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: These groups possess no specific expertise on secondary and waste materials for aggregates use. In addition to these groups, however, the Department also receives advice from consultants and the appropriate trade associations. Consultations have also taken place with environmental and other interests on the regional commentaries produced by the regional aggregates working parties and my Department has taken the responses into consideration in the revised guidelines for aggregates provision which have been published for consultation.

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much *(a)* crushed rock, *(b)* sand and gravel, *(c)* marine dredged sand and gravel, *(d)* secondary aggregates and *(e)* recycled materials have been (i) imported into the United Kingdom and (ii) exported from the United Kingdom for 1985 until the latest available date; if he will list the countries involved; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: Very little crushed rock, land-won sand and gravel or secondary and recycled aggregates have been imported or exported to or from the United Kingdom since 1985. Total exports and imports of these aggregates are estimated to account for les than 1 per cent. of total United Kingdom aggregates production and consumption.

Marine sand and gravel dredged in United Kingdom waters is landed in some other European countries, principally Holland, Belgium and France. Foreign landings of marine dredged sand and gravel since 1985 are:

	Tonnes
1985	2,495,000
1986	2,317,000
1987	2,564,000
1988	2,379,000
1989	2,590,000
1990	3,818,000
1991	4,614,000

Source: Crown Estate.

FC Initiatives

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further allocations of funding are available to the United Kingdom from the European social fund and the European regional development fund for initiatives which are the responsibility of his Department, as a result of the fall in the exchange rate.

Mr. Robin Squire: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him today by my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry.

Derelict Land

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what resources are being made available for derelict land reclamation under the derelict land grant programme in 1993-94; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The resources available in 1993-94 for derelict land reclamation under the derelict land grant programme will be £103·5 million.

The reclamation of derelict and often seriously contaminated land plays a vital role in regenerating run down urban areas and improving the environment. In the last five years DLG has funded the reclamation of more than 6,000 hectares (14,820 acres) of derelict land, and more than, 1,500 hectares of land are now reclaimed annually.

DLG is available throughout England, but in practice the largest allocations go to the north west and Yorkshire and Humberside regions where some of the most extensive dereliction is found; and to the west midlands where funding is needed for continued investigative and remedial work on old limestone workings in the black country.

A large proportion of the DLG programme will be devoted to 25 rolling programmes of reclamation, which will receive £45 million in 1993-94.

Reclamation in areas subject to colliery closures is an important priority. DLG is being used in these areas mainly to reclaim collieries closed before March 1990: British Coal has agreed to take financial responsibility for the reclamation of most collieries closing since then. In 1993-94, £19 million of DLG will be devoted to treating dereliction arising from coal mining.

The Government's continued high level of commitment to the clearance of dereliction will ensure that momentum is not lost in the handover to the urban regeneration agency. The agency will have a wide range of powers to deal with derelict, vacant and underused land either itself or in cooperation with local authorities and the private and voluntary sectors.

Earth Summit

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether Population Concern, the International Planned Parenthood Federation and Marie Stopes International have been invited to take part in the discussions on the practical implementation of the Earth Summit agreements at the International Conference for Non-Governmental Organisations in Manchester in September.

Mr. Maclean: We have consulted on proposals to hold an international conference in September on the theme of partnerships for change. We are considering responses to our consultation note. When we issue invitations to attend, we shall bear in mind the interest of people engaged in the population issues.

Urban Waste Water

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the sites proposed to him for classification as sensitive areas under the EC directive on urban waste water treatment, including the proposing body, by reason of *(a)* eutrophication and *(b)* inland water with a nitrate concentration greater than 50 mg/l.

Mr. Maclean: The urban waste water treatment directive requires member states to identify sensitive areas, in accordance with the criteria set out in the directive, by 31 December this year. The National Rivers Authority is at present compiling final lists of "candidate" sensitive areas which it will submit to the Department for consideration. Similar exercises are being carried out in the remainder of the United Kingdom. An announcement about the location of the areas to be formally identified as sensitive will be made before the deadline imposed in the directive.

Protection Regulations

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the regulations protecting the environment which he proposes to take steps to rescind.

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. Friend is currently reviewing all regulations protecting the environment to ensure that they are necessary, and that they are meeting their objectives in the most efficient way possible with the minimum burden on industry.

Civil Servants (Bicycles)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the current conditions on which civil servants in his Department are granted salary advances to enable the purchase of bicycles for home-to-office travel; if he will make a statement on the current conditions in each agency of his Department; what plans he has to change the conditions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 18 January 1993]:* Neither my Department not its agencies currently have a scheme for granting salary advances for the purchase of bicycles. However, my Department is currently reviewing the exisitng facilities for staff who cycle to work.

Abandoned Mines (Water Pollution)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to complete his consideration of the framework of responsibility for water pollution from abandoned mines; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 10 February 1993]:* We aim to reach conclusions later this year.

Oil Spillages

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he will take to protect sites of special scientific interest and other environmentally important areas from the effects of oil spillages.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 12 February 1993]:* In advance of any recommendations arising from the Marine Accident Investigation Branch investigation into the Shetland tanker incident or from the inquiry conducted by Lord Donaldson on the measures necessary to protect the United Kingdom coastline from pollution from merchant shipping, I draw the hon. Member's attention to the agreement reached by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport with tanker operators to avoid a number of sensitive areas.

Coal-fired Power Stations

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment in what circumstances his Department is required to grant permission before sulphur can be added to coal used in coal-fired power stations.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 9 February 1993]:* There is no record of sulphur being added to coal used in power stations. However, in appropriate circumstances, traces of sulphur trioxide may be added to the flue gases to provide a very great improvement in the removal of particulate matter in an electrostatic precipitator. The sulphur trioxide has little environmental significance in the quantities used. Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution would require notification before the use of sulphur trioxide began at a power station.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 16 February 1993

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

South Georgia

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to collect payment from ex-Soviet fishing operations off South Georgia.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands are actively pursuing, with some success, debts owed by vessel owners for the transhipment of their catches off South Georgia. The majority of outstanding debts are owed by vessels of the former Soviet Union.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many landings have occurred in prohibited areas by tourists in South Georgia over the last two years.

Mr. Garel-Jones: There was one unsubstantiated report during 1992 that a cruise vessel had landed passengers in a prohibited area.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the sources of income for South Georgia for the last three years.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The main sources of income over the last three years have been transhipment fees paid by fishing vessels, port and harbour dues, investment income, money from the sale of stamps and income from tourist charges.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what representations he has had about the need for a tourism management plan for South Georgia;

(2) if he will list the detailed requirements for a South Georgia management plan;

(3) when he expects to publish a management plan for South Georgia.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We are studying the case for commissioning a detailed management plan for South Georgia and have received representations about the introduction of such a plan from various interested individuals and groups. Any plan would need to cover a range of issues, including the impact of tourism on the environment of South Georgia. In the light of advice from our environmental advisers we shall examine whether existing legislation should be updated and any further measures which may be necessary.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to introduce a charge for tourist visits to South Georgia.

Mr. Garel-Jones: During 1992, a charge of US$50 per head was introduced for all tourists visiting South Georgia.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to apply for a world heritage listing for South Georgia; and if he will list the advantages and disadvantages of obtaining a world heritage listing for South Georgia.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The World Conservation Union is considering which sub-antarctic islands meet the criteria for world heritage listing. We will examine the case for the listing of South Georgia in the light of their recommendations.

Antarctica

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the reasons why the United Kingdom has delayed the extension of maritime zones in Antarctica.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The sea areas around the British Antarctic Territory are included within the scope of Antarctic treaty instruments to which the United Kingdom is a party. These instruments provide a legal regime for sustainable and non-sustainable resources. We see no advantage in extending maritime zones.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his officials have made of the Macquarie island plan.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We have studied the Macquarie island nature reserve management plan of 1991 prepared by the Tasmanian Government's department of Parks, Wildlife and Heritage. This provides a prescriptive framework which takes account of the conservation and management needs of that island.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to extend the maritime zones of the South Sandwich islands, the South Orkney islands, South Georgia, Gough islands and Shag rocks.

Mr. Garel-Jones: A fisheries zone of 200 nautical miles has already been created around Gough island as part of the Tristan da Cunha island group. The territorial sea around South Georgia, which includes Shag rocks, and the South Sandwich islands was extended to 12 miles in 1989. The situation is kept under review. There are no plans to extend maritime zones off the British Antarctic Territory which includes the South Orkney islands.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will list those Antarctic islands together with their parent country that have had their maritime zones extended; and from what date this took effect in each case;

(2) if he will list those Antarctic islands and their parent country that have not had their maritime zones extended.

Mr. Garel-Jones: On the basis of the published information available, it appears that the islands within the Antarctic treaty area and the following sub-Antarctic islands have the fishery zones or economic zones which are listed in the table, with effective dates indicated where available.

Island	*Nationality*	*Zone*	*Effective date*
Heard Island	Australia	200 mile fishing zone	1979
McDonald Island			1979
Macquaire Island			1979
Auckland Island	New Zealand	200 mile economic zone	1977
Campbell Island			1977
Prince Edward Island	Republic of South Africa		1977
Marion Island			1977
Crozet Island	France		1978
Kerguelan Island			1978
Amsterdam Island			1978
Saint Paul Island			1978

Statutory Instruments

Ms. Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many statutory instruments were laid before Parliament by his Department in each year since 1980.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd The following number of statutory instruments were laid before Parliament by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the years 1980 to 1992:

	Number
1980	30
1981	45
1982	22
1983	21
1984	22
1985	28
1986	20
1987	27
1988	31
1989	24
1990	24
1991	10
1992	23

Island Groups

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what studies he has made of the management plans for the Campbell and Snare island groups; and what input his officials have had into the plans for the Antipodes and Bounty island group.

Mr. Garel-Jones We have not received copies of the management plans for the Campbell and Snares island groups and have not been asked to comment on the plans for the Antipodes and Bounty island group.

Diplomatic Service

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received concerning the recent decision by the diplomatic service to reduce the number of Rolls-Royce motor cars; and why this decision was taken.

Mr. Goodlad: A number of representations have been received since the decision was taken in 1990 to reduce the number of Rolls-Royce cars used in diplomatic posts overseas. The most recent of these approaches have been from my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mr. Mills) and from Mr. Nigel Cornelius, director of UK and Pacific operations Rolls-Royce Motor Company Ltd.

The decision was taken in the context of tightening financial constraints which made it necessary to make substantial savings in the provision of vehicles for overseas posts.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Rolls-Royce motor cars are currently owned and used by the diplomatic service overseas, and at which embassies, consulates and other units.

Mr. Goodlad: The diplomatic service at present owns and uses eight Rolls-Royce motor cars. These are in the following overseas posts.

Bonn
Canberra
Moscow
Paris
Pretoria
Riyadh
Tokyo
and Washington

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Overseas Affairs if he will make a statement of his policy on *(a)* providing assistance with the promotion of the products of United Kingdom manufacturers through the diplomatic service and *(b)* the criterion by which value for money in diplomatic service purchasing policy is assessed.

Mr. Goodlad: The promotion of Britain's economic interests overseas, including visible and invisible exports, is one of the basic aims of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. A variety of services is provided by our overseas posts and the Department of Trade and Industry for exporters of British goods and services.

In accordance with Government guidelines, the purchasing policy of the FCO is based on obtaining value for money through competition. British suppliers are used where they are competitive on quality, price and delivery.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his Department has had with other members of the UN Security Council and EC member states about sanctions against the former Yugoslavia; what decision has been taken as to the circumstances in which sanctions might be applied to Croatia; what assessment he has made of whether Russia will continue to support sanctions against Serbia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are in close contact with our European partners and members of the United Nations Security Council on this issue. No decision has been taken on what circumstances would require sanctions against Croatia. Russia has repeatedly made clear its full support for the enforcement of sanctions against Serbia and Montenegro.

The Edinburgh European Council made clear that unless there were a radical change of policy in Belgrade, and genuine co-operation with the peace process, the international community would continue to take stern action against the authorities there, isolating Serbia for a long time to come.

Visas

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the number of appeals in each of the last five years against refusal of visitor's visas to people visting the United Kingdom in order to visit relations or friends in Walthamstow; and how many were successful.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The information requested is not centrally recorded and could not be provided except at disproportionate expense.

Serbia

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many identified detention centres have been set up by the Serbian administration; and what evidence he has of the prevailing conditions and the welfare of the prisoners.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The International Committee of the Red Cross has not been able to identify any detention camps set up by the Serbian administration. The ICRC has, however, identified five detention camps in Bosnia administered by Bosnian Serb authorities. It has access to all five.

Foreign Policy

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when his Department last conducted a general review of British foreign policy; and what were its conclusions.

Mr. Hurd: My Department keeps British foreign policy under almost constant review, adapting policies and redeploying resources whenever necessary. The FCO departmental report, which describes recent developments and future priorities, was published on 10 February. I have agreed with the Chancellor of the Exchequer that during this year we shall be studying ways in which this country's diplomatic and related work overseas can be enhanced.

Diplomatic Missions

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals exist to close British diplomatic missions over the next 10-year period; in which countries these missions are scheduled for closure; and with what savings proportionate to his Department's total budget.

Mr. Goodlad: We are studying carefully a range of options for reducing expenditure in line with the public expenditure plans announced in the 1992 autumn statement. No decisions have yet been taken.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support the Government are giving to the Falkland Islands Government, GECO-PRAKLA and Spectrum to explore and survey for hydrocarbons in the waters around the Falkland Islands; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs approved the issue of licences to both companies to enable them to carry out seismic surveys in the Falkland Islands designated area. Surveying has begun.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish in the *Official Report* the statement made by the Governor of the Falkland Islands to the executive council on 23 December 1992, with regard to seismic licences; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Meetings of the Falklands executive council are confidential.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what he has done to counter the claims made by the Argentine Government over waters currently the subject of seismic licences held by GECO-PRAKLA and Spectrum to survey for hydrocarbons, since the granting of those licences.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The Argentines are well aware of our position regarding the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands and their surrounding maritime areas. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by my right hon. and noble Friend the Baroness Chalker of Wallasey in another place regarding our sovereignty of the Falkland Islands:

> "Sovereignty is not for negotiation. I cannot underline that too strongly".—[*Official Report, House of Lords,* 1 February 1993; Vol. 542, c. 8-9.]

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will issue a letter of comfort on behalf of the British Government to enable the oil industry to further explore for hydrocarbons in the waters around the Falkland Islands.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given in reply to a question by the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) on 10 February 1993, *Official Report*, column *681*.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he had with the Argentine Government, during his last visit to the Argentine, in respect of *(a)* the Falkland Islands continental shelf, *(b)* the exploration for hydrocarbons in the waters of the Falkland Islands and *(c)* the entry of the Argentine into the squid licensing market in waters around the Falkland Islands.

Mr. Garel-Jones: During the visit of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to Argentina in January, he made clear to Foreign Minister di Tella our concerns about the potential over-fishing of the vulnerable illex squid stock as a result of extra fishing effort in Argentine waters and agreed with Dr. di Tella that we should work to achieve a long-term fisheries agreement. He also took the opportunity to update Dr. di Tella on the seismic surveying in the Falklands designated area. He gave no undertaking that oil exploitation can only go ahead after prior agreement with Argentina. Dr. di Tella understands this position fully.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the effect of Argentina's entry into the squid licensing market on squid stocks in waters around the Falkland Islands; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Increased fishing of illex squid in Argentine waters this season may put extra pressure on the vulnerable illex squid stock. The agreement we reached with Argentina in December whereby they will issue 45 permits in response to applications for more than twice that number will mean that the risk is considerably less than it would otherwise have been.

Quangos

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all those non-departmental public bodies, for which his Department is responsible, which have the power to compel individuals, firms, companies or other institutions to carry out their instructions at the expense of the individuals, firms, companies or other institutions, and also to charge fees for the cost to the non-departmental public bodies of assessing the work which needed to be done.

Mr. Goodlad: None of the non-departmental public bodies for which I am responsible has such powers.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Trade Deficit

Sir Gerard Vaughan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out the main types of consumer goods which contribute to the United Kingdom trade deficit.

Mr. Nelson: Overseas trade statistics suggest that "apparel and clothing accessories", "passenger motor cars" and "household fixtures and fittings" contributed significantly to the deficit in our trade in consumer goods in 1992.

Public Sec[illegible]

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those industries, businesses and enterprises remaining in the public sector.

Mr. Portillo: The following enterprises are currently in the public sector:

Audit Commission
Bank of England Banking Department
British Broadcasting Corporation
British Coal
British Railways Board
British Waterways Board
The Buying Agency
Caledonian MacBrayne Ltd
Central Office of Information
Channel Four Television Company Ltd
Civil Aviation Authority
Commonwealth Development Corporation
Companies House
Covent Garden Market Authority
Crown Agents and Crown Agents Holding and Realisation Board
Crown Estate Office
Development Board for Rural Wales
Driving Standards Agency
English Industrial Estates Corporation
Export Credits Guarantee Department
Forestry Enterprise
Her Majesty's Stationery Office
Highlands and Islands Enterprise
Horserace Totalisator Board
Housing Action Trusts
Housing Corporation
Housing for Wales
Industrial Training Boards
Land Authority for Wales
Local Authority Airports
Local Authority Bus companies
London Regional Transport
National Health Service Trusts
New Town Development Corporations and Commission
Northern Ireland Electricity Service
Northern Ireland Housing Executive
Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company
Northern Ireland Trust Ports
Nuclear Electric plc
Oil and Pipelines Agency
Passenger Transport Executives
Patent Office
Post Office Corporation
Remploy Ltd
Royal Mint
Scottish Enterprise
Scottish Homes
Scottish Nuclear Ltd
Scottish Transport Group
United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority
Urban Development Corporations
Vehicle Inspectorate
Welsh Development Agency
Welsh Fourth Channel Authority

Also included in the public sector are local authority enterprises other than those in the table. No comprehensive list is held centrally; however the information that is available is published in the Business Monitor MA23, "Sector Classification for the National Accounts", which is available in the House Library.

Company Cars

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has recently received concerning the impact upon the purchase of company cars of uncertainty about the future arrangements for company car taxation; and what assessment he has made of the effect of that uncertainty upon company and fleet car sales by United Kingdom manufacturers.

Mr. Dorrell: United Kingdom car manufacturers have generally welcomed the proposal to move to a price-based system for taxing company cars. Some recent representations have noted the effects of future uncertainty on sales and sought decisions on the details and timing of the change at the earliest possible date. These effects are by their nature not directly measurable. We appreciate however the importance to the industry and others of certain and stable arrangements for company cars.

Budget Proposals

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what meetings he has had with hon. Members to discuss representations by their constituents on proposals being considered for his Budget.

Mr. Lamont: I have had several such meetings.

Supply Estimates

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what date he will publish the 1993-94 supply estimates.

Mr. Dorrell: Tuesday 9 March.

Redundancies

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list, in respect of the current and next three financial years, the cost to the Exchequer of redundancy payments in respect of job losses and redundancies *(a)* in mining and related industries in the event that the proposals of 13 October 1992 are implemented, *(b)* in the armed forces under "Options for Change" and *(c)* in other fields; and what is his estimate of the overall cost of unemployment and other social security benefits to which those redundancies will give rise for each year that those made redundant remain unemployed.

Mr. Portillo: The amount and timing of grant payments to British Coal in respect of redundancies will depend on the pattern of voluntary redundancies and on the decisions about pit closures taken by the corporation in the light of the coal review, the outcome of which will be announced in a White Paper to be published shortly. The effect on related industries will depend on these decisions.

Payments to the armed forces under "Options for Change" are:

	£ million
1992-93	160
1993-94	370
1994-95	350
1995-96	—

(Rounded to the nearest £10 million.

These figures are the sum of the special capital compensation payments to armed forces personnel made redundant as part of the transition to new force structures, together with the net present value of the extra costs associated with the early payment of both their pension lump sums and their annual pensions.

It is not possible to estimate the costs of paying benefits for each year those made redundant remain unemployed; it is not known how quickly they will get jobs and the level of social security benefits payable depends on the characteristics of the individuals.

Income Tax

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his current estimate of the cost to the Exchequer of a reduction of one penny in the basic rate of income tax.

Mr. Dorrell: About £1·6 billion in 1993-94, and £1·7 billion in 1994-95, if the reduction applied from the beginning of the 1993-94 tax year. The costs include the effect of the reduction in receipts of advance corporation tax, and the consequent effect on receipts of mainstream corporation tax. They are based on the same assumptions as those used in table 5.6 of the "Autumn Statement 1992", Cm. 2096 but have been corrected to allow for an error which applied only to these two figures.

Developing Countries (Debt)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress Her Majesty's Government have made in tackling the problem of developing countries' external debt during 1992.

Mr. Nelson: The Government have made substantial progress in dealing with developing country debt issues during 1992.

The Government are directly responsible for official bilateral debts. Proposals for rescheduling or restructuring such debts are dealt with multilaterally through the Paris club of creditor countries.

The Paris club reached agreements with 18 countries during 1992, involving the rescheduling or restructuring of over US$10½ billion of bilateral official debt. Three agreements were with middle-income countries—Argentina, Brazil and Bulgaria—and a further four were with lower middle-income countries—Cameroon, Ecuador, Jordan, and Morocco—which benefited from more generous rescheduling arrangments involving longer grace and repayment periods, known as "Houston" terms.

I am delighted to announce, however, that the majority of agreements, 11 in all, were concluded on Trinidad terms. The countries concerned were Bolivia, Ethiopia, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea Republic, Honduras, Mali, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, and Zambia. This follows from the Paris club's decision in December 1991 to begin implementing the initiative of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister for providing concessional relief to the very poorest indebted countries.

In addition to the countries listed, Nicaragua and Benin benefited from Trinidad terms in 1991, and Mauritania in 1993, making 14 beneficiaries in all so far.

Trinidad terms provide for the equivalent of cancellation of up to half the eligible debt consolidated by the agreements. Each agreement contains an undertaking by creditors to consider the case for a reduction in the whole stock of the debtor countries' eligible debt to the Paris club after a period of proven economic and financial responsibility. During 1992 Trinidad terms agreements covered over US$3 billion of debt entailing the forgiving of over US$1 billion over the life of the agreements. Including Nicaragua, Benin, and Mauritania, over US$4 billion of debt has been restructured under Trinidad terms, and about US$1½ billion forgiven over the life of the agreements.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Research Programmes

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer of 26 January to the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan), *Official Report*, column 606, if he will place in the Library the Government's papers to the December European Community Council on the future management of research programmes and the evaluation of existing research programmes.

Mr. Waldegrave: A copy of the evaluation of the second framework programme was placed in the Library in October last year. The United Kingdom's paper "Excellence in EC Programme Management—Looking ahead to Framework Programme IV" was an informal discussion document. However, given the general interest, I have on this occasion placed a copy of the paper in the Library.

Public Bodies

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what change there has been in the proportion of women being appointed to public bodies between the last year for which data are available and the previous year.

Mr. Robert Jackson: The percentage of appointments to public bodies held by women has increased from 23 per cent. in 1991 to 26 per cent. at 1 September 1992. Further details are available in the 1992 edition of "Public Bodies" published recently, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Quangos

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list all those non-departmental public bodies for which his Department is responsible, which have the power to compel individuals, firms, companies or other institutions to carry out their instructions at the expense of the individuals, firms, companies or other institutions, and also to charge fees for the cost to the non-departmental public bodies of assessing the work which needed to be done.

Mr. Waldegrave: No non-departmental public body for which my Department is responsible has such a power.

Market Testing

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list all the market tests that have taken place in his Department since November 1991; whether the result was the maintenance of in-house provision or whether the service was contracted out; what was the name of the successful contractor where appropriate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: The market tests completed since November 1991 by the Office of Public Service and Science, including its agencies, Her Majesty's Stationery Office and the Central Office of Information and the outcome of these tests is as follows:

Activity tested (and area)	*Outcome*
Conference and event management (CCTA)	Contracted out to Viewplan Ltd
Data preparation (Chessington Computer Centre)	Contracted out to Alpha Numeric
Reprographic services (COI)	Contracted out to Williams Lea Ltd
Security and reception services (Recruitment and Assessment Services)	Retained in-house
Training (Chessington Computer Centre)	Contracted out to Skill Advance and to Data Training

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many staff in his Department are assigned to the market testing programme; how much the programme has cost his Department since November 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: There are seven full-time and 41 part-time staff currently engaged on market testing in the Office of Public Service and Science, including its Agencies, HMSO and COI. The cost of market testing since November 1991 has been £705,000.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the amount of money paid out by the Legal Aid Board area offices at Newcastle upon Tyne and Leeds during the last financial year.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Legal Aid Board makes all payments centrally through its accounts office in London. It is therefore only possible to make estimates of the amount attributable to each area office. Estimates for the year ending 31 March 1992 for the area offices in question are as follows:

	£ million
Newcastle upon Tyne	40·7
Leeds	52·9

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Correspondence

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 14 December 1992, *Official Report*, column 25, when he expects to write with the details of the countries which have been subject to the United Kingdom's arms embargoes over the last 20 years.

Mr. Needham: I wrote to the hon. Gentleman on 13 January giving the information he requested.

Ship Building

Mr. Hutton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the future world demand for new merchant ships; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: It is not possible to make an accurate forecast of future world demand for merchant ships. However, it is generally expected that there will be an upturn in demand in the second half of the decade. It is likely that existing world merchant ship capacity will be adequate to meet the demand.

Infrastructure Projects

Mr. Bell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what provision his Department has made to approve infrastructure projects during the course of 1992.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has powers to approve the development of infrastructure in a number of areas. In 1992, following the merger of the Department of Energy with the DTI, he approved the construction of two power stations, the extension of three power stations, 954 overhead power lines, two cross-country gas pipelines and one gas pipeline landfall. The President also granted licences which will allow 12 companies to develop fixed telecommunications networks in the United Kingdom.

Overseas Markets

Mr. Bell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what studies have been made within his Department concerning the obtaining of access for British companies to overseas markets by way of goods, services and finance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: My Department continually monitors overseas market access for United Kingdom traders and takes action as and when appropriate.

Government Contracts

Mr. Bell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how his Department is monitoring the tendering of contracts by Governments of EC member states within the framework of the single market.

Mr. Needham: Responsibility for monitoring the application and effectiveness of EC law on public procurement lies with the European Commission in co-operation with member states. Her Majesty's Treasury represents the United Kingdom in that context and co-ordinates responses to alleged breaches of the rules in the United Kingdom. My Department's single market compliance unit is available to provide advice to any United Kingdom supplier who suspects that the rules are being broken by a purchaser in another member state. The principal means of enforcement, however, lies in the hands of potential suppliers and contractors who can take direct legal action if they are harmed by a purchaser's failure to follow the rules.

Bicycles

Mr. Bell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on what occasion since February 1992 Her Majesty's Government have been consulted by the European Commission regarding the importation of Chinese bicycles; what representations were made to the Commission by the Government; what was the result of the Commission's preliminary investigation; when it was received by the Government; what action has been taken by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: Last December the Commission consulted member states about the preliminary findings of their anti-dumping investigation into bicycle imports from China and Taiwan. For China, dumping causing injury to European Community producers was established and the Commission proposed a provisional anti-dumping duty of 34·4 per cent. to prevent further injury while the investigation was completed. For Taiwan, dumping was found to be de minimis and so no action was proposed. The Government informed the Commission on 21 December that we accepted its conclusions. It is now for the Commission to decide whether to adopt its proposals.

Mr. Bell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received regarding the import of bicycles from China and Taiwan; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: My Department has received representations from United Kingdom bicycle manufacturers arguing for restrictions on Chinese and Taiwanese imports as well as from United Kingdom importers and retailers who consider that trade should remain unimpeded. Other issues raised include the safety of imported bicycles as well as the customs duties imposed on both complete machines and their components.

Access to British Markets

Mr. Bell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what studies have been made within his Department concerning the control of access to the British market by way of goods, services and finance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: Import policy issues are regularly and frequently analysed by my Department.

Military Equipment

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what capacity his Department has to evaluate the post-sale veracity of end-use commitments made in export licence applications for sensitive and dual-use military equipment.

Mr. Needham: My export control organisation has the capacity to evaluate information from a wide range of sources—not least from exporters themselves—about the actual end-use of controlled goods. This information is taken into account in considering what action should be taken against evasion of controls, and what decisions should be made on future export licence applications where similar evasion might be attempted.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy to investigate which of the exports to the former Yugoslavia—listed by the Minister of Trade to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent in his letter of 5 February—were in fact sent to the former Yugoslavia having been awarded an export licence.

Mr. Needham: No.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish in the *Official Report* the schedule of licences granted for the export of military goods to Yugoslavia for the period 1 January 1989 to 31 December 1992 included in the letter of 5 February to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent by the Minister of Trade.

Mr. Needham: Following is the schedule and my covering letter to the hon. Member:

Dear Llew

I am now able to let you have the attached schedule of licences granted for the export of military goods to Yugoslavia, as promised in the Prime Minister's reply to your Parliamentary Question (Hansard 23 November, column 456).

Your request for quantities has necessitated an examination of individual licences, which is extremely time-consuming; to go back to 1979 as you requested would take too many staff off normal licensing duties for too long, and the schedule therefore gives full details for 1 January 1989-31 December 1992. In many instances the number and range of items involved in shipments made under a licence makes it impossible to state quantity and value has therefore been given. I should also emphasise that the issue of a licence does not mean that the export took place.

Armaments and military equipment during that period fell within Group 1 of Part II of Schedule 1 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1991 or its predecessor, the 1989

Order. The 1992 Order came into force on 31 December 1992 and no licences for former Yugoslav Republics were issued on that day.

All Group 1 licences were revoked on 3 July 1991 as a precautionary measure and any licensed goods not exported by that date would have been stopped from leaving the UK.

Following UK action, the EC embargo on exports of military goods was imposed on 5 July 1991 and the UN embargo on 25 September that year; UN sanctions on all trade with Serbia and Montenegro were imposed on 30 May 1992.

Applications since 3 July 1991 for Group 1 goods destined for former Yugoslav Republics have been refused unless for lifesaving equipment, much of it for UN operations.

Exports to the territories which comprise the former republic of Yugoslavia
Military, security and para-military goods and arms, ammunition and related material

Goods	*Quantity or value*	*End-use/User*
AIRCRAFT PARTS AND SPARES		
1989		
Jet engine parts	£1,500,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Oxygen equipment	£231,500	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Jet engine parts	£69,500	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Jet engine parts	£1,500,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Jet engine parts	£1,500,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Jet engine parts	£100,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Jet engine parts	£150,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Jet engine parts	£200,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Aircraft parts	£5,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Aircraft parts	£5,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Aircraft parts	£1,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Aircraft parts	£300,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Air conditioning equipment	£2,800	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Jet engine parts	£1,500,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Jet engine parts	£1,500,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Aircraft parts	£300,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Tachometers	168	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Turn and slip indicators	85	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Air conditioning equipment	£6,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Valves	£41,200	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Jet engine parts	£250,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Oil pressure indicators	1	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Tailplanes	6	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Ailerons	12	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Aircraft parts	£15,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Jet engine parts	£1,680,700	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Oil pressure indicators	58	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Ailerons	18	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Various indicator equipment	£313,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Oil pressure indicator	1	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Jet engine parts	£25,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Navigation system parts	5	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Jet engine parts	£69,500	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Test equipment for aircraft sighting system	£142,250	Testing of military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Ejector Seat Cartridges	31	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Oxygen equipment test sets	13	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
1990		
Aircraft spares	£4,250	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Test equipment for jet engines	£344,000	Testing of jet engines/Yugoslav Air Force
Autostabiliser computer	12	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Navigational equipment	£5,000,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Jet engine parts	£2,000,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Aircraft instrument spares	5	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Aircraft spares	£200,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Aircraft spares	£300,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Parts for gyro platform system	£1,000,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Ejector Seat spare cartridges	232	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Spare parts for military aircraft	£607,450	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Valves	80	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Valves	60	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Valves	60	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Spare parts for military aircraft	£10,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Oxygen equipment	£97,750	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Starter generators adaptors	20	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Oxygen supply test equipment	£80,750	For test purposes/Yugoslav Air Force
Ejector seats and equipment	£1,850,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Ejector seats and equipment	£179,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Jet engine parts	£2,000,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Jet engine parts	£2,000,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Jet engine parts	£2,000,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Jet engine parts	£1,000,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Jet engine parts	£1,000,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Spare parts for military aircraft	£250,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force

Goods	*Quantity or value*	*End-use/User*
Temperature indicators	3	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
1991		
Jet engine parts	£2,000,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Jet engine parts	£2,000,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Tail planes	6	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Ailerons	18	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Ailerons	12	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Aircraft indicator equipment	£253,600	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Jet engine parts	£2,000,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Jet engine parts	£2,000,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Aircraft indicator equipment	£235,750	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Aircraft ignition and switchgear spares	£100,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Ejector seats and equipment	£800,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Ejector seat parts	£2,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Oxygen equipment	£25,500	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Oxygen equipment	£223,750	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
Engine air inlet ice protection equipment	£76,000	For military aircraft/Yugoslav Air Force
1992		
Ballistic blankets for helicopter seats	30	Helicopter seat protection/United Nations Forces
AMPLIFIERS		
1990		
Various amplifiers and voltage stabilisers	£38,250	Development of electronic counter measures receiver/Institute of Microwave and Electronics
BODY ARMOUR		
1990		
Armoured jackets, helmets, ceramic plates	£24,120	Personal protection/Yugoslav State Police
1991		
Armoured jackets, helmets, ceramic plates	£18,600	Personal protection/Yugoslav State Police
1992		
Armoured jackets, plates etc.	£26,300	Personal protection/Staff of United Nations High Commission for Refugees
Armoured jackets, plates etc.	£8,500	Personal protection/Staff of United Nations High Commission for Refugees
CAMERAS		
1989		
Cameras for aerial photography	2	For remote piloted vehicle/Federal Directorate of Supply and Procurement
DETONATORS		
1991		
Detonators and fuses	500	To activate fire detection/suppression systems in hazardous environment/rubber manufacturer
COMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT		
1989		
Spares for transceiver	£2,500	Radio communications/Yugoslav Army
Spares for minehunting command and navigation systems	£15,000	Federal Secretariat of National Defence
COMPASSES		
1989		
Tubular compasses	40	Attachment to surveillance equipment/Yugoslav Ministry of Defence
ELECTRONIC EQUIPMENT AND COMPONENTS		
1989		
Hysteresis Motor	45	Manufacture of test equipment/Federal Secretariat of National Defence
Hysteresis Motor	16	Manufacture of test equipment/Federal Secretariat of National Defence
Torque Motors	4	For simulation training equipment/Federal Secretariat of National Defence

Goods	*Quantity or value*	*End-use/User*
1990		
Hysteresis Motor	44	Manufacture of test equipment-Federal Secretariat of National Defence
Explosives Detection Equipment		
1989		
Explosives detector	1	Demonstration only/Yugoslav Institute of Security
Explosives vapour detector	2	Yugoslav police
Infrared, Thermal Imaging and Image, Intensifier Equipment	2	Yugoslav police
1989		
Second generation image intensifier	1	Night vision goggles/optical manufacturer
Passive driving periscope (2nd generation image intensifier tubes)	1	Demonstration/night optics manufacturer
Second generation image intensifier	1	Night vision goggles/optical manufacturer
Steady scope with night vision (second generation) attachment	1	Demonstration only/Yugoslav Police
Processing equipment for second generation image intensifiers	£1,503,700	Manufacture of night vision equipment/ Yugoslav Army
Image intensifier tubes (second generation)	6	Night vision equipment/Yugoslav Ministry of Defence
Second generation image intensifiers	150	Night vision goggles/optical manufacturer
Second generation image intensifiers	66	Night vision goggles/Yugoslav Army
Second generation image intensifiers	40	Night vision goggles/optical manufacturer
Second generation image intensifiers	60	Night vision goggles/optical manufacturer
Second generation image intensifiers	8	Night vision goggles/optical manufacturer
Second generation image intensifiers	200	Night vision goggles/optical manufacturer
Cryogenic equipment for thermal imaging equipment	12	Thermal imager/thermal electro-optics manufacturer
1990		
Night vision goggles and equipment (second generation tubes)	6	Demonstration only/optical manufacturer
Second generation image intensifers	2	For night vision goggles/optical manufacturer
Lifesaving equipment		
1991		
Marine distress equipment (flares, Very pistols, etc.)	£91,500	Marine rescue/leisure and commercial shipyards
1992		
Smoke canisters, cartridges, pistols	£1,900	Ground-air/ground-ground signalling marking for landing dropping zones/United Nations forces
Marine distress equipment (flares, smoke canisters, etc.)	£124,350	Marine rescue/leisure and commercial shipyards
Smoke signalling grenades	£18,115	Smoke signalling United Nations forces
Lithium batteries		
1990		
Lithium reserve batteries	£10,000	For mines, grenades, etc./Federal Directorate of Supply and Procurement
Periscope and spares		
1990		
Periscope spares	£3,190	Yugoslav Navy
Radar equipment and spares		
1989		
Miscellaneous spares for military mobile radar systems	£22,700	Spares for existing equipment/Yugoslav Air Force
Miscellaneous spares for military mobile radar systems	£755,500	Spares for existing equipment/Yugoslav Air Force
Switches	270	Radar simulation/Secretariat of National Defence
Switches	270	Radar simulation/Secretariat of National Defence
1990		
Miscellaneous Spares for military mobile radars—air defence	£72,160	Support spares for existing equipment/Federal Directorate of Supply and Procurement
Isolators	5	Repair of radar equipment/Secretariat of National Defence

Goods	*Quantity or value*	*End-use/User*
Miscellaneous radar equipment and spares	£24,286,700	For existing radar stations/Yugoslav Air Force
1991		
C—Band magnetrons	20	Spares for existing radar equipment/Yugoslav army
Isolators	5	Spares for existing radar equipment/air traffic control
Gunn diode	8	Spares for existing radar equipment/Institute for Microwave Technology
Miscellaneous spares for military mobile radar systems	£755,500	Spares for existing equipment/Yugoslav Air Force
Spares for mortar-locating radar	£25,000	Spares for existing equipment/Yugoslav Army
RANGEFINDERS (LASER)		
1989		
Hand held laser rangefinder	1	Evaluation purposes/Yugoslav defence contractor
Hand held laser rangefinders (non-functioning)	4	Interface checks/Yugoslav defence contractor
SMALL ARMS AND AMMUNITION		
1989		
Metal-filled plastic bullets (heads)	Sample quantity	Production of frangible training ammunition/Federal Directorate of Supply and Procurement
Smith & Wesson revolver	1	Target shooting/tourism company
9mm sports pistol	1	Sporting use/private buyer
Shotgun primers	£10,000	Sporting ammunition manufacture
1990		
·22 rifle barrels and actions	2	Sporting use private buyer
Shotguns and blank ammunition	£5,200	Production of cinema film/film company
MG34 7·9mm rifle	1	Production of cinema film/film company
BAR 30·06 auto rifle	1	Production of cinema film/film company
Sporting rifle, shotgun and pistol, and ammunition	3	Sporting use/private buyer
1991		
Revolver (·357)	1	Personal protection/private buyer
Smith & Wesson revolver	1	Sporting use/private buyer
SONAR EQUIPMENT SPARES		
1989		
Spares for sonar equipment	£4,000	Repair of equipment/Yugoslav Navy
Spares for sonar equipment	£15,700	Repair of equipment/Yugoslav Navy
TRANSISTORS		
1989		
Field effect transistors	£3,000	For instrumentation/Federal Secretariat National Defence

Companies (Environmental Disclosure)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what response he intends to make to the proposal from his advisory council on business and the environment that all companies should adopt environmental disclosure as a requirement for listing on the stock exchange.

Mr. Eggar: The advisory committee's recommendation is directed at the stock exchange and it is for that body to consider and decide on its appropriateness. The recommendation has been brought to the attention of the stock exchange and I await its response with interest.

Expo '92

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals he has received for the future use of the British trade pavilion used at the Expo '92 exhibition in Seville; and what decisions he has taken.

Mr. Needham: Negotiations are now at an advanced stage with a private sector buyer for sale of the United Kingdom's Expo '92 pavilion. Subject to a satisfactory outcome, the purchaser intends to dismantle the pavilion and relocate it in the United Kingdom. It is hoped to bring the negotiations to a successful conclusion by the end of March 1993.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent communications he has received from HHL Publishing regarding its participation at the British pavilion at the Expo '92 exhibition in Seville.

Mr. Needham: Solicitors representing HHL Publishing wrote on 27 November 1992 about various aspects and received a detailed response to all points on 18 December.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent communications he has received from Farrow and Humphreys Ltd., in regard to services provided to the British pavilion at the Expo '92 exhibition in Seville.

Mr. Needham: Farrow and Humphreys Ltd. wrote on 13 January concerning the loss incurred in supplying the company that ran the pavilion shop, which is now in voluntary liquidation. I replied on 31 January.

Republic of China

Mr. Parry: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the total exports and imports between the United Kingdom and the Republic of China in each of the last three years.

Mr. Needham: Information on United Kingdom visible trade is published in the "Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom" which is available in the Library of the House.

Insolvency Service

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the Insolvency Service expects to complete its review of its funding and fee charging policy.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The review is nearing completion and I will make known my conclusions in due course when I have had an opportunity to consider all the issues.

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to publish the accounts of the Insolvency Service for 1991-92.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The statement of receipts and payments of the Insolvency Service's account for 1991-92 is expected to be published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office on 24 February.

Steel

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to hold discussions with *(a)* the Luxembourg Government and *(b)* the European Commission concerning state aids to Messrs. Arbed, steel producers, of Luxembourg and its subsidiaries.

Mr. Sainsbury: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has no plans at present to hold discussions with the Luxembourg Government. Arbed has made applications for research grants which are permitted under the ECSC state aid code, and these have been discussed between member states and the Commission. However, if evidence exists to suggest that Arbed is benefiting from illegal subsidies, the Government will pursue the matter vigorously with the Commission.

Quangos

Mr. Sproat: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list all those non-departmental public bodies for which his Department is responsible which have the power to compel individuals, firms, companies or other institutions to carry out their instructions at the expense of the individuals, firms, companies or other institutions, and also to charge fees for the cost to the non-departmental public bodies of assessing the work which needed to be done.

Mr. Eggar: The Hearing Aid Council is the only non-departmental public body for which my Department is responsible which has these powers.

Digital Audio Broadcasting

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to promote the introduction of digital audio broadcasting in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: Digital audio broadcasting—DAB—is recognised as a very important development in sound broadcasting, and I am anxious to ensure that its benefits and opportunities are made available in this country. I am therefore establishing a United Kingdom DAB forum to co-ordinate and promote plans for the introduction of DAB in this country and to liaise with those with similar interests in other countries, particularly elsewhere in Europe.

Participants will include broadcasters, equipment manufacturers, retailers, service providers and other interested parties. The aim is to enhance the potential benefit for United Kingdom industry and ensure that British people will be able to enjoy the benefits of DAB, including high-quality reception in cars and on portable receivers, and additional services that the new technology will make possible.

My officials will continue their efforts to secure sufficient radio spectrum for the first terrestrial DAB transmissions to begin when the first receivers become available, which is expected to be around 1995.

Ammonium Nitrate

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action he is taking to prevent the dumping in the United Kingdom of low-quality ammonium nitrate by the former eastern bloc countries; and if he will ensure that imported ammonium nitrate is bagged and labelled correctly.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 11 February 1993]:* Anti-dumping action is a matter for the European Commission, which is currently investigating a complaint by the Fertiliser Manufacturers Association that ammonium nitrate is being dumped in the United Kingdom by certain republics of the former Soviet Union. The Government have urged the Commission to complete its investigation quickly and will consider carefully any proposals for anti-dumping measures which the Commission then makes. As regards bagging and labelling of dangerous substances such as ammonium nitrate, imports must comply with the relevant United Kingdom legislation and inspectors from the Health and Safety Executive are responsible for checking on this during visits to ports.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the weekly budget allocation per prison inmate for breakfast, lunch, tea and supper on 1 January 1973, 1 January 1983 and 1 January 1993; and what account is taken of inflation in uprating the allowance.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: There is no weekly budget allocation per inmate for food. Inmates are fed to a predetermined dietary scale which provides them with a set quantity of food and is therefore not affected by inflation. The items on this scale are either purchased from centrally negotiated call-off contracts or provided by Prison Service farms and gardens group.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the prisons which have contracted out their catering functions; what arrangements have been made for monitoring the carrying out of the contract; and what system is in place to respond to complaints about the service provided.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The catering function is contracted out in the following prisons:

Belmarsh
Bullingdon
Downview
Highdown
Holme House
Woodhill
Lancaster Farms

Prison Service area catering managers inspect and report on technical standards in all prisons. This includes monitoring contract caterers for their compliance with the contract. Contractors are responsible to governors for the satisfactory overall performance of the contract.

The system for dealing with complaints about the service provided by a contract caterer is the same as for prisons with an in-house catering service.

Wolds Prison

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the names and previous employment of *(a)* the governor and deputy governor of Wolds remand prison, *(b)* the governor and deputy governor of Blakenhurst prison and *(c)* the director and assistant director of Group 4 Court Escort Services Ltd.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: A contracted-out prison is run by a director not a governor. The director of Wolds remand prison is Mr. Stephen Twinn. Wolds has no deputy director, but the head of custody is Mr. David McDonnell. The director of Blakenhurst is Mr. David Brooke, and the deputy director will be Mr. Bernard Higgins, who has yet to take up post. All were formerly members of HM Prison Service. Immediately prior to taking up his post at Blakenhurst, Mr. Brooke was on secondment to HM inspectorate of prisons. The director of Group 4 Court Services Ltd. in the east midlands and Humberside is Mr. Michael Hirst. There is no assistant director, but the two senior controllers are Mr. Ken Tuckwood and Mr. David Adams. All are former police officers.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the absconding of a man on remand at the Wolds on 9 February; and if he will institute an inquiry.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: On 9 February a prisoner escaped from Hull royal infirmary where he had been taken, under escort, from Wolds remand prison. He was re-arrested by the police during the night of 10 February.

The contractor's staff are carrying out a full inquiry into the causes of the escape. I have also instructed the controller to initiate an inquiry into matters connected with the escape.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if Group 4 pays for the cost of providing gas, electricity and water at the Wolds remand prison.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No, but these are met from within the £6·9 million estimated cost of running the prison published on Budget day last year. Because Wolds is of a unique design, it was not possible to set benchmark levels of energy and water consumption for inclusion in the contract, but the contractor's efficient use of public utilities is monitored by the Home Office controller based at the prison who is assisted by the Home Office energy efficiency unit. Once energy consumption for the Wolds buildings over a full year has been established, it is intended to amend the contract so that the cost of public utilities becomes the contractor's responsibility.

Court Escort Service

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to extend the contracting out of the court escort service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Invitations to tender for the contracting out of the court escort service in the Metropolitan police district are to be issued later this year. Subject to the tenders received demonstrating value for money, it is intended that contracted-out operations should commence in 1994. Next year, it is expected that tenders will be sought for three contract areas outside London, with the aim that the service should begin in those areas in 1995. It has not yet been decided which three areas will be covered.

Metropolitan Police

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what will be the total cost to public funds of the Metropolitan police in 1993-94; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: As police authority for the metropolis, I have approved estimates which provide for net revenue expenditure of £1,597,684 million in 1993-94. There will be a cash limit on current expenditure of £1,555,397 million. This is an increase of 5·2 per cent. on the budget estimate for 1992-93. Capital expenditure is subject to separate control.

I have also approved the issue of a precept of £128·15 per property in band D of the council tax valuation bands for Metropolitan police purposes.

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what effect the applicability of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 has had on the time taken for the market testing of Strangeways prison.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The original deadline for receiving bids for the operating contract of Her Majesty's prison Manchester was 18 January 1993. This has been extended while we consider the implications of applying the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations [illegible]81. No new deadline has yet been set.

Winston Silcott

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what examination he has given to the new evidence in the case of Winston Silcott presented to him on 16 June 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: Following representations made to my right hon. and learned Friend on 16 June 1992 about Mr.

Silcott's conviction for the murder of Mr. Smith, the Metropolitan police were asked to make inquiries. These have since been extended to take account of further representations received on 27 October 1992 and 25 January 1993. My right hon. and learned Friend will give further consideration to the case once the police inquiries have been completed.

Squatting

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when legislative proposals will be brought forward on the squatting of residential property.

Mr. Jack: I refer the hon. Member to the answer which I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) on 3 February, at column *203*.

MFV Pescado

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what occasions the salvage of the MFV Pescado has been attempted; and what is now the earliest expected date for raising the MFV Pescado.

Mr. Charles Wardle: There has been no attempt to raise the Pescado for the past two months because of bad weather conditions. A further attempt will be made as soon as the tide and weather conditions are synchronised in such a way that a lift would be possible.

Immigration

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons were detained by immigration officers on seeking to exit from the United Kingdom for a period in excess of one hour over the past 12 months; and what reasons were given for the detention.

Mr. Charles Wardle: This information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of immigrants to, and emigrants from, the United Kingdom for each year for the period 1980 to 1992.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 15 February 1993]:* For a description of the available information on migration to and from the United Kingdom, and data for 1991, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) on 15 February at columns *19-20*. Data for 1980-90 are given in table 2·1 of the 1989 and 1990 issues of the OPCS publication "International Migration", copies of which are in the Library. Data for 1992 are not yet available.

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the responsibilities and activities of the group of co-ordinators on the free movement of persons referred to in the report of the immigration and nationality department 1991-92.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The co-ordinators' group is a group of senior officials set up by the European Council in 1988 to co-ordinate member states' action relating to the free movement of persons. It also has direct oversight of the work of the horizontal group on data processing, which is looking at the creation of a European information system for the exchange of information of inadmissible aliens, missing persons, stolen vehicles and other goods. The group also has a remit from the Maastricht European Council to plan for the implementation of title VI of the treaty on European union. It reports direct to the European Council.

Drugs, Northumbria

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures are being taken to prevent the flow of drugs into Northumbria.

Mr. Jack: Drug dealers and traffickers are the subject of investigations by the Northumbria police drug squad and by No. 2 regional crime squad, in liaison with Her Majesty's Customs, and supported by the drugs division of the National Criminal Intelligence Service. Additionally, divisional officers are trained to recognise and deal with drug problems at street level. The outcome in 1992 was a significant increase over 1991 in the number of arrests for drug-related offences in the Blyth area. Northumbria police also give regular briefings on drugs to teachers to assist in informing children of the dangers of drug misuse.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of convictions in the Northumbrian police area involving under 18-year-olds and in total were for drug-related offences in each year since 1982.

Mr. Jack: The information is given in the table.

Number and percentage of persons convicted of indictable drug offences and all indictable offences in the Northumbrian police force area by age 1982 to 1991

Year	*Aged 10 and under 18* *Indictable drug offences* *Number*	*per cent.*	*Total indictable offences (=100 per cent.) Number*	*All ages* *Indictable drug offences* *Number*	*per cent.*	*Total indictable offences (=100 per cent.) Number*
1982	3	0·1	4,098	121	1·0	12,037
1983	—	—	3,698	82	0·7	11,830
1984	2	0·1	3,572	111	1·0	11,599
1985	5	0·2	3,282	118	1·1	10,621
1986	1	0·0	2,528	90	1·0	8,985
1987	2	0·1	2,449	115	1·3	9,076
1988	3	0·1	2,253	86	1·0	8,880
1989	3	0·2	1,702	113	1·4	7,815
1990	10	0·6	1,642	132	1·7	7,760
1991[1]	12	0·8	1,557	137	1·7	7,991

[1] Provisional.

Category A Prisoners

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many inmates in prisons in *(a)* England and Wales, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Northern Ireland who were held as category A prisoners on 1 January 1992 were removed from this category during 1992.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: During 1992, 56 category A inmates in England and Wales were downgraded to category B following review by the category A committee.

The position in Scotland and Northern Ireland is the responsibility of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Northern Ireland respectively.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women who were held in prisons in (i) England and Wales, (ii) Scotland and (iii) Northern Ireland were category A prisoners during 1992.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: On 31 December 1992, there were 554 male and four female category A prisoners in prison custody in England and Wales.

The position in Scotland and Northern Ireland is the responsibility of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Northern Ireland respectively.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how often the status of an inmate being held as a category A prisoner in *(a)* England and Wales, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Northern Ireland is reviewed.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: In England and Wales the security category of category A prisoners is liable to review at any time in the light of security or other information. Usually a category A prisoner is held in the category on a provisional basis until conviction and sentence, when the case is put to the category A committee for formal review. Cases are reviewed at least annually thereafter.

The position in Scotland and Northern Ireland is the responsibility of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Northern Ireland respectively.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the longest period of time an inmate at present being held in prison in *(a)* England and Wales, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Northern Ireland has been in category A status as at 1 February.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Twenty-six years in England and Wales. The position in Scotland and Northern Ireland is the responsibility of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Northern Ireland respectively.

Bosnian Refugees

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria are being applied in selecting areas for resettlement of Bosnian refugees once they leave reception centres.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The areas selected will be those where support can be made available from refugee and other voluntary organisations, and where there is suitable accommodation.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much he expects to spend in the next six, 12 and 18 months on resettlement programmes associated with Bosnian refugees; and how much local authorities will be expected to pay.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Firm forecasts are not yet possible and depend on how quickly the international organisations are able to arrange the arrival of further groups from Bosnian detention camps and the tracing of their dependants. The proposed settlement of the Bosnians in various parts of the country seeks to avoid imposing undue burdens on individual local authorities.

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the destinations and the arrangements for catering for the Bosnian and other former Yugoslav refugees admitted to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The areas provisionally identified for the resettlement of both former detainees and their dependants accepted by the Government at the request of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees are listed in the table. The Government are providing funds to the Refugee Council and the British Red Cross to find suitable housing and to provide support to the Bosnian families in conjunction with refugee and other voluntary organisations in the areas concerned.

Provisional resettlement areas

The West Midlands
The East Midlands/East Anglia
The North
The North-East
Central Scotland
London

Immigration Rules

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the immigration rules which prescribe that a person wishing to set up a business in the United Kingdom must leave the United Kingdom to make the application as part of the exercise in looking at regulations which unnecessarily inhibit business.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans to set aside the entry clearance requirement for non-EC nationals wishing to establish themselves in business or self-employment in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to modify the immigration rules so that under the European Community's association agreements with Czechoslovakia, Hungry and Poland self-employed persons from those countries who own and direct their own businesses will be free to establish themselves in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My right hon. and learned Friend is considering what changes will need to be made to the immigration rules in order to comply with the provisions in the EC association agreements with Hungary and Poland on the establishment of their nationals in this country once the agreements come into force.

Police Radios

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he proposes to take to counter the use of scanners by criminals to monitor police radios.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Specialist units already use encrypted radios and many police forces are now purchasing such radios for more general use. This is the most effective way of protecting police communications.

East-West Migration

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what follow-up action the Government are taking on the conference on east-west migration arising from the Berlin conference referred to in the report of the Immigration and Nationality Department 1991-92.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My right hon. and learned Friend attended a ministerial conference in Budapest on 15 and 16 February. This was a follow-up to the Berlin conference, and among other things considered a series of recommendations for tackling illegal immigration from and through central and eastern Europe.

Foreign Enlistment Act 1870

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the prosecutions under the Foreign Enlistment Act 1870 in the last 10 years.

Mr. Jack: Records available centrally show no prosecutions in England and Wales from 1979 to 1991, which is provisional, under the Foreign Enlistment Act 1870.

Young Offenders

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of offenders in *(a)* the north-west and *(b)* England and Wales were aged under 21 years in the last year for which figures are avilable.

Mr. Jack: Information for 1991, which is provisional, is given in the table.

Number and percentage of offenders cautioned and found guilty at all courts in the North West region and England and Wales by age and type of offence, 1991[1]

Area/type of offence	*Aged under 21 years*						*All ages [= 100 per cent.]*		
	Cautioned		*Found guilty*		*Total found guilty or cautioned*		*Cautioned*	*Found guilty*	*Total found guilty or cautioned*
	Number	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*			
North West Region									
Indictable offences	17,324	68	19,197	36	26,521	46	25,316	53,917	79,233
Summary non-motoring offences	6,364	52	10,023	16	16,387	22	12,169	62,527	74,696
All offences (excluding summary motoring)	23,688	63	29,220	25	52,908	34	37,485	116,444	153,929
England and Wales									
Indictable offences	119,424	66	115,376	34	234,800	46	179,885	335,394	515,279
Summary non-motoring offences	38,649	39	63,279	14	101,928	19	98,880	450,558	549,438
All offences (excluding summary motoring)	158,073	57	178,655	23	336,728	32	278,765	785,952	1,064,717

[1] Provisional.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Royal Art Collection

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will give details of the charitable trust set up to administer the royal art collection.

Mr. Key: This is a matter for the director of the royal collection, who is secretary of the Royal Collection Trust and to whom the hon. Lady may wish to write.

Items in Lieu of Tax

Mr. Brandreth: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what offers in lieu of tax allocated there have been since his last announcement on 14 January, *Official Report*, column 774.

Mr. Brooke: Since my announcement on 14 January, I am pleased to inform the House of the allocation of items offered in lieu of taxation. A painting, "San Bernardino preaching in the Campo at Siena" by Domenico Beccafumi, together with a chalk study of the painting, will be allocated to the Fitzwilliam museum. Two diagrams by Michelangelo will be allocated to the British museum.

Windsor Castle

Mr. Trend: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a further statement on an independent fund for the restoration of Windsor castle to which he referred in his oral answer to the hon. Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) on 25 January, *Official Report*, column 695.

Mr. Brooke: I am pleased to say that following inquiries from a number of people who wish to assist with the restoration of Windsor castle, Coutts and Company, bankers are establishing a trust fund to receive donations for that purpose. This fund will be entirely independent of the royal household and the Government.

Contracting Out

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will provide figures for the reduction in numbers of posts as a result of contracting out since 1979 in his Department and agencies for which he has responsibility.

Mr. Key: The Department of National Heritage was established in April 1992 since when 27 industrial posts have been lost as a result of contracting out. There has been no loss of posts at the Historic Royal Palaces Agency in this period.

Quangos

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list all those non-departmental public bodies for which his Department is responsible which have the power to compel individuals, firms, companies or other institutions to carry out their instructions at the expense of the individuals, firms, companies or other institutions, and also to charge fees for the cost to the non-departmental public bodies of assessing the work which needed to be done.

Mr. Key: My Department is responsible for five non-departmental public bodies which have the power to compel individuals, firms, companies or other institutions to carry out their instructions. These are:

British Library
Broadcasting Complaints Commission
Broadcasting Standards Council
Football Licensing Authority
English Heritage

Of these, the Broadcasting Complaints Commission recovers the costs incurred for adjudications from the broadcasters.

TRANSPORT

Unseaworthy Vessels

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many ships' owners were gaoled for letting unseaworthy vessels sail as allowed for by the Merchant Shipping Acts in each of the past five years.

Mr. Norris: None.

Inshore Waters Forecast

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what instructions he has given to Her Majesty's coastguard concerning issuing to the public, or answering telephone inquiries from the public about, the inshore waters forecast for the United Kingdom.

Mr. Norris: Each coastguard rescue centre broadcasts on marine VHF radio Marinecall inshore weather forecasts for their local areas at four-hourly intervals, or every two hours when a strong wind warning is in force. The Shetland isles is an exception and is covered by an inshore forecast especially provided by the Meteorological Office and paid for by the Department of Transport. Marinecall information is a commercial undertaking through a British Telecom recorded message service and is supplied free to Her Majesty's coastguard for promulgation by VHF radio only. Her Majesty's coastguard has undertaken not to compromise the service provided and, therefore, directs telephone callers to the Marinecall recorded service. However, BBC inshore waters forecasts, which are in the public domain, are given by Her Majesty's coastguard upon request via radio or telephone.

MFV Pescado

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give the precise position of MFV Pescado at the time of its sinking; and whether this position is outside British territorial waters.

Mr. Norris: The wreck lies at Lat 50° 00·5′N, Long 4° 43·9′W which is outside United Kingdom territorial waters.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to investigate possible submarine damage to MFV Pescado.

Mr. Norris: The marine accident investigation branch inspectors considered every possibility during their investigation.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the deadline for the submission of compensation claims arising out of the sinking of MFV Pescado; and who is entitled to claim compensation.

Mr. Norris: Under the provisions of the Limitation Act 1980 claims in respect of death or personal injury have to be made within three years of the incident. Other claims in tort have to be made within six years. The dependants of any person who died may be in a position to make a claim; if they are minded to do so they should seek legal advice. If claims are made against the owner he cannot limit his liability in respect of crew members employed on the vessel.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to arrange for the MFV Pescado to be raised before the expiry of the deadline under which compensation claims must be made.

Mr. Norris: No.

Speed Limits

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to introduce automatic speed limits in rural villages between village signs.

Mr. Carlisle: The Department issued a policy document on speed limits and revised guidance on the criteria for setting local speed limits on 13 January. There are no plans to introduce automatic speed limits between village signs, as used in some other countries. The factors which determine the best site for a village name sign invariably differ from those for deciding the start of a speed limit. Speed limits need to be seen by drivers as reasonable if they are to be obeyed and combining the village and speed signs could result in many instances in a speed limit being applied before it is appropriate. There are severe penalties for breaking limits and drivers should know when they enter a new speed limit zone by passing a sign displaying a speed limit roundel.

MV Goldeneye

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what restrictions exist on a vessel of the type of MV Goldeneye attending a salvage outside United Kingdom territorial waters.

Mr. Norris: Restrictions on the salvage operations of vessels of the type of MV Goldeneye are governed by the terms of the load line or load line exemption certificate.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will publish further papers considered by the high-level forum for the channel tunnel rail link.

Mr. Freeman: Copies have been placed in the Library of the two papers considered by the high-level forum that I chaired in December. These are entitled "Proposed Consultation Arrangements" and "Developing Station and Junction Proposals".

Shipping (Radar Surveillance)

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what was the cost of operating radar surveillance of shipping in the English channel in each of the last three financial years;

(2) what estimate his Department has made of the capital cost and annual running costs of installing radar surveillance equipment to monitor shipping traffic in the Fair Isle straits, the Minches, the Pentland firth and the North channel.

Mr. Norris: The operating costs of the channel navigation information service—CNIS—comprise extra manpower required by Her Majesty's coastguard at Langdon battery Dover and at the technical services unit at Highcliffe, the maintenance of the radar system and ancillary equipment, and an aircraft to identify vessels infringing the traffic separation scheme. Figures for the last three years, in £000s, and the estimated outturn for 1992-93 are as follows:

	1989-90	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*[1]1992-93*
Manpower	87	89	101	113
Maintenance	357	303	389	550
Aircraft	129	120	139	100

[1] Estimate.

The manpower figures are estimated because they are not recorded separately within the budget for operating Langdon battery.

The radar system is being overhauled, with a new computer system being installed, at a total cost of £4·5 million. The maintenance costs this year have been higher because of this exercise but are expected to fall sharply when the new system is commissioned in April 1993.

The Department has not estimated the costs of installing and operating a similar system in any other area: this could be done only after a detailed study of the area concerned to determine what sites and equipment would be needed. The figures given for CNIS may not be indicative because some sites and equipment already available have been used, but they show the order of cost.

Radio Transponders

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations Her Majesty's Government have made to the International Maritime Organisation on the subject of equipping vessels with radio transponders; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: No representations have been made to the International Maritime Organisation—IMO—with regard to equipping vessels with radio transponders. However, the Department is actively considering their use in vessel traffic services at the International Association of Lighthouse Authorities, which has been tasked to undertake this work by the IMO.

Quangos

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all those non-departmental public bodies for which his Department is responsible, which have the power to compel individuals, firms, companies or other institutions to carry out their instructions at the expense of the individuals, firms, companies or other institutions, and also to charge fees for the cost to the non-departmental public bodies of assessing the work which needed to be done.

Mr. Norris: None of the non-departmental public bodies for which my right hon. Friend is responsible has such power.

Northern Ireland Railways

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 8 February, *Official Report*, column *418*, if he will list the property owned by British Rail in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Freeman: This is a matter for British Rail.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 8 February, *Official Report*, column *418*, if he will make a statement as to the implications for Northern Ireland of clause 132(3) of the Railways Bill.

Mr. Freeman: The implications for Northern Ireland of section 132(3) of the Railways Bill are minimal. The main provisions of part I of the Railways Bill do not extend to Northern Ireland. The restructuring provisions in part II and associated provisions in part III, which apply to the British Railways Board, are extended to Northern Ireland to enable the board to deal with any property, rights and liabilities it may have in Northern Ireland. Other provisions extend to Northern Ireland where they amend legislation which so extends.

Vehicle Testing

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what advice he has issued to vehicle testing stations; and if he will place the full details in the Library;

(2) what information he has on how many diesel cars have suffered engine damage as a result of the new smoke emission tests in the MOT test;

(3) what steps he has taken to inform the public of the diesel engine new smoke emission tests; what evaluation of alternative test methods which are less liable to cause engine damage has been made; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: MOT testing stations have been advised how to test diesel-engined vehicles, and with what equipment. They have been specifically instructed not to test vehicles where the engine is not in a satisfactory condition, and they have also been given guidance on how to establish this. I have placed in the Library a copy of the advice to MOT testing stations about the MOT diesel smoke check, together with the relevant extract from the MOT tester's manual about the test procedure.

The test involves measuring smoke density while the eingine is run to its maximum governed speed so as to impose a similar sort of load on the engine as it experiences in normal driving conditions. The only alternative to measuring smoke density during a free acceleration test would require the use of a dynamometer. This would be a very much more expensive investment than the smoke meters which have been in use since 1 January.

The purpose of the test and the procedure are described in an advisory note which MOT testing stations have been providing to applicants with diesel-engined vehicles before tests have been carried out. As the note explains, the test procedure is not harmful to properly maintained engines, but an engine may well need prior attention where it has not been maintained in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations.

Unfortunately I have received reports that there have been some cases where light-duty diesel engines have suffered damage during the metered test of smoke levels while the engine is under load, and I have therefore decided to suspend that part of the test temporarily as from today pending an investigation into these matters.

In the meantime motorists should continue to take diesel-engined vehicles only to MOT testing stations which have been authorised to test diesels, since they will still be continuing to check by eye that vehicles are not emitting excessive smoke or vapour at normal idling speed. Taken by itself, this visual check is not such an effective test because it does not indicate how an engine performs when a vehicle is out on the road. However, it will at least identify those vehicles with serious in-service performance deficiencies.

I hope that it will be possible to reinstate the metered test a little later in the year. Emissions testing during roadworthiness tests is an important feature of our policy on improving the environment, and if a diesel engine is putting out too much smoke we have a responsibility to ensure that the problem is rectified.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will require all vehicle testing stations to undertake MOT tests of diesel engines.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No, the decision on whether to invest in smoke-measuring equipment must be a matter for individual MOT testing stations to make. If we were to introduce a requirement that all stations should be able to test diesel-engined vehicles there would be substantial over-capacity, and a lot of equipment would be left standing idle for long periods of time.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to inform the owners of diesel cars and diesel light commercial vehicles of the need to ensure that their vehicles are serviced before being submitted for the Ministry of Transport test diesel smoke emission levels test.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Diesel-engined vehicles do not necessarily need to be serviced before the MOT test, although an engine may well need prior attention where it has not been maintained in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations. MOT stations have been providing an advisory note about this to all test applicants with diesel-engined vehicles before a test takes place. The note explains the purpose of the smoke check; the procedure involved; and it also advises against proceeding with a test in any case where an engine may not be in a fit state to be tested. In addition, testing stations have been instructed to review the service history of a vehicle with the applicant before starting the test, and to carry out a number of preliminary safety checks on the engine. I have placed a copy of the note and our instructions in the Library.

Unfortunately, notwithstanding the various precautions which have been taken, I have nevertheless received reports that there have been some cases where light-duty diesel engines have suffered damage during the metered test, and I have therefore decided to suspend that part of the test temporarily as from today pending an investigation into these matters.

East Coast Motorway

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the proposed east coast motorway from the Humber bridge towards London.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport to my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) on 9 July 1992, *Official Report*, columns *321-22*.

Birmingham Northern Relief Road

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the Birmingham northern relief road was expected to have been begun and completed before the tolling decision was taken.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: In May 1989, when it was announced that the Birmingham northern relief road would be privately financed, the Department estimated that a public sector scheme could not have opened until the mid-1990s, allowing for a three-year construction period. That estimate was however very tentative: the statutory procedures for the public scheme had not been completed; the implications of new national traffic forecasts had not been incorporated; and the availability of public finance could not be guaranteed.

Behavioural Research

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the behavioural research programme announced in the 1980s and on its progress and interim results.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The behavioural studies research programme was initiated in 1986. Its aim is to quantify how the accident risk of individual drivers and motor cyclists depends on age, driving experience, gender and a range of social and psychological factors.

The programme has identified those skills and attitudes which are important for safety on the road. It is now exploring the ways by which key skills such as hazard perception can be taught, and how attitudes and behaviours can be influenced. It is providing a sound basis for measures to help reduce the number of casualties on our roads, in particular those associated with young or inexperienced drivers.

There is a continuing programme of work, involving the Transport Research Laboratory and 10 universities, which so far has resulted in more than 40 publications in the scientific press.

Heathrow Express

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the current forecast timetable for *(a)* the rail track charges for the Heathrow express to be agreed and *(b)* the Heathrow express to start operating.

Mr. Norris: I hope that negotiations between the British Airports Authority and British Rail on track access charges and other matters will be concluded shortly. It ought then to be possible for the service to begin operating in 1997.

Rail Improvements

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the capital cost and the net present value of the proposed rail improvements at Borough Market and of the Thameslink 2000 project.

Mr. Norris: Preliminary estimates by British Rail suggest that the net capital cost of the Thameslink 2000 project as a whole would be about £1 billion; that it would have a negative financial net present value, discounted at

8 per cent., of about £600 million but positive net present value of about £1 billion if non-priced benefits were taken into account.

The element of capital costs in the Borough Market area is estimated to be in the order of £80 million to £90 million; no meaningful net present value can be attached to this element of the project in isolation.

British Rail is continuing its appraisal work.

Disabled Employees

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of employees in his Department are registered disabled.

Mr. Norris: At 1 July 1992, the latest date for which figures are available, 1·3 per cent. of the total work force of the Department of Transport and its agencies were registered as disabled. It is not possible to establish the total number of departmental staff with disabilities because many people with disabilities prefer not to register.

Plutonium

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the transportation by air of plutonium in containers which do not meet the standards stipulated by the International Atomic Energy Agency; when this method of transporting plutonium began; why this method of transportation was chosen; and what assessment has been made of the likely effects if any of the aeroplanes which are used to transport plutonium were to be involved in a crash.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I know of no instance when plutonium has been transported in or over the UK in containers that did not meet the standards stipulated by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

In its report "The Transport of Civil Plutonium by Air", published in 1988, the advisory committee on the safe transport of radioactive material concluded that the health risk to people from the current transport of civil plutonium by air to and from the United Kingdom is not only extremely remote but also acceptable.

Contracting Out

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will provide figures for the reduction in numbers of posts as a result of contracting out since 1979 in his Department and agencies for which he has responsibility.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I regret that the information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. We will, however, be reporting on the outcome of this year's market testing programme.

Statutory Instruments

Ms. Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many statutory instruments were laid before Parliament by his Department in each year since 1980.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The number of statutory instruments laid before Parliament by my Department in each of the years 1980 to 1992 was as follows:

	Number
1980	66
1981	76
1982	57
1983	64
1984	98
1985	99
1986	148
1987	74
1988	86
1989	114
1990	85
1991	123
1992	127

Air Freight Facilities

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to improve air freight facilities between Scotland and EC member states; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The third package of aviation liberalisation measures, which came into effect on 1 January, has introduced a fully liberal air freight market in the EC. This means that routes between the United Kingdom and other EC member states can be operated by any EC licensed air carrier. The provision of facilities for such operations is for the carriers and airports concerned.

Oil Tankers

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of how much time it would take for a sea-going tug to render assistance in the event of a tanker getting into trouble in the Minch.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 12 February 1993]:* Such an assessment is not possible without defining the particular circumstances of the case including weather and the location of the casualty. Provision of emergency tug assistance is a matter between the owner or master of the casualty and tug suppliers.

Tankers

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent assessment he has made of the environmental impact of tankers flushing out their tanks in the North sea.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 15 February 1993]:* Efforts continue to deter tankers from illegally flushing their tanks in the North sea and to detect tankers that may do so. It is impracticable to undertake an assessment of the environmental impact of such flushing because of the difficulties of distinguishing between traces of hydrocarbons present in sea water due to tank flushing and those from other sources.

Bicycles

Mr. Bell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what guidance his Department has given regarding implementation of the requirement of imported bicycles to meet current trading standards regulations.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: As the question falls to the Department of Transport, I have been asked to reply.

The sale of bicycles is regulated by the Pedal Bicycles (Safety) Regulations 1984 (SI 1984/145 as amended by

SI 1984/1057) made under what is now the Consumer Protection Act 1987. These apply the relevant British Standard—BS—and will shortly be updated in line with the latest BS published last year. The regulations, which are enforceable by trading standards officers, cover the supply of all bicycles, whether imported or not.

Radioactive Substances

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment Her Majesty's Government have made of the proposal for a Council regulation on shipments of radioactive substances within the European Community (Com (92) 520 final) delivered by the European Commission to the United Kingdom Presidency of the European Council on 7 December 1992.

Mr. McLoughlin: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the explanatory memorandum number 11035/92 submitted by the Employment Department on 10 December 1992. A further supplementary explanatory memorandum will be submitted shortly.

EDUCATION

Further Education Colleges (Auditors)

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what restrictions there are on colleges of further education after 1 April appointing the same firm of auditors to undertake both internal and external audit functions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: Colleges entering the new further education sector on 1 April may use one firm to provide internal and external audit services. The Further Education Funding Council has advised colleges intending to use only one firm that they should satisfy themselves that the arrangements will provide an effective service; and that they should be able to satisfy the council's audit service that each role is clearly defined, that both sets of reporting requirements are fully met and that the internal audit coverage will not be limited to an assessment of the systems and controls that are carried out by an external auditor in forming an opinion. Colleges have also been advised by the council to ensure that their selection process ensures real competition.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what arrangements he is making to extend the responsibilities of the Audit Commission to encompass colleges of further education and grant-maintained schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: The Education Bill currently before Parliament includes proposals to allow the Audit Commission to carry out value-for-money studies for the Funding Agency for Schools. The commission is already empowered to undertake similar work for the Further Education Funding Council. The district audit service may, under current arrangements, compete with other companies to provide audit services for grant-maintained schools and, after 1 April, further education corporations, if it chooses to do so.

Primary and Secondary Education (Funding)

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the basis for the difference between funding of primary and secondary school children; if he will make it his policy to fund children from the ages of five to 16 years on a national curriculum basis; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The current balance of funding between the primary and secondary phases reflects local education authorities' decisions about relative needs and priorities. Similarly, it is for local education authorities—LEAs—to decide the basis of funding for compulsory school education, within the resources available to them. Spending available per pupil in nursery, primary and secondary schools increased in real terms by over 45 per cent. between 1979-80 and 1990-91. LEAs' planned spending in 1992-93 was around 5 per cent. higher in real terms than LEA spending in 1990-91.

GCSE (Science)

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what percentage of pupils achieved the highest grades in Sc 1, Sc 2, Sc 3 and Sc 4 in the recent pilot studies for the new GCSE science exam.

Mr. Forth: The purpose of these pilots was to test the examining and awarding processes, not the pupils. Those who took part will be taking GCSE examinations this summer, and had not completed the GCSE syllabus at the time of the trials. The marks are not therefore significant as predictors of GCSE grades.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will review the criteria to be applied in assessing Sc 1—the practical investigations—GCSE science.

Mr. Forth: Criteria for GCSE syllabuses in science were published by the School Examinations and Assessment Council in June 1992. I know of no reason why my right hon. Friend should review those criteria.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what consultations his Department had with organisations representing experienced teachers before introducing GCSE science.

Mr. Forth: Before the GCSE was introduced for all subjects in 1986, the Department undertook extensive consultations with a wide range of organisations and individuals, including teachers and their representative bodies.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the estimated annual cost of providing the helpline to answer questions from the public on grant-maintained status for schools.

Mr. Forth: The helpline is a pilot scheme which began on 1 February and will run for at least six weeks. Decisions about extending the service will be made in due course in the light of experience of the pilot.

The estimated running costs of the pilot are £25,000. A further sum, estimated at £200,000, is being spent to inform the public of the availability of the service in the national press and magazines.

Quangos

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list all those non-departmental public bodies, for which his Department is responsible, which have the power to compel individuals, firms, companies or other institutions to carry out their instructions at the expense and also to charge fees for the cost to the non-departmental public bodies of assessing the work which needed to be done.

Mr. Boswell: None of the non-departmental public bodies for which this Department is responsible may compel anyone to carry out instructions at their own expense while at the same time charging fees to cover costs incurred for assessing work deemed necessary by a public body.

Academic Results

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will set out academic results as indicated by five GCSE A-C grades, aggregated for grant-maintained schools and aggregated for non-grant-maintained schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: In England, the proportion of pupils aged 16 at the end of the academic year 1991-92 in grant-maintained secondary schools gaining five or more grades C or better at GCSE was provisionally 45·2 per cent. The corresponding proportion for other maintained schools was 35 per cent.

Nursery Education

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what statistics are available on the educational achievements of children who received pre-school nursery education relative to children who did not receive nursery education.

Mr. Forth: The Department does not collect statistics on this issue. Various research findings suggest that nursery education has benefits in preparing many children for their primary schooling. There is no conclusive evidence of its longer-term benefits or of its cost effectiveness relative to that of other forms of under-five provision.

PRIME MINISTER

Royal Family (Taxation)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral statement of 11 February, *Official Report*, column 1111, at which tax office the tax affairs of Her Majesty the Queen and the Prince of Wales will be administered; if any additional *(a)* training and *(b)* security measures are proposed; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The chairman of the Board of Inland Revenue, who is a signatory of the memorandum of understanding, is responsible for the administrative arrangements relating to the tax affairs of Her Majesty the Queen and His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales. I have no doubt that he will ensure appropriate levels of training and security.

As with other taxpayers, confidentiality and security are important considerations. That is why details relating to where the tax affairs of the Queen and Prince of Wales will be administered will not be released.

Official Visits

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister when he next plans an official visit to Southwark or Bermondsey.

The Prime Minister: I have no immediate plans to do so.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 16 February.

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 16 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Ministers (Resignation)

Dr. Wright: To ask the Prime Minister what are the circumstances in which he would require Ministers to resign.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 9 February 1993]:* I would not expect to have to do so. All ministerial offices are at the disposal of the Prime Minister.

HEALTH

Regional Allocations

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when her Department will undertake the review of weighted capitation for regional allocations referred to in paragraph 232 of the report of the inquiry into London's health service, medical education and research; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: The review will take place during 1993-94 with a view to implementing any agreed changes to the formula in 1995-96 allocations.

Brook Hospital

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons the constituent of the hon. Member for Woolwich, national insurance No. PW130335D, cannot be discharged from the Brook hospital to appropriate care in the community.

Mr. Yeo: I will write to the hon. Member.

Magnetic Resonance Scanners

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish a table showing the number of magnetic resonance scanners in each NHS region per 1,000 population and the number of procedures carried out on each scanner between April and October 1992.

Mr. Sackville: The number of magnetic resonance scanners, including both national health service and private in each NHS region per million population is as follows:

England:	*Number*
East Anglian	0·96
Mersey	1·25
Northern	1·30
North East Thames	3·17
North West Thames	3·63
North Western	1·75
Oxford	1·95
South East Thames	1·09
South West Thames	2·69
South Western	1·84
Trent	1·28
Wessex	0·68
West Midlands	1·15
Yorkshire	0·82
Scotland:	2·16
Wales:	1·04
Northern Ireland:	0·35

Details of the number of procedures carried out on each scanner between April and October 1992 is not held centrally.

Limited List Prescribing

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 2 February, *Official Report,* column *152,* if she will name the pharmaceutical companies on whose behalf assurances were sought that the limited list regulations would not be extended; and on what dates the inquirers were informed by her Department that at that time there were no plans to extend the selected list scheme.

Dr. Mawhinney: Such detailed information about correspondence between the Department and individual pharmaceutical companies is treated in confidence.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to make a statement on the precise arrangements for the inclusion of a further 10 therapeutic categories of drugs which may now be included on the selected list.

Dr. Mawhinney: We shall make an announcement after we have received advice from the advisory committee on national health service drugs.

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many drugs are on the market in each of the 10 categories proposed for addition to the limited list.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information available relates to the number of different preparations dispensed in 1991 under the national health service in England in each of the categories. The following figures are for items dispensed by community pharmacists and appliance contractors, dispensing doctors and personal administration.

	Number
Antidiarrhoeal drugs	43
Antihistamines, hyposensitisation, and allergic disorders	156
Hypnotics and anxiolytics	156
Appetite suppressants	12
Treatment of vaginal and vulval conditions	52
Contraceptives	60
Anaemias and some other blood disorders	146
Drugs for the relief of soft-tissue inflammation	112
Drugs acting on the ear and drugs acting on the nose	130
Skin	1,776

Road Accidents (Charges)

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what statistics she keeps on the extent to which health authorities levy a charge for treating patients involved in a road accident.

Mr. Sackville: Information concerning charges levied under the Road Traffic Act 1988 is contained in the summarised accounts of health authorities and national health service trusts.

Psychiatric Beds

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many psychiatric beds there were in 1986 and at the most recent date in *(a)* rural areas and *(b)* urban areas.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

NHS Trusts

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to respond to the first report from the Health Committee of Session 1992-93 on "NHS Trusts: Interim Conclusions and Proposals for Future Inquiries", House of Commons Paper No. 321.

Dr. Mawhinney: We expect to respond shortly.

Contracting Out

Mr. Wells: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her estimate of cumulative savings to the national health service from the contracting out of support services; and what plans she has to extend contracting out.

Mr. Sackville: Support services in the national health service have been contracted out since the earliest days and we have no estimate of the cumulative savings involved. It is estimated that in 1990-91 there were savings in excess of £125 million as a result of the market testing initiative started in 1983.

The plans for extending market testing in the NHS were set out in chapter 4 of the White Paper "Competing for Quality", Cm 1730 November 1991.

Statutory Instruments

Ms. Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many statutory instruments were laid before Parliament by her Department in each year since 1980.

Mr. Sackville: The available information is shown in the table. Information relating to previous years is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Number of statutory instruments laid

1991	*1992*
91	112

Mentally Ill Patients

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds were available in locked wards for mentally ill patients in *(a)* 1984 and *(b)* 1992-93.

Mr. Yeo: This information is not collected centrally. Reports from health authorities suggest that there were 639 such beds in local district facilities in 1991, compared with 1,163 in 1986. This excludes places in regional secure units and other facilities for patients needing care in conditions of medium security.

Home Helps

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for health what is the percentage change in the number of home helps in Northumberland since 1979.

Mr. Yeo: The latest available information, at 30 September 1991, shows 513 whole-time equivalent home helps employed by Northumberland social services, an increase of 33 per cent. since 1979.

Schizophrenia

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what training is given to GPs in diagnosing schizophrenia.

Mr. Yeo: During basic medical education and vocational training, general practice trainees are trained to recognise psychiatric disorders including schizophrenia. Of the three years of formal general practice vocational training, two years are hospital-based. During this time over 40 per cent. of trainees currently choose a six-month period in a psychiatric department as a senior house officer.

Principals in general practice update and extend their knowledge of psychiatric disorders under the system of continuing education funded in all national health service regions.

All general practioners can refer patients for specialist attention both to confirm a diagnosis of schizophrenia and to obtain assistance in the management of this disorder.

Additionally community psychiatric nursing posts have been established in many districts to provide a psychiatric input into primary health care and can act as a resource for all members of the primary health care team, including GP trainees.

Contraceptive Pill

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research she has done into the medical effects to women of restricting the prescription of the oral contraception pill to the cheaper varieties.

Mr. Sackville: In advising the Health Departments on which contraceptives should not be available for prescription under the national health service, the advisory committee on NHS drugs will be required to ensure that all clinical need can be provided as economically as possible. In formulating its advice, I would expect the committee to have regard to the findings of relevant research.

Merseyside Ambulance Service

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the operation of Merseyside ambulance service.

Mr. Sackville: Mersey regional ambulance service national health service trust consistently achieves the national standard laid down for emergency call response times. The trust is constantly striving to improve services to patients.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital calls were made by the Merseyside ambulance service in each year since 1987.

Mr. Sackville: Information on hospital calls is not held centrally. Information is available on patient journeys conducted by the Mersey regional ambulance service as follows:

Patient Journeys (thousands)

	Emergency	Urgent	Special Planned	Total
1987-88	108·5	29·0	649·0	786·5
1988-89	101·4	28·0	641·3	770·7
[1]1989-90	101·4	24·0	433·0	558·5
1990-91	103·4	27·2	576·0	706·5
[2]1991-92	102·1	38·4	561·0	701·5

[1] Due to industrial action during this period, 1989-90 figures do not reflect the total activity in the year.

[2] Figures are provisional.

Rehabilitation Facilities Elderly People (Care)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will lay down guidelines on basic minimal standards of service for elderly patients discharged into community care;

(2) if she will establish a policy of active rehabilitation for those people who require a short period of more integrated and intensive care than is possible in their homes.

Mr. Yeo: A wide range of rehabilitation facilities exists within the national health service and local social services authorities. Decisions about rehabilitation services are for the professional judgment of those concerned with the individual case.

Free Prescriptions

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many free prescriptions were dispensed in the year 1991-92; what was the figure in 1978-79; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: Information is not available in the precise form requested. In 1979 an estimated 185·5 million prescribed items—about 60 per cent. of the total number —were dispensed free of charge by community pharmacists and appliance contractors. By 1992 the number had risen to 311·9 million—about 80 per cent. of the total.

Hearing Impairment

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice she has given local authorities about their duty in law to instal minicoms in the homes of people with severe hearing impairment where need is being assessed and irrespective of whether the individual disabled person already has a telephone; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: We expect local authorities to be aware of their statutory duty, under section 2(1)(h) of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970, to provide assistance to disabled people with the provision of a telephone, and any special equipment needed to use it, irrespective of whether the individual disabled person already has a telephone, where they accept that there is an assessed need. Each case is assessed on its own merits by the local authority.

Quangos

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list all those non-departmental public bodies, for which her Department is responsible, which have the power to compel individuals, firms, companies or other institutions to carry out their instructions at the expense of the individuals, firms, companies or other institutions, and also to charge fees for the cost to the non-departmental public bodies of assessing the work which needed to be done.

Dr. Mawhinney: There are two non-departmental public bodies for which the Department is responsible which have such powers. The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, under section 16 of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990, has the power to charge a fee for granting licences. Licences are required by centres providing treatments involving IVF, AID, egg and embryo donation and centres undertaking embryo research and storage of gametes and embryos.

The National Radiological Protection Board, under section 1 of the Radiological Protection Act 1970, has the power to charge for providing technical services to persons concerned with radiation hazards, but no power to compel such persons to comply with that advice.

West Midlands RHA

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what level of severance payment was approved by her Department in connection with the resignation of Sir James Ackers as chairman of the West Midlands regional health authority; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar) on 15 February at column *81*.

Wessex RHA

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she is taking to hold a full investigation of mismanagement in the Wessex regional health authority; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: Like any other regional health authority, Wessex regional health authority is held to account through the national health service management executive which monitors its performance throughout the year.

Health Authority Chairmen

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list all regional health authority chairmen who have received payments on retirement additional to their salary in the last five years, and the amounts of such payments in each year.

Dr. Mawhinney: With the agreement of the Treasury, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has decided to make a payment of £10,000 to Sir James Ackers under the provisions of paragraph 9(3) of schedule 5 to the National Health Service Act 1977. There have been no other such payments in the last five years.

Extra-contractual Referrals

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish the recent guidance issued by the management executive on extra-contractual referrals and the information to be made available to patients in the light of any deferral of treatment.

Dr. Mawhinney: No. It is not appropriate to publish guidance which simply deals with the administrations of the extra-contractual referrals system. Current good practice requires patients to be kept informed of decisions affecting their treatment.

All health authorities have set local charter standards and many have published their own local charters. These include access to detailed information about local health services including waiting times for treatment.

GP Practices (Staff)

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the number of *(a)* community nurses, *(b)* health visitors and *(c)* social workers employed in (i) fund-holding general practitioner practices and (ii) non-fund holding general practitioner practices.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not held centrally. Data on practice staff employed by all general practitioner practices are available, but the categories of staff are differently defined. The total whole-time equivalent numbers in England in these categories as at 1 April 1992 are given in the table.

	Number
Management and Administration	6,069
Secretariat and Clerical	12,539
Receptionist	19,508
Computer Operator	1,133
Practice Nurse	8,945
Dispenser	1,014
Physiotherapist	77
Chiropodist	9
Interpreter/Link Worker	24
Counsellor	168
Message Taking	38
Other Duties	615
Total	50,139

Hygiene Regulations

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she is taking to ensure sensitive and appropriate enforcement of hygiene regulations.

Mr. Sackville: In 1991 the Department of Health issued statutory code of practice No. 9 advising environmental health officers to conduct food hygiene inspections according to the relative risk posed to public health. A copy is available in the Library.

The Department works closely with the Local Authorities Co-ordinating body on Food and Trading Standards—LACOTS—a local government central body whose purpose is to co-ordinate trading standards and food hygiene activity throughout the United Kingdom. It gives advice to local authorities on common enforcement problems.

LACOTS has, with our encouragement, recently issued a circular to all environmental health departments giving advice on the enforcement of hygiene requirements in premises run by voluntary and charitable organisations. The circular advocates sensible enforcement based on assessment of risk to public health. A copy will be placed in the Library.

NHS Capital Expenditure

Mr. Kynoch: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the value of capital expenditure in the NHS in the years 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93; and what was the split between hospital building and equipment.

Mr. Sackville *[pursuant to his reply, 1 February 1992, c. 72]:* I regret that there was an error in my previous reply. The corrected and updated figures are as follows.

Gross NHS capital expenditure in 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93 was £1,603 million, £1,645 million and £2,089 million respectively—the figure for 1992-93 is the estimate made for spring supply.

In 1990-91 capital spending within hospital and community health services was divided as follows:

	Per cent.
Building and engineering works	61·3
Equipment and furniture	12·8
Vehicles	1·6
Other	24·4

Figures for later years are not yet available.

SCOTLAND

GP Fund Holders

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what new services will be provided by fund-holding general practitioners; and if he will publish the proposed remuneration scales.

Mr. Stewart: The regulations providing for the new services announced by my noble Friend the Minister of State on 26 January are in the process of being compiled. In broad terms they will permit GP fund holders, where appropriate and qualified and with the prior approval of the health board, to be reimbursed from the fund for providing certain specified diagnostic and minor surgical procedures for their own patients. There will be further discussion with health boards and the profession before the details of how the new services will operate are finalised

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many general practitioner fund holders he expects there to be in each health board area by January 1994; and how many there are currently in each area.

Mr. Stewart: Latest information from health boards indicates the expected numbers of general practitioner fund holders from January 1994 will be as set out in the table.

	Number of GP fund-holders	
Health board	*Currently*	*Expected by January 1994*
Argyll and Clyde	1	5
Ayrshire and Arran	Nil	3
Borders	Nil	1
Dumfries and Galloway	Nil	Nil
Fife	Nil	3
Forth Valley	Nil	5
Grampian	5	25
Greater Glasgow	2	4
Highland	Nil	1
Lanarkshire	Nil	14
Lothian	1	7
Orkney	Nil	Nil
Shetland	Nil	Nil
Tayside	1	8
Western Isles	Nil	Nil
Total	10	76

Hospitals

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will review the admission policies of intensive care units to ensure surgical patients are not deferred or transferred to another hospital pre-operatively because of budget requirements.

Mr. Stewart: Admission policies for intensive care units are primarily the responsibility of the relevant health board. Admission to an intensive care unit or transfer to another hospital should be determined by clinical decision.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what evidence he has received of general practitioners using the emergency bed service for obtaining admissions because of ward closures by providers.

Mr. Stewart: None. The admission procedures employed by the health boards in Scotland work well.

Health Service Property

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate has been made of the cost of undertaking all the identified backlog in repairs and maintenance to health service properties.

Mr. Stewart: Health boards estimate that at 31 March 1992 the expenditure required to put the essential estate in a sound physical condition was £240 million. This figure embraces backlog maintenance and such other work as the replacement of building elements which have reached the end of their useful life.

Contracting Out

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide figures for the reduction in numbers of posts as a result of contracting out since 1979 in his Department and agencies for which he has responsibility.

Mr. Lang: Information on the reduction in personnel as a result of contracting out work for the period 1979 to 1986-87 is not readily available. In the years 1987-88 to 1991-92 there was a reduction of 117·5 full-time equivalent posts in my Department and agencies as a result of contracting out.

Quangos

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all those non-departmental public bodies for which his Department is responsible which have the power to compel individuals, firms, companies or other institutions to carry out their instructions at the expense of the individuals, firms, companies or other institutions, and also to charge fees for the cost to the non-departmental public bodies of assessing the work which needed to be done.

Mr. Lang: This information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Genetic Fingerprinting

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what facilities are available to Scottish police forces in relation to genetic fingerprinting techniques; what plans he has to increase or develop these facilities; if he will list the resources he has allocated to *(a)* research and development and *(b)* provision of such services in the current financial year; what consultations he has had with chief police officers about genetic fingerprinting; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 January 1993]:* Scottish police forces have access to DNA testing or "genetic fingerprinting" facilities provided by police forensic laboratories, the Forensic Science Service for England and Wales and the private sector. Police authorities determine the resources allocated to their forces, on which police grant is paid at 51 per cent. of net expenditure. It is for chief constables to decide how the resources available to them are deployed. Scottish Office officials have discussed the issues relating to the holding of DNA test records with chief constables in the Scottish criminal record office controlling committee.

Radiation Emergencies

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he has taken in his Department to implement the Public Information for Radiation Emergencies Regulations 1992.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 8 February 1993]:* These regulations, in so far as they embrace Scotland, apply to employers who conduct undertakings in relation to which a radiation emergency is reasonably foreseeable, and to regional and islands councils. The Scottish Office has no direct responsibility for their implementation.

Ambulance Services

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will authorise an inquiry into the management of the ambulance services in Renfrewshire.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 4 February 1993]:* No.

EC Initiatives

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 17 December 1992, *Official Report*, columns *465-66*, if he will list the projects.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 4 February 1993]:* The information requested is given in the tables:

	£	*Approximate per cent. of Strathclyde allocation*
Inverclyde		
World Yachting Grand Prix	211,000	1·2
Property Improvement Grants	205,000	1·2
Industrial Units at Larkfield Industrial Estate	131,500	0·8
Small Business Assistance Scheme	94,000	0·5
Capping Blairmore Road Tip	34,500	0·2
Custom House Quay: Environmental Improvement Phase 1	215,000	1·3
East India Harbour: Improvement Phase 1	50,000	0·3
East India Harbour: Infrastructure Works Phase 1	470,000	2·8
Custom House Quay: Infrastructure Works Phase 2	324,000	1·9
Srathclyde Business Centre, Ladyburn	350,000	2·0
TOTAL	2,085,000	12·2
Strathclyde excluding Inverclyde		
Clydebank Environmental Improvements	741,000	4·3
Geotechnical Survey	20,000	0·1
Linthouse Workspace	365,500	2·2
TOTAL	1,126,500	6·6
As yet unattributed	13,896,793	81·2
Total Strathclyde Allocation	17,108,293	100·0

	£	*Approx percent of Fife allocation*
Fife		
Burntisland Environmental Imp Phase 1	344,000	12.5
Regional Enterprise Grant	187,500	6.8
Robinson Crusoes Underwater World	175,000	6.4
KDC Small Firms Assistance Schemes	100,000	3.6
Business Development Grants	94,500	3.5
Enterprise Levenmouth	93,000	3.4
Regional Enterprise Grant	33,433	1.2
Start-up Business Assistance Grant	30,000	1.1
Forth Rail Bridge North Cantilever Env Imp	28,000	1.0
Meadowfield—Refurbishment of Administration Block	3,500	0.1
TOTAL	1,088,933	39.6
As yet unattributed	1,660,986	60.4
TOTAL FIFE ALLOCATION	2,749,919	100.0

Note: The authentic figures for allocations are expressed in Ecu. The totals expressed in sterling at the exchange rate of £1 = 1.23 Ecu are for illustrative purposes only. The final sterling sums available to the programmes will depend on the exchange rates at the time payments by the Commission are received.

Market Testing

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many staff in his Department are assigned to the market testing programme; how much the programme has cost his Department since November 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 15 February 1993]:* A new division was established in my Department in August 1992 to co-ordinate the market testing programme. The six staff in the division are not exclusively assigned to market testing work. The division calls on the assistance of other Scottish Office staff and external consultants when required. The cost of the programme, including staff costs and fees for consultancy work, for the period November 1991 to the end of December 1992, is estimated at £425,000.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all the market tests that have taken place in his Department since November 1991; whether the result was the maintenance of in-house provision or whether the service was contracted out; what was the name of the successful contractor where appropriate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 15 February 1993]:* The information requested is set out in the table.

Market tested activity	*Result*	*Name of contractor*
Property management at Scottish Police College	Contracted out	Povall Worthington
Toll collection at Erskine Bridge	Contracted out	Apcoa Parking (UK) Ltd
Management and Maintenance of Court Houses (5 contracts)	Contracted out	Webster and Company Bernard Thorpe Ryden (3 contracts)
Solicitor's Office: conveyancing, debt recovery and court work (part)	Retained in house	
Building and plan maintenance for the Scottish Fire Service Training School	Contracted out	Bell-Ingram
Property management, Marine Laboratory, Aberdeen	Contracted out	Bell-Ingram
Audit of 2 National Health Service Trusts (2 contracts)	Contracted out	Coopers and Lybrand KPMG

Councillors' Allowances

Mr. McMasterster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the advantage allowance *(a)* including and *(b)* excluding expenses paid to elected members of (i) regional and (ii) district councils in Scotland in the last financial year; what is the projected average in each of the same categories in the current financial year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 20 January 1993]:* The Scottish Office Environment Department does not hold details of the allowances paid to individual local authority members. Each authority decides on its own scheme within the requirements of the Local Authorities Etc (Allowances) (Scotland) Regulations 1991, as amended. Similarly, the Department does not hold details of the payment of travelling, day or night subsistence allowances to members which are payable outwith the scheme.

Rates of all allowances will continue to be reviewed on a regular basis.

KS Properties

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 17 December 1992, *Offical Report,* column *457,* what information his Department had on sales by KS Properties Ltd. of extensive land and buildings assets immediately prior to approving the writing-off of moneys due under mortgage deed by that company to the Scottish Development Agency.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 22 January 1993]:* I shall write to my hon. Friend.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Housing Benefit

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list (i) the expenditure on housing benefit rate rebates or poll tax benefit or community charge benefit in each region and nation for 1988-89, 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92 and (ii) the number of claimants of each benefit in each region or nation; and if he will express the payments as a figure of expenditure per head in each region or nation.

Mr. Burt: The available information is in the tables:

(i) Expenditure (£ millions)[1]

Region	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*
South East (excluding London)	183	186	361	245
London	213	225	290	209
North (including Cumbria)	90	97	181	130
Yorkshire and Humberside	117	128	217	164
East Midlands	87	87	182	136
East Anglia	35	38	80	70
South West	74	82	173	126
West Midlands	149	159	273	209
North West (excluding Cumbria)	212	234	372	279
England	1,160	1,237	2,131	1,568
Wales	48	51	94	44
Scotland	170	209	224	168

Note:

[1] The expenditure figures are from information supplied by local authorities and represent the authorities' claim for benefit paid and not subsidy received. The 1991-92 are mainly from pre-audit claims.

(ii) Caseload (Number of claimants)[1]

Region	*1988-89*	[2]*1989-90*	[3]*1990-91*	*1991-92*
South East (excluding London)	666,200	637,200	929,000	891,000
London	645,300	620,800	724,400	732,700
North (including Cumbria)	365,900	356,500	504,200	446,500
Yorkshire and Humberside	504,500	493,300	664,500	635,100
East Midlands	325,000	313,000	430,300	392,100
East Anglia	148,200	141,700	279,000	257,700
South West	326,300	319,300	477,100	453,400
West Midlands	522,400	498,900	687,800	691,000
North West (excluding Cumbria)	700,200	694,100	960,300	875,500
All England	4,204,000	4,074,700	5,656,600	5,734,900
Wales	253,700	251,800	383,700	324,600
Scotland	624,700	850,300	690,600	640,300

[1] The numbers given are in benefit units and are averages of the four quarters figures for each year, including estimates for non responding authorities. A benefit unit may be a single person or a couple.

[2] The Community Charge was introduced in Scotland in April 1989. The figure given for Scotland for 1989-90 is the Community Charge rebate caseload.

[3] The Community Charge replaced domestic rates in England and Wales in April 1990. All figures for 1990-91 and 1991-92, therefore, refer to Community Charge Benefit.

(iii) Expenditure per case (£/year)[1]

Region	*1988-89*	[2]*1989-90*	[3]*1990-91*	*1991-92*
South East (excluding London)	270	290	390	280
London	330	360	400	280
North (including Cumbria)	250	270	360	290
Yorkshire and Humberside	230	260	330	260
East Midlands	270	280	420	350
East Anglia	240	270	290	270
South West	230	260	360	280
West Midlands	280	320	400	300
North West (excluding Cumbria)	300	340	390	320
England	280	300	380	290
Wales	190	200	240	140
Scotland	270	250	320	260

[1] The caseloads and expenditures from which the average amounts per case are derived are not measured in the same way. The caseloads are from four point in time counts for each year.

Expenditure figures refer to the whole year.

Amounts of benefit refer to the benefit unit (including couples) and, therefore, in 1990-91 and 1991-92, should not be linked with average Community Charges, which are expressed as the charge per person.

[2] Due to the introduction of Community Charge in Scotland in April 1989, the 1989-90 figure for Scotland is for Community Charge rebate.

[3] All figures for 1990-91 and 1991-92 refer to Community Charge Benefit.

Pensioners

Mr. Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what information he has on the changes in income each year of pensioners who retired in 1979.

Miss Widdecombe: Data on the average incomes of the same cohort of pensioners for successive years are not available.

Contracting Out

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide figures for the reduction in numbers of posts as a result of contracting out since 1979 in his Department and agencies for which he has responsibility.

Miss Widdecombe: Information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Disabled Employees

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of employees in his Department is registered disabled.

Mr. Burt: On 1 July 1992, 1·7 per cent. of staff employed in the Department of Social Security were registered disabled. This figure excludes staff with disabilities who choose not to register.

National Insurance Contributions

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the additional revenue generated in a full year from the abolition of employees' national insurance contributions upper earnings limit.

Miss Widdecombe: If the upper earnings limit for employees' contributions was abolished, the additional revenue yield for 1993-94 would be about 2·9 billion. About 3 million employees would have to pay extra national insurance contributions as a result.

Pensions

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the value of the basic state pension as a proportion of gross average earnings in the United Kingdom for each year since 1978.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested in relation to Great Britain is in the table.

Year	*Age*	*Basic State Pension as a per cent. of gross average earnings*[1] *Single per cent.*	*Couple per cent.*
November 1978	under 80	23·2	37·1
	80 and over	23·5	37·7
November 1979	under 80	23·2	37·1
	80 and over	23·4	37·6
November 1980	under 80	22·6	36·1
	80 and over	22·8	36·6
November 1981	under 80	22·4	35·8
	80 and over	22·5	36·1
November 1982	under 80	23·1	36·9
	80 and over	23·2	37·3
November 1983	under 80	21·7	34·8
	80 and over	21·9	35·1
November 1984	under 80	21·4	34·3
	80 and over	21·6	34·6
November 1985	under 80	21·4	34·3
	80 and over	21·6	34·6
July 1986	under 80	20·5	32·8
	80 and over	20·6	33·0
April 1987	under 80	19·9	31·8
	80 and over	20·0	32·1
April 1988	under 80	18·8	30·2
	80 and over	19·0	30·4
April 1989	under 80	18·2	29·1
	80 and over	18·3	29·3
April 1990	under 80	17·8	28·5
	80 and over	17·9	28·7
April 1991	under 80	18·3	29·2
	80 and over	18·4	29·4
April 1992	under 80	17·8	28·5
	80 and over	17·9	28·6

[1] Average earnings are derived from the Department of Employment's New Earnings Survey (Great Britain) estimates of all adult earnings. Equivalent figures for the UK are not readily available.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what information he has about the value of state pensions as a proportion of gross average earnings in each member state of the European Community.

Miss Widdecombe: There are no comparable statistics available on average earnings for the United Kingdom and the other member states of the European Community. Therefore, it is not possible to provide the information requested.

Civil Servants

Mr. Cann: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people aged 60 years and over began employment in his Department in 1992.

Mr. Burt: A total of 25 such people started employment in the Department and its agencies in 1992. This figure excludes casual staff, but includes nine staff who transferred from other Government Departments.

Carers

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to raise the earnings limits on benefits available to carers.

Mr. Scott: The earnings limit for invalid care allowance will be increased from £40 to £50 per week from April 1993. This will be the fourth substantial increase in successive years. Also from April, a £15 earnings disregard will be introduced for all carers receiving income-related benefits.

Legal Aid

Mr. Olner: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of income that the compensation recovery unit will lose as a result of the Lord Chancellor's proposed changes in eligibility for legal aid.

Miss Widdecombe: This information is not available. Details held by the compensation recovery unit do not distinguish between those cases which have the benefit of legal aid and others.

Social Fund

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many grants and loans have been made from the social fund in Walthamstow in each of the last three years for which figures are available; how many applications were made; and what were the total sums involved.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is available in the Library for the years 1989-90, and 1990-91 by former departmental local office. Information is also in the Library for 1991-92 for the Benefits Agency's Lea-Roding district, of which Walthamstow is part.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the ability of the social fund to meet the needs of the poorest claimants.

Mr. Scott: The operation of the social fund is closely monitored by the Department. We also commissioned detailed research from the university of York's social policy research unit, which we are currently considering along with other recent reports about the scheme.

Income support is the main help which the Government give to people who have insufficient income to meet their general needs. The social fund complements income support by helping people with specific expenses in certain circumstances, which may not necessarily be related to their general financial circumstances alone.

Sick and Maternity Pay

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received about current arrangements for the payment of statutory sick pay and maternity pay; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: Following publication of the National Audit Office report on the operation of the statutory sick pay and statutory maternity pay schemes, two parliamentary questions have been tabled by hon. Members and a letter about the schemes has been received from the general secretary of the TUC.

Since the EC pregnant workers directive was adopted last October, one hon. Member has tabled three parliamentary questions about the maternity pay aspects of the directive. Correspondence raising or referring to issues contained in the directive have been received from three hon. Members and one MEP, and a number of employers, employers' organisations and members of the public have asked questions about particular aspects of the directive's requirements. The Government are considering the maternity pay aspects of the directive.

Quangos

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list all those non-departmental public bodies for which his Department is responsible which have the power to compel individuals, firms, companies or other institutions to carry out their instructions at the expense of the individuals, firms, companies or other institutions, and also to charge fees for the cost to the non-departmental public bodies of assessing the work which needed to be done.

Miss Widdecombe: Certain occupational and personal pension schemes are required to register, at their own expense, with the Occupational Pensions Board acting as pensions registrar and to pay a levy which is collected by the registrar to meet part of the cost of various consumer protection measures.

Voluntary Workers

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many social security applicants had applications refused or reduced because of the number of hours worked in the voluntary sector in each year since 1979.

Mr. Burt: There is no legislation limiting the amount of hours an unemployed person may spend working in the voluntary sector. Unemployed people who undertake unpaid voluntary work in this country may continue to receive benefits provided they satisfy the conditions of entitlement. These are that a person must be available for work and take reasonable steps, each week, to seek work.

Independent Living Fund

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what proposals he has to provide financial assistance for domiciliary care for those who would be in principle eligible for assistance from the independent living fund for the first time between 31 December 1992 and 31 March; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make a statement on the provision of domiciliary care comparable to that provided by the independent living fund to those of pensionable age after 31 March.

Mr. Scott: The provision of domiciliary care is a matter for local authorities and for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

Income Support

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of Social Security what elements of water charges have been included in the Rossi index for each year since April 1988.

Mr. Burt: Since April 1992 variations in the cost of water, sewerage and environmental charges have been included in the Rossi index.

WALES

One-stop Shops

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with Wales Enterprise regarding the development of one-stop shops for business and technology support in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The chairman of Wales Enterprise is a member of the enterprise and business support working group and therefore takes part in the discussions regarding the development of a co-ordinated approach to business and technology support in Wales.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total accumulated surplus of the seven Welsh training and enterprise councils since 1990.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The latest published annual accounts of the seven Welsh TECs show that at 31 March 1992 there were accumulated surpluses of £15,599,643. The TECs have plans to spend over £13·5 million of accumulated surpluses in the 1993-94 financial year in support of a range of training and enterprise measures.

Disabled Employees

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of employees in his Department are registered disabled.

Mr. David Hunt: As at 1 January 1993 1·7 per cent. of staff in my Department had registered as disabled. These are the latest available details.

My Department also employs several unregistered disabled people.

Selective Assistance

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total of regional selective assistance offered to the projects listed in his press release of 1 February; and when he intends to publish the details of the individual offers to the companies concerned.

Mr. David Hunt: The total of regional selective assistance offered is commercially confidential although details will be published in due course in the *Employment Gazette*, as indeed will details of all offers of RSA of £75,000 or more, but only when the first payments of grant have been made.

Housing Statistics

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many housing units have been built in Wales in each year since 1979.

Mr. David Hunt: The available information is published in "Welsh Housing Statistics No. 12 1992", a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Homelessness

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has on the number of homeless people in Wales in each year since 1979.

Mr. David Hunt: Information is available for those persons accepted as homeless by local authorities for each year since 1979 and are shown in table 7.1 of "Welsh Housing Statistics No. 12 1992", a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Sheep Scab

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of outbreaks of sheep scab, by county and divided into less-favoured areas, in each month from October 1991 to the last month for which figures are available.

Mr. David Hunt: Details of the distribution of sheep scab outbreaks in favoured and non-favoured areas could be supplied only at disproportionate cost. Information on sheep scab outbreaks is available up to May 1992; the figures between October 1991 and May 1992 are as follows:

Month	*County*	*Number of outbreaks*
October 1991	—	0
November 1991	—	0
December 1991	Dyfed	1
	Gwynedd	1
January 1992	Clwyd	1
	Dyfed	2
	Gwynedd	3
February 1992	Dyfed	2
March 1992	Dyfed	2
	Gwynedd	1
April 1992	Clwyd	1
	Powys	1
May 1992	—	0

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of sheep affected by sheep scab, by county and divided into less-favoured areas and non less-favoured areas, in each month from October 1991.

Mr. David Hunt: Information on the number of sheep affected in outbreaks of sheep scab is not available.

Quangos

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all those non-departmental public bodies for which his Department is responsible which have the power to compel individuals, firms, companies or other institutions to carry out their instructions at the expense of the individuals, firms, companies or other institutions, and also to charge fees for the cost to the non-departmental public bodies of assessing the work which needed to be done.

Mr. David Hunt: A number of the 16 Welsh Office-sponsored executive non-departmental public bodies have statutory powers to require action by individuals, firms, companies or other institutions. This may involve some additional expense to those concerned, for which compensation is sometimes payable. In practice it is rarely necessary for the bodies to invoke such powers, and none charges fees for the cost to the NDPB of assessing any associated work.

Manufacturing Statistics

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the change in the value of manufacturing *(a)* production, *(b)* employment and *(c)* investment in Wales from 1979-80 to 1991-92, in money and percentage terms after allowing for inflation.

Mr. David Hunt: Changes in manufacturing production are best measured by the Welsh index of production. Average quarterly manufacturing output rose by 23·9 per cent. between 1979-80 and 1991-92. The index of manufacturing production in the third quarter of 1992 stood at 126·3. The comparable figure for 1979 was 100·7.

The average number of employees employed in manufacturing fell by 91,000, 29 per cent., between 1979-80 and 1991-92. The estimated income from employment in manufacturing in Wales in 1979 was £1,728 million and in 1991 was £3,639 million, a rise of 110.6 per cent. Regional deflators are not available.

The available information on gross domestic fixed capital formation in Wales, by industry, was published by the Central Statistical Office in "Economic Trends No. 470, December 1992", which is available from the Library of the House.

Regional Development Fund

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his oral answer of 1 February, *Official Report*, columns 2-3, corrected by corrigendum on 8 February, *Official Report*, columns 785-88, (1) what consultations he has had with the chairmen of *(a)* British Coal Enterprise, *(b)* British Steel Enterprise, *(c)* the Land Authority for Wales *(d)* the Cardiff Bay development corporation, *(e)* the Development Board for Rural Wales and *(f)* the Welsh Development Agency, in relation to accessing the £70 million European regional development fund gross capital expenditure allocation in Wales in 1993-94;

(2) which agencies and which main projects will provide the principal components of the £70 million European regional development fund gross capital expenditure; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The amount of ERDF available to Wales is determined by the European Commission under the agreed operational programmes.

In October last year my officials wrote to all public sector bodies in Wales notifying them of the new arrangements for ERDF grants. However, ERDF is available to a wide range of local and other public authorities, charities and voluntary organisations and it is too early to estimate the distribution of this grant between those bodies, or to say which projects will be funded, since it is for the relevant monitoring committees, comprising representatives of the sponsors concerned, to decide during the remainder of 1993 how to allocate the available resources.

I will make available full public expenditure cover for any sponsor receiving an allocation of ERDF from the programme monitoring committees.

A55, Pen-y-Clip

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will specify the main elements of overspending on the A55 Pen-y-Clip tunnels construction contract.

Sir Wyn Roberts: There are no elements of overspending on the A55 Pen-y-Clip tunnel construction contract. All payments on this contract have been made within the provisions of the contract.

Contracts lasting more than two years, as in this case, are subject to an allowance for the increase in cost of plant, labour and materials throughout the period of the works. The contract also allows for variations and additions to overcome any problems or difficulties encountered during the execution of the works.

Independent Living Fund

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 4 February, *Official Report*, column *341*, what proposals he has to provide financial assistance for domiciliary care for those who would be in principle eligible for assistance from the independent living fund for the first time between 31 December and 31 March 1993.

Mr. David Hunt: The provision of domiciliary care is a matter for local and health authorities.

Capital Programme

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to the oral answer of 1 February, *Official Report*, columns 2-3 and *Official Report*, 8 February, columns 785-88, what consultations he has had with the local authority associations in Wales concerning the estimate for local authority gross capital expenditure in 1993-94.

Mr. David Hunt: Under long-standing arrangements the local authority associations in Wales assess the level of provision needed in the settlement year to support the range of services which they provide. I take account of that assessment when deciding how much central Government support should be made available to them out of the Welsh block. My decision also takes into account my assessment of the ability of local authorities to finance expenditure from their own resources as demonstrated by outturn data for earlier years. For 1993-94 I further took into account the additional receipts available to authorities as a result of the temporary relaxation in controls on the use of capital receipts.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he had for tolls to be charged on each of the roads listed as major projects in his announcement of 1 February, *Official Report*, columns 2-3.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The Government expect to publish a Green Paper on road pricing in the spring of this year. It is too soon to speculate on the content.

"Roads in Wales"

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what date he estimates he will publish the 1993 supplement to "Roads in Wales".

Sir Wyn Roberts: Soon.

Cardiff Bay Barrage

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress has been made on the feasibility study commissioned by Cardiff Bay development corporation into the possibility of creating a major bird reserve on the Gwent levels to compensate for the loss of feeding grounds associated with the proposed barrage.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I have now received the report of the feasibility study, copies of which are in the Library of the House. It concludes that the proposed freshwater habitats at Redwick and salt water ponds at Goldcliff have the potential to create an area of wetland of outstanding value for wintering and breeding waterfowl and for other rare or threatened bird species.

It is very encouraging that the consultants assessed the proposals to have such significant potential for wild birds. We are grateful to the Countryside Council for Wales and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, which have given constructive advice throughout this exercise. Planning permission will now have to be sought and the land acquired and, if this is successful, the Government will be making the necessary funding available.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Fishing Vessels (Decommissioning)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the expected contribution from the Exchequer towards the cost of a decommissioning scheme; and what part of this will be paid for from EC funds.

Mr. Curry: The Government have made provision of £25 million for the decommissioning scheme over a period of three financial years commencing April 1993. Council regulation (EEC) 4028/86 as amended provides for 70 per cent. of eligible expenditure to be reimbursed by the Community if vessels are scrapped and 50 per cent. in other cases. However, the operation of the Community budget means that the greater part of any such reimbursement is funded by the Exchequer.

Statutory Instruments

Ms. Corston: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many statutory instruments were laid before Parliament by his Department in each year since 1980.

Mr. Curry: The information requested is as follows:

Calendar year	*Number of statutory instruments laid before Parliament*
1985	67
1986	100
1987	87
1988	73
1989	95
1990	108
1991	84
1992	106

Details for the years 1980 to 1984 are not readily available.

Disabled Employees

Miss Lestor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of employees in his Department is registered disabled.

Mr. Curry: Counting part-time staff as whole units, MAFF and its agencies currently employ 155 registered disabled staff. This represents 1·5 per cent. of total staff but does not take into account staff with disabilities who have chosen not to register.

Dangerous Animals

Mr. Peter Griffiths: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on how many occasions in each year since 1980 licences issued under the Dangerous Imported Animals Act 1932 have been revoked or individual farmers prosecuted.

Mr. Soames: Since 1980, no licences, issued under the Destructive Imported Animals Act 1932, have been revoked and no prosecutions have been taken.

Live Exports

Mr. Miller: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what effect the European Commission proposals on the transport of live animals are expected to have on maintaining the United Kingdom transportation of live animals regulations.

Mr. Soames: Directive 91/628/EEC on the protection of animals during transport sets a framework of controls which are to be supplemented by additional Community rules. Commission proposals for these additional rules are still awaited. In the meantime the directive permits national measures to apply in the relevant areas. Such measures are contained in the Welfare of Animals During Transport Order 1992 which came into force on 1 January 1993.

Suckler Cow Premium

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on what basis he exercises his discretion in *(a)* paying in full, *(b)* paying in part and *(c)* refusing late applications for suckler cow premiums.

Mr. Curry: Suckler cow premium is paid under Council regulation (EEC) 1357/80 as amended and Commission regulation (EEC) 1244/82, as amended. The time limits are strict. Applications received 10 working days after the closing date, which are otherwise eligible, may be admitted but premium is reduced by 30 per cent. Applications received after this 10 working day "period of grace" cannot be accepted unless there are valid force majeure reasons for doing so.

Fishing Industry

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will make a statement on how his Department will pursue the deregulation initiative with regard to regulations affecting the fishing industry; and what resources he has devoted to it;

(2) what assessment he has made of the scope for reduction in the number of regulations affecting the fishing industry and of the consequent effect on the manpower of his Department.

Mr. Curry: Each of the policy areas for which my Department has responsibility is being studied with a view to identifying where the burden of regulation is heaviest and can most easily be relieved. The fisheries sector is currently being studied within this overall review.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food under what treaty basis the common fisheries policy is established; how that basis will be changed under the treaty of Maastricht; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The common fisheries policy is established under article 43 of the treaty establishing the European Economic Community. This treaty basis would not be affected by the treaty of Maastricht.

Quangos

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list all those non-departmental public bodies, for which his Department is responsible, which have the power to compel individuals, firms, companies or other institutions to carry out their instructions at the expense of the individuals, firms, companies or other institutions, and also to charge fees for the cost to the non-departmental public bodies of assessing the work which needed to be done.

Mr. Curry: The following non-departmental public bodies—NDPBs—are funded primarily from industry levies and have powers to compel individuals etc. to carry out instructions:

Apple and Pear Research Council
Horticultural Development Council
Home Grown Cereals Authority
Meat and Livestock Commission
Sea Fisheries Industry Authority

In addition, Food From Britain, through its subsidiary body, the United Kingdom register of organic food standards, is designated as the authority responsible for the inspection system and the approval of private inspection bodies under EC regulations on organic food standards. Producers, processors and importers who wish to market their goods as organic must comply with EC standards and bear the inspection costs.The following NDPBS have power to compel but have no powers to charge:

Agricultural Wages Board
Agricultural Wages Committees
Wine Standards Board
Agricultural Land Tribunals

Apple Juice

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on what dates the matter of patulin in apple juice was considered by the Food Advisory Committee.

Mr. Soames: The Food Advisory Committee considered this matter at its meetings on 18 September and 29 October 1992.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what response was given by officials in his Department in September 1992 to outside inquirers relating to the finding of patulin in apple juice.

Mr. Soames: The Ministry published on 3 September the agenda for the Food Advisory Committee meeting on 18 September. The agenda made clear that patulin in apple juice was an item for discussion by the committee. On 14 October the Ministry published a short note recording the points discussed by the committee at this meeting. The Ministry has no record of receiving any inquiries about patulin during this period.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on what date in December 1992 he or his officials met representatives of the fruit juice producers to discuss the advice of the Food Advisory Committee in relation to apple juice.

Mr. Soames: I met representatives of the fruit juice producers on 17 December 1992.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the scale of the testing of all batches of apple juice to the limits laid down for patulin following upon the finding of four contaminated samples.

Mr. Soames: The United Kingdom producers and retailers have undertaken to ensure that all supplies of apple juices meet the advisory level. The major producers have been testing every batch of apple juice.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on what date the British Soft Drinks Association was first informed of the finding of patulin in samples of apple juice.

Mr. Soames: The British Soft Drinks Association was first informed of the findings in a letter dated 21 July 1992 summoning the industry to a meeting with scientific and medical officials of the Ministry and the Department of Health.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on what dates *(a)* samples of apple juice were found to contain higher than acceptable levels of patulin, *(b)* the samples were referred to the committee on toxicity and *(c)* the committee decided that there was no need to withdraw apple juice from sale.

Mr. Soames: The Ministry received the results on 5 June 1992 and referred them to the next meeting of the committee on toxicity of chemicals in food, consumer products and the environment on 21 July 1992. The results had meanwhile been assessed by the scientific and medical staff of the Ministry and the Department of Health who had concluded that there was no risk to health. The committee's advice was passed to officials of the two Departments on the day of the meeting. The results and the committee's comments were subsequently considered by the Food Advisory Committee at its meetings in September and October 1992.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions relating to press inquiries on the incidence of patulin in apple juice took place at the meeting in August of departmental officials and the British Soft Drinks Association.

Mr. Soames: A meeting between officials from my Department and trade representatives, including the British Soft Drinks Association, took place on 23 July 1992.

At the conclusion of that meeting my officials told the trade that they had no plans to issue a press notice at that time, but that the results would be published as a food surveillance paper in the usual way, following consultation with the Food Advisory Committee.

There was no other such meeting, until my officials and I met the industry to discuss this matter further on 17 December 1992.

Milk Marketing

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has for arbitration in the case of disputes between successor bodies to the Milk Marketing Board and the Dairy Trades Federation.

Mr. Curry: On the ending of the milk marketing scheme all parties engaged in milk trading will operate within the legal framework applying to commercial trading bodies generally. The normal procedures for settlement of disputes, through the courts or by arbitration, will apply.

Food Additives

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what facilities are available to his Department in Harpenden for the testing of food additives and related drugs.

Mr. Gummer: The testing facilities I have at Harpenden are within the Central Science Laboratory. They are dedicated to the analysis of commodities for pesticide residues and preservatives.

Fruit Juice

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what testing takes place of imported fruit juice for toxic substances including patulin.

Mr. Soames: Responsibility for the general safety of imported food lies with the port health authorities and local authorities. Imported fruit juices are included in food surveillance programmes undertaken by the Ministry.

EMPLOYMENT

Betting Shops (Evening Opening)

9. Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what protection is available to employees of betting shops who are faced with unilateral changes to their contract of employment as a result of evening opening hours being introduced.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Employees could seek redress in the civil courts by suing for damages for breach of contract, or through an industrial tribunal for infringement of statutory rights, depending on the circumstances.

Wages Councils

13. Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations she has received on plans to abolish the wages councils; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend has continued to receive representations both for and against abolition of the councils.

Labour Statistics

14. Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the rate of unemployment in the United Kingdom; and what is the average rate in European Community member states.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: 10·7 per cent. and 9·6 per cent. respectively, excluding Denmark, Greece and Luxembourg.

17. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many unemployed people were placed by the Employment Service during each quarter of 1992; and what were the targets set for the year.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I am delighted to be able to tell my hon. Friend that the Employment Service placed 312,000 unemployed people in the first quarter of 1992; 350,000 in the second quarter; 379,000 in the third quarter; and 367,000 in the fourth quarter. This is 10 per cent. more than the planned level. The agency is well on course to achieve its 1992-93 target of more than 1·4 million job placings by March this year.

21. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will make a statement on the latest unemployment figures for Cornwall.

Mr. McLoughlin: In December 1992 there were 28,606 claimant unemployed people in the county of Cornwall. This figure is on the unadjusted basis.

22. **Mr. Martlew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the level of unemployment in the Carlisle travel-to-work area.

Mr. McLoughlin: In December 1992 there were 4,133 unemployed claimants in the Carlisle travel-to-work-area. This figure is on the unadjusted basis.

23. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of unemployed in Ilford, South in January 1979, January 1990, January 1991, January 1992 and January 1993; and how many registered job vacancies there were on the same dates; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Unadjusted claimant unemployed in the Ilford, South constituency was 1,762 in January 1990, 2,615 in January 1991 and 4,259 in January 1992. The corresponding numbers of jobcentre vacancies were 102, 42 and 42 respectively. However, the latter represent only a minor proportion of the total number of jobs available to the unemployed of Ilford, South.

25. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are currently unemployed in the United Kingdom; and if she will provide a breakdown by age.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: In December 1992, on the seasonally adjusted basis, there were 2,973,500 unemployed claimants in the United Kingdom. In October 1992, the latest date for which figures by age are available, those aged 24 and under, and those aged 40 and over each constituted just under one third of the total. More details can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library.

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people in Lambeth have been unemployed for *(a)* more than six months, *(b)* more than 12 months and *(c)* more than two years.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information requested is contained in the table and can also be obtained from the NOMIS database system in the Library.

Duration of unemployment in the Lambeth local authority district (October 1992)

Duration of Unemployment	*Number of Claimant Unemployed*
Over 6 months	15,119
Over 12 months	9,824
Over 2 years	4,225

Note:

Claimant unemployment figures by duration are available on a quarterly basis for the months of January, April, July and October and are not adjusted for seasonal influences.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the *(a)* number and *(b)* rate of long-term unemployed for more than one year in the Blyth Valley area.

Mr. McLoughlin: In October 1992, the latest date for which claimant unemployment figures by duration are available, 1,243 people—or 33 per cent. of all unemployed claimants—in the Blyth Valley parliamentary constituency had been unemployed for over one year. An official unemployment rate is not available.

Inward Investment

15. **Mr. Ancram:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what estimate has been made of the effect of United Kingdom employment legislation on inward investment.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: No such estimates have been made. However, we believe that the United Kingdom's employment legislation is one of many factors contributing to our good record in attracting inward investment.

Unemployment (Greater London)

16. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what initiatives she has taken this year specifically aimed at reducing unemployment in Greater London.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Employment Service and training and enterprise councils deliver a wide range of employment, enterprise and training programmes to help unemployed people find the best and quickest route back to employment. These programmes are available for unemployed people in Greater London, as elsewhere.

Prince's Youth Business Trust

18. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much her Department has given to the Prince's Youth Business Trust in each of the last three years; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Expenditure by the Department on the Prince's Youth Business Trust was £2·7 million in 1989-90, £4 million in 1990-91 and £3·2 million in 1991-92. The Department's expenditure matches funding raised by the private sector.

Competitive Tendering

19. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps she is taking to investigate the effect on wages and conditions of employees of companies which win contracts for public services under the compulsory competitive tendering regulations.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: None; pay and conditions in private companies are matters for the employers and employees concerned.

Employment Growth

20. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment she has made as to which sectors of employment show the most potential for employment growth in 1993.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Government do not forecast employment or unemployment.

Training and Enterprise Councils

24. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what will be the levels of funding for training and enterprise councils in London in 1993-94.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The regional director for London is currently discussing levels of funding for 1993-94 with the London TECs.

Unemployed People

26. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when she last met a representative group of unemployed workers.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: During the course of our work, my ministerial colleagues and I regularly meet, or receive representations from, individuals and organisations concerned with the problems of unemployment and those it affects.

Job Advertisements (Pay)

27. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will make it a requirement for job centres to include in all job advertisement details of pay.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Details of rates of pay are important to jobseekers considering vacancies. Jobcentres always encourage employers to state the rates of pay, together with other information about the job. However, some employers prefer to discuss and agree exact rates of pay with the applicant and I believe they must have this flexibility.

Youth Training

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what monitoring has taken place *(a)* in London and *(b)* elsewhere of young people graduating from youth training schemes to establish how useful these schemes have been in enabling young people to find employment.

Mr. McLoughlin: A variety of information is collected about what happens to young people after leaving their youth training scheme. Information is collected from both training providers and from the trainees themselves. Local training and enterprise councils—TECs—may collect further information about their trainees but this is not held centrally. A regular monthly report containing information at national and regional level about the success of youth training trainees obtaining employment and qualifications is placed in the Library.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what statistics her Department collates with respect to youth training schemes.

Mr. McLoughlin: Responsibility for the organisation of youth training lies with TECs and information about individual training schemes is not held centrally. TECs are required through their contract with the Secretary of State to provide only summary information. A copy of this contract is available in the Library. Although information on schemes is not available, information about trainees and their training is collected and held centrally.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment she has made of whether youth training schemes nationwide are achieving the goals for which they were established; and what criteria the Government use to determine the success or failure of youth training schemes.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Department's annual report, Cm 2205, explains the objectives of YT and how progress towards achieving these is measured. A copy of the current report is available in the Library.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many young people in *(a)* London and *(b)* England are currently registered on youth training schemes.

Mr. McLoughlin: At December 1992, the latest date for which information is available, it is estimated that there were 19,300 people registered on youth training in London and 242,000 people registered on youth training in England. Both figures include youth credits.

Industrial Accidents

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to her answer of 2 December 1992, *Official Report*, columns *221-22*, how many accidents were reported to the Health and Safety Executive under the provisions of regulation 5(1) of the Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazard Regulations 1984 in each year since 1984; and if she will list for each accident the dangerous substances involved and for each substance the number of accidents in which it was involved; in which accidents members of the public were *(a)* requested to remain in their homes or *(b)* asked to leave their homes for the duration of the incident; and in which accidents restrictions were placed on (i) the consumption of foodstuffs, (ii) the consumption of drinking water and (iii) the use of water for agricultural or industrial purposes.

Mr. McLoughlin: The table shows the number of accidents which occurred between 1985 and 1992 that were reported to the Health and Safety Executive—HSE—under the provisions of regulation 5(1) of the Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazards Regulations 1984 and the dangerous substances involved in each accident:

Year	*Accident*	*Dangerous substances involved in accident*
1985	1 accident: this involved:	 methane
1986	7 accidents: 2 involving: 1 each involving:	 cholorine isoprophylalcohol and methylalcohol

Year	*Accident*	*Dangerous substances involved in accident*
		hydrogen peroxide
		ethylene oxide and isobutane
		toluene
		compound fertilisers containing super phosphate and ammonium nitrate substances
1987	5 accidents	
	1 each involving:	hydrogen gas, petroleum gas and hydrocarbon liquids
		propylene oxide
		petroleum liquids and spirits
		carbon disulphide
		methane
1988	2 accidents:	
	1 each involving:	300 different chemicals including oxidising materials, highly flammable liquids, chlorinated hydrocarbon solvent
		ortho-nitro-benzaldehyde
1989	3 accidents:	
	1 each involving:	ammonium nitrate fertilisers
		ammonia
		propane
1990	6 accidents:	
	1 each involving:	2, 4, dichloronitrobenzene, potassium fluoride, dimethylacetamide, tetramethylammonium chloride and xylene
		isobutane and hydrofluoric acid
		white phosphorus
		toluene
		natural gas/methane
		propane, propylene, butane and butylene
1991	5 accidents:	
	2 involving:	methane
	1 each involving:	acetone
		naphtha
		dimethyl aniline, toluene, dimethyl amino acid
1992	4 accidents:	
	1 each involving:	azodiisobutyronitrile (AZDN), ammonium persulphate and sodium persulphate
		hydrogen fluoride, chlorine, hydrogen chloride and trichloro-trifluoroethane
		ethylene
		aluminium silicate catalyst gave rise to hydrogen light hydro-carbon gases and carbon monoxide

The additional information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Youth Statistics

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of people aged 16 and 17 years old in Walthamstow are *(a)* on youth training schemes, *(b)* in full-time education and *(c)* in employment.

Mr. McLoughlin: Information on the status of young people in Waltham Forest is not available from the Department in the form requested.

Tribunal Decisions

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what time the 10 and 90 percentiles and median cases for *(a)* industrial tribunal and *(b)* employment appeal tribunal decisions took from first application, in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. McLoughlin: I regret that the information is not readily available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The average length of time for an appeal to come to hearing at the employment appeal tribunal in England and Wales is two years and in Scotland five months. The table shows the percentage of cases coming to first hearing at the industrial tribunals in various given periods of time for the 12 months ended 31 March 1992:

Percentage

Less than	*England and Wales*	*Scotland*
10 weeks	10	8
12 weeks	20	24
16 weeks	41	55
20 weeks	61	75
26 weeks	80	90

Engineering

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what figures she has for the numbers employed in the engineering sector.

Mr. McLoughlin: The available information is as follows:

Employees in employment in the engineering industries in Great Britain: November 1992

(Not seasonally adjusted)

	Thousands
Mechanical engineering	626
Electrical and electronic engineering	471
Instrument engineering	88

Statutory Instruments

Ms. Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many statutory instruments were laid before Parliament by his Department in each year since 1980.

Mr. McLoughlin: The number of statutory instruments laid before Parliament by the Department of Employment in each year of the years 1980 to 1992 is as follows:

Year	*Total number of Statutory Instruments*
1980	41
1981	48
1982	49
1983	34
1984	29
1985	31
1986	25
1987	30

Year	*Total number of Statutory Instruments*
1988	40
1989	41
1990	30
1991	35
1992	41

DEFENCE

Naval Engineering College, Manadon

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many non-engineering Royal Navy officers attended courses at Manadon in maritime technology in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In the academic year 1992-93, 45 non-engineering Royal Navy officers and one Royal Marines officer are studying courses in maritime technology.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current student enrolment at the Royal Naval Engineering College, Manadon; what was the annual intake in 1992-93; what is the current complement of *(a)* civilian and *(b)* service personnel; and what are the current annual running costs categorised as appropriate.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: For the academic year 1992-93 there are 444 students at Manadon, excluding students who attended short courses of less than one year's duration. The new intake comprised 291 students, excluding short courses. The current complement of the college is 176 civilians—67 industrials and 109 non-industrials—and 148 service personnel—102 officers and 46 ratings. The current annual running costs are £10 million broken down as follows:

	£ million
Service pay	4·00
Civilian pay	2·40
Duty travel and subsistence	0·20
Utilities and fuels	0·50
Education fees	0·30
Office machinery, stationery and telephones	0·15
Works	1·20
Repairs/maintenance	0·60
Accommodation services	0·80
Computer software, stores and miscellaneous	0·05
	10·20
Less income from research	0·20
TOTAL	10·00

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many foreign students are currently enrolled at Manadon; and what was the fee income from such students in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As at 9 February 1993 there were 53 foreign and commonwealth students enrolled at Royal Naval Engineering College, Manadon. The income from the tuition of foreign students in the financial year 1991-92 was just under £500,000.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what higher-level degrees or their equivalent are awarded as a result of study at the Royal Naval Engineering College, Manadon; how many were awarded in 1991-92; and what is the normal period of study for such degrees.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Royal Naval Engineering College, Manadon awards two MSc degrees—the advanced marine engineering course—AMEC—and the advanced marine defence technology course—AMDTC. Fourteen AMEC and seven AMDTC degrees were awarded in the academic year 1991-92. The normal period of study for MSc degrees is 54 weeks, including leave periods.

Sandhurst

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total student intake into Sandhurst in academic year 1991-92; what were the target intakes for *(a)* school-leavers and *(b)* graduates at each point of entry in academic year 1992-93; what have been the actual figures to date; how much has been spent on unprogrammed advertising for entrants to Sandhurst in 1992-93; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Archie Hamilton: The total student intake into Sandhurst in academic year 1991-92 was 808. Since September 1992 when the common commissioning course was introduced officer recruiting targets are set for the year as a whole and do not distinguish between graduates and school leavers. A total of 537 officer cadets entered Sandhurst during 1992-93 against an annual entry target of 611. No money has been spent on unprogrammed advertising for entrants to Sandhurst in 1992-93, although £186,000 was spent last November on an advertising campaign directed at the May intake.

Quangos

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all those non-departmental public bodies, for which his Department is responsible, which have the power to compel individuals, firms, companies or other insititutions to carry out their instructions at the expense of the individuals, firms, companies or other institutions, and also to charge fees for the cost to the non-departmental public bodies of assessing the work which needed to be done.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Oil and Pipelines Agency is the only Ministry of Defence executive non-departmental public body which has powers—under the Land Powers Act 1958—to compel third parties to carry out its instructions and to raise fees, in connection with preparation and organisation, for the directed work.

Tay House, Glasgow

Sir John Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what day a conditional missive was finalised between his Department and the vendors of Tay House, Glasgow; and if a financial penalty to his Department is incurred if the purchase is not completed.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No conditional missive has been finalised, nor any other form of legal agreement reached, with the vendors of Tay House or any other building in Glasgow or elsewhere which might meet the Army personnel centre requirement. No binding agreement on any building will be reached until consultation has been completed and final decisions have been made. There would be no financial penalty if, in the event the final decision were not to locate the centre in Glasgow. All speculation to the contrary is mistaken.

Barracks

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give details of the potential additional accommodation available to soldiers in barracks which are not currently used by the Regular Army; and which barracks these are.

Mr. Archie Hamilton *[holding answer 11 February 1993]:* In general, empty barrack accommodation in the United Kingdom is either not required and therefore in the process of disposal, or is being prepared for, or awaiting occupation by, incoming units. In addition, barracks at training camps will be empty from time to time when no units are undergoing training at those sites. As at 12 February 1993 the following barracks were empty:

Barracks	*Remarks*	
Scotland		
Edinburgh	Redford	Under refurbishment
Lanark	Winston	Awaiting disposal
Kirkcudbright	Kings	Awaiting disposal
Eastern		
Strensall		Training Camp
Wathgill Camp		Training Camp
Southern		
Deepcut	Alma/Dettingen	Under consideration
Aldershot	Lands Yard	Awaiting refurbishment
Aldershot	Mons	Awaiting refurbishment
Arborfield	Rowcroft	Under consideration
Dover	Old Park	Awaiting disposal
Tidworth	Mooltan	Under refurbishment
Wales and West		
Crickhowell		Training Camp
London		
Horse Guards		Under refurbishment
Windsor	Victoria	Under refurbishment

Small Firms Research Initiative

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the small firms research initiative.

Mr. Aitken: My Department has for many years used the services of small firms, particularly to aid its applied research programme. One vehicle developed to foster such connections was the small firms research initiative—SFRI—launched in 1987 as part of the Government's small firms initiative and with an annual budget of some £1 million. Since then, however, a number of developments have occurred, in particular the formation of the Defence Research Agency—DRA. This organisation is already being run under commercial disciplines, introducing primary competition and more significantly secondary—sub-contract—competition.

The DRA has recently launched a new scheme, Pathfinder, through which it invites industry to put forward research proposals that meet both MOD customer needs and firms' own research priorities for up to 100 per cent. funding. The aim is to achieve a better return on the total research expenditure made by MOD and industry, to mutual benefit. Pathfinder embodies the concept of strategic alignment with industry and aims to improve the capability of industry as a supplier of defence equipment while simultaneously providing a degree of competition at research team level to stimulate cost efficiency.

The Government's policy on the support of small firms remains unchanged. But in the particular circumstances no useful purpose would be served by continuing with the SFRI given the launching of the new Pathfinder scheme, and no further funds will be allocated to it.

ENVIRONMENT

Council Property

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish for each local authority *(a)* the amount spent on council house repairs and maintenance, *(b)* the number of council-owned properties and *(c)* the average spent on repairs and maintenance per council-owned property in the latest available year.

Mr. Baldry: I have deposited a copy of a table showing the information requested by the hon. Member in the Library of the House. The table shows for 1992-93 each authority's estimated expenditure on repairs and maintenance debited to the housing revenue account including, where applicable, any expenditure via the housing repairs account; the average number of properties owned by each council during 1992-93; and the amount of repairs and maintenance expenditure per property.

Housing Investment, Waltham Forest

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the housing investment programme allocation for the London borough of Waltham Forest for each of the last 10 years, expressed at constant prices.

Mr. Baldry: The information requested is given in the table. The figures for 1990-91 and subsequent years are not directly comparable with those for earlier years because of the revisions to the capital finance system introduced in April 1990.

Housing investment Programme (HIP) allocations by Waltham Forest borough council and capital expenditure, 1983-84 to 1992-93

£ thousands

	HIP allocations[1]		*Housing capital expenditure*	
	Cash	*1992-93 prices*[2]	*Cash*	*1992-93 prices*[2]
1983-84	8,627	14,323	13,279	22,047
1984-85	8,945	14,134	16,135	25,495
1985-86	8,270	12,391	12,739	19,087
1986-87	7,971	11,571	14,462	20,993
1987-88	7,600	10,458	18,568	25,550
1988-89	9,651	12,379	21,881	28,065
1989-90	6,926	8,335	35,921	43,231
New capital finance system[3]				
1990-91	17,138	19,101	23,744	26,463
1991-92	13,859	14,448	[4]18,881	[4]19,683
1992-93	17,752	17,752	[5]24,827	[5]24,827

[1] Allocations for the years up to and including 1989-90 are final allocations, i.e., the initial allocation plus any increases to the initial allocation made in-year. The allocations figures for 1990-91 and subsequent years are the HIP allocations (housing annual capital guidelines plus specified capital grants) issued prior to the start of the financial year. These figures do not include any supplementary credit approvals issued during the year.

[2] Cash figures have been converted to 1992-93 price levels by excluding the effect of general inflation as measured by the GDP market prices deflator.

[3] From 1990-91, under the new capital finance system, the HIP allocation is an assessment or relative need for housing capital expenditure rather than a direct borrowing approval. Borrowing approval is now conveyed by the single, all service, basic credit approval.

[4] Provisional.

[5] Estimated.

Local Authority Housing

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the responses to the consultation paper "Local Authority Housing in England-Voluntary Transfer".

Sir George Young: Approximately 200 responses to the consultation paper have been received to date, some of which were submitted in confidence. A list of the responses will be placed in the House Libraries this week. The responses will be held for six months in the Department's central library, where inquirers may get access to them.

Primary and Secondary Education (Funding)

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the basis for the difference between funding of primary and secondary children; what weight he gives to different age children in determining education standard spending assessments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: The methods used for calculating the standard spending assessment (SSA) for primary and secondary children are set out in the "Local Government Finance Report (England) 1993-94" which was approved by the House on 3 February—copies are in the Library.

Quangos

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all those non-departmental public bodies, for which his Department is responsible, which have the power to compel individuals, firms, companies or other institutions to carry out their instructions at the expense of the individuals, firms, companies or other institutions, and also to charge fees for the cost to the non-departmental public bodies of assessing the work which needed to be done.

Mr. Howard: None of the NDPBs sponsored by my Department has this combination of powers. Within the Department, however, Her Majesty's chief inspector of pollution exercises powers of this kind in the authorisation and regulation of industrial processes and of the use, storage and disposal of radioactive material.

Departmental Annual Report

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many copies of his departmental annual report 1993, Cm 2207, have been printed; at what cost; and to whom it has been distributed.

Mr. Howard: A total of 3,750 copies of the Department of the Environment annual report 1993 (Cm 2207) were printed. The costs of printing and publication were borne by HMSO, which aims to recover its costs from sales revenue. In addition to commercial sales and distribution within Parliament, copies of the report were sent to the chairmen and chief executives of the Department's non-departmental public bodies, to the chief executives of every English principal local authority and to a number of other interested bodies.

Leicestershire Structure Plan

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration he has given to the validity of the advice from Leicestershire county council to his Department's inspector for the Leicestershire structure plan inquiry in October and November 1992 to consider the planning and transport submission as a whole rather than individual road schemes; what further action is planned; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: Under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, as amended by the Planning and Compensation Act 1991, it is for a county planning authority to select matters for disucssion at an examination in public of its structure plan, in consultation with the chairman of the EIP panel. It is then for the county council to consider the report of the panel before deciding whether to modify the plan. In the recent EIP for its replacement structure plan, Leicestershire county council chose to examine its overall strategy for transport rather than any individual road schemes. The Department was not requested to intervene in the matter and will not be further involved until the county council publishes its proposed modifications later this year.

Empty Properties (Manchester)

Mr. Eastham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the percentage of empty properties in Manchester's housing stock.

Mr. Baldry: Based on Manchester city council's most recent housing investment programme return, 5.4 per cent. of council housing stock was empty at 1 April 1992.

Construction Industry

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 27 January, *Official Report*, column 762 when the proposed Government/industry review of contracting and procurement arrangements in the construction industry is expected to report.

Mr. Baldry: Once an independent expert is appointed and begins work, I hope the report will be available within 12 months.

Property Services Agency

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what type of computing system is used by the Property Services Agency accounts department; when it was installed; at what cost; and how has it affected the time taken to deal with accounts.

Mr. Redwood: The PSA services runs the Ross systems integrated accounting package on a developed DEC VAX hardware platform. The new systems, providing fully auditable commercial and vote accounting, went live on a phased basis for resource accounting between January and April 1991. Works bill payment and recovery was also transferred onto the Ross systems from the agency's centralised accounts division on a phased programme, which was completed in February 1992. The full strategic accounting system project cost £10·3 million; the later works bill payment project cost £1·5 million.

The new systems enable the PSA businesses to operate on an autonomous basis and improve financial discipline in PSA. The advantages of the new devolved accounting systems include the improved quality of local invoicing and the elimination of any delay in moving paperwork to a central location. Improvements in the payment cycle rely as much on the certification procedures and handling processes involved as on the systems themselves. The businesses are working to ensure that subcontractors are paid within 30 days of validation.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much the Property Services Agency owes Landscaping and Grounds Maintenance Ltd., of Trescan, Wembury Road, Wembury, Plymouth; if he will instruct the Property Services Agency to pay its outstanding debt; what is his policy on late payment of debts by the Property Services Agency; when the Property Services Agency last paid the company; and for what period of work.

Mr. Redwood: Landscaping and Grounds Maintenance Ltd. will be paid £30,590 later this week in respect of work let under a measured term contract. The company was last paid on 4 February 1993 for work done up to the end of November 1993. New payment arrangements are being implemented by the PSA building management businesses, where it is acting as agents for the Ministry of Defence for payment purposes under MOD property management contracts, such that subcontractors are paid no later than seven days following receipt of payment from the client, MOD. There is an existing obligation on the MOD to pay promptly and this together with the new payment arrangements being adopted by the PSAS will ensure that subcontractors should be paid within 30 days from validation.

The development of appropriate systems and procedural changes is underway so that by 1 April 1993 the five BM businesses are operating on this new basis. As these arrangements are introduced, I am demanding better performance from PSA in reducing delays in payments to contractors by getting invoices to MOD more promptly.

These arrangements create a contractual commitment on the managing contractor to make payment to subcontractors whose invoices have been accepted for payment by MOD and should be distinguished from other forms of "pay when paid" for capital works contracts whereby main contractors may withhold payments to subcontractors. This latter practice is inconsistent with the Government's prompt payment policy.

While the building management businesses are still in Government ownership, and they retain the obligations of the Government's prompt payment policy in their own right, a safety net will be in place so that PSA can ensure prompt payment to its contractors even where MOD had not paid PSA.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, if he will provide details of the pay when paid policy of the Property Services Agency and of its purpose and origins; and if he will make a statement on the application to this policy of the Government's requiring Departments to pay their private contractors as quickly as possible.

Mr. Redwood: New payment arrangements are being implemented by the PSA building management businesses, where they are acting as agents for the Ministry of Defence for payment purposes under MOD property management contracts, such that subcontractors are paid no later than seven days following receipt of payment from the client, MOD. There is an existing obligation on the MOD to pay promptly and this together with the new payment arrangements being adopted by the PSA will ensure that subcontractors should be paid within 30 days from validation.

The development of appropriate systems and procedural changes is under way so that by 1 April 1993 the five BM businesses are operating on this new basis. As these arrangements are introduced, I am demanding better performance from PSA in reducing delays in payments to contractors by getting invoices to MOD more promptly.

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While the building management businesses are still in Government ownership, and they retain the obligations of the Government's prompt payment policy in their own right, a safety net will be in place so that PSA can ensure prompt payment to its contractors even where MOD had not paid PSA.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 17 February 1993

HEALTH

Orthodontic Facilities

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what orthodontic facilities exist in the London borough of Newham.

Mr. Sackville: Newham health authority is responsible for commissioning services for local residents. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mrs. Rosemary Walters, chairman of Newham district health authority, for details.

Dentistry

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average length of time taken by her Department to respond after an appeal is lodged following a Dental Practice Board recommendation.

Dr. Mawhinney: Appeals to the Secretary of State, following complaints made under the National Health Service (Service Committees and Tribunal) Regulations 1992, are now handled by the family health services appeal unit at Yorkshire regional health authority under devolved powers. Appeals are given very careful consideration and the time taken to process them varies from case to case. Information about average times is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the capital allocation granted to each NHS trust in the northern region in 1992-93: and what allocation is proposed for 1993-94.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested is set out in the table.

NHS trust	*Allocated 1992-93 £000*	*Proposed allocation 1993-94 £000*
The Freeman Group of Hospitals	2,154	3,505
Newcastle Mental Health Services	252	288
Northumbrian Ambulance	2,210	1,695
Cleveland Ambulance	496	300
North Tees Health	2,508	1,498
Northgate	2,172	252
The RVI Group of Hospitals	15,081	7,627
Gateshead Community Health	356	1,084
South Tees Acute Hospitals	9,149	5,730

NHS Trusts

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to respond to the first report from the Health Committee of Session 1992-93, "NHS Trusts: Interim Conclusions and Proposals for Future Inquiries" —House of Commons Paper No. 321.

Dr. Mawhinney *[pursuant to his reply, 16 February 1993]:* We are publishing our response to the report today. Copies are available in the Library.

Mentally Ill People

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans there are to provide day care centres for the mentally ill in Lambeth.

Mr. Yeo: It is the responsibility of district health authorities and local authority social services departments to contract for or provide a comprehensive range of mental health services to meet the level of psychiatric need in their areas.

Contracting Out

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will provide figures for the reduction in numbers of posts as a result of contracting out since 1979 in her Department and agencies for which she has responsibility.

Mr. Sackville: The Department of Health became a separate Government Department in 1989. Since then, the number of posts in the Department has been reduced by just under 30 as a result of contracting out.

Schizophrenia

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were registered as suffering from schizophrenia in *(a)* 1986 and *(b)* 1991-92.

Mr. Yeo: There is no requirement to register patients suffering from schizophrenia. The table gives the number of admissions to hospitals in England in 1986 and 1989-90, the latest year for which the quality of information permits publication, where a diagnosis of schizophrenia was made.

Number of hospital admissions in England for patients with schizophrenia 1986 (Mental Health Enquiry) and 1989-90 (Hospital Episode Statistics)

	Admissions
1986	29,419
1989-90	38,180

Mental Illness

Ms. Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines her Department has issued to local authorities with regard to specific provision for the care of those in the 16 to 25 years age group suffering from mental illness.

Mr. Yeo: No guidance has been issued which specifically focuses on this age group. Services for disturbed adolescents—generally 12 to 19 years—were the subject of a report "Bridges over Troubled Waters" from the national health service health advisory service which the Department issued to health and local authorities in 1986. A copy will be placed in the Library.

Psychiatric Patients

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many psychiatric patients are *(a)* long-term and *(b)* acute.

Mr. Yeo: The table gives the total number of residents in the mental illness specialty in England for *(a)* long-term —one year and over—and *(b)* acute—under one year—at 31 March 1992.

	Number
Under one year	25,500
One year and over	19,700

Note: These figures are estimates based on data obtained directly from regional health authorities.

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many psychiatric patients are waiting for a bed.

Mr. Yeo: Information about the numbers waiting by specialty is given in the publication "Hospital Waiting List, In-Patients and Day Cases"—ISBN 1 85839 003 6 —a copy of which is available in the Library.

Fund-holding Practices

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many GP non-fund-holding practices there are in each region; what percentage this represents of the regional total of GP practices; and what percentage of the regional population they serve.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is given in the table:

Region	*Number of GP practices Non-fundholding April 1992*	*Percentage of GP practices Non-fundholding April 1992*	*Percentage of population served by GP Non-fundholding practice April 1992*
Northern	479	92·3	84
Yorkshire	605	90·2	79
Trent	785	92·9	86
East Anglia	283	95·6	92
North West Thames	760	93·9	86
North East Thames	890	97·7	93
South East Thames	757	96·2	91
South West Thames	494	92·7	85
Wessex	405	91·8	85
Oxford	345	87·8	77
South Western	537	92·9	86
West Midlands	997	94·4	87
Mersey	396	88·6	81
North Western	847	96·4	91

Note:

1. The number of GP practices given above relates to the number of GP partnerships at 1 April 1992, including single handed partnerships.

Community Care

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she will publish the guidance note "Housing and Community Care Planning: The First Steps: A Review of Good Practice."

Mr. Yeo: The community care support force is aiming to complete and issue practical guidance on a range of issues concerned with housing and community care, by the end of March.

General Practitioners

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will extend to non-fund-holding GPs the facility to hold two sessions a week to perform a range of diagnostic tests and extra minor surgery procedures to be paid at the clinical assistant rate.

Dr. Mawhinney: Non-fund holding general practitioners may already provide these services under contract to district health authorities.

Walthamstow GPs

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the number of patients per general practitioner in Walthamstow.

Mr. Sackville: The information requested is shown in the table.

GP	*List Size*	*GP*	*List Size*	*GP*	*List Size*
1	4,291	17	2,395	33	1,782
2	3,617	18	2,356	34	1,729
3	3,158	19	2,339	35	1,682
4	3,158	20	2,300	36	1,624
5	2,981	21	2,293	37	1,621
6	2,945	22	2,259	38	1,588
7	2,910	23	2,241	39	1,526
8	2,871	24	2,214	40	1,415
9	2,796	25	2,204	41	1,346
10	2,769	26	2,194	42	1,323
11	2,740	27	2,135	43	1,046
12	2,673	28	1,990	44	694
13	2,557	29	1,980	45	628
14	2,433	30	1,907	46	619
15	2,418	31	1,898	47	258
16	2,401	32	1,853	48	1

This includes one unfilled vacancy.

Operations (Waiting Times)

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what instructions the national health service management executive has given to hospitals in respect of telling patients how long they will have to wait for their operations; and if she will make a statement.

(2) what action she is taking to reduce hospital waiting lists and to keep patients informed about the length of time they will have to wait for operations.

Mr. Sackville: We have made it a requirement under the patients charter that all hospitals must inform patients of the guaranteed date by which they will be admitted for treatment. In addition, a national telephone health helpline has been established under the patients charter so that patients can inquire about local waiting times as well as a wide variety of other health matters.

Since 1987 we have provided a waiting time fund of nearly £200 million to enable hundreds of thousands of additional patients to be treated from waiting lists. Waiting times for hospital treatment have improved dramatically and we are determined to build on this success.

Nurse Training

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of enrolled nurses have the opportunity for training or professional development on conversion courses to achieve first level registration; what information she has on the different levels of opportunity in different health authority areas; and which health authorities provide *(a)* the best and *(b)* the worst training opportunities for enrolled nurses.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not held centrally.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will introduce a national policy on training for enrolled nurses to ensure a consistent approach between regions; and if she will refund the costs of undertaking open and distance learning incurred by enrolled nurses.

Mr. Sackville: It is for regional health authorities, in consultation with employers, to plan for enrolled nurse conversion.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of enrolled nurses are from an ethnic minority; and what policies there are to increase training opportunities for this group.

Mr. Sackville: Data on the ethnic background of enrolled nurses are not held centrally. They will benefit from recent measures which have increased opportunities for conversion.

NHS Facilities (Access)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her policy on the rights of access to NHS facilities of patients with guide dogs; and what guidance she has issued or intends to issue on this matter.

Mr. Yeo: The patients charter sets a national standard requiring arrangements to be made to ensure that everyone, including people with special needs, can use the services. This includes patients with guide dogs.

NHS Management Audit

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to conduct an audit of management within the NHS; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: I understand that, as part of its continuing programme of value-for money studies, the Audit Commission is undertaking a study of unit management in the national health service. I look forward to considering its report.

Whistle Blowers

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made on the consultations on her draft guidance on the protection of the position of NHS employees who draw attention to malpractice and fraud; and when she expects to issue formal guidance.

Dr. Mawhinney: Following the recent consultation exercise on the draft guidance on freedom of speech for national health service staff, we are currently considering the large number of comments received. We expect to be able to issue the final version shortly.

Waiting List Initiative

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines she has given to purchasers and providers of health care concerning the use of marginal cost pricing for waiting list initiative expenditure; in what circumstances purchaser-provider arrangements for operations can be based on marginal cost pricing; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Allocations to regional health authorities from the waiting time fund are tied to the achievement of waiting time targets and, in particular, national policy objectives. Standard pricing guidelines apply to the health care that these funds purchase. As marginal cost pricing should only be applied, in year, for unplanned spare capacity in excess of the assumed volume of service, waiting list initiative expenditure need not result in marginal cost pricing. It is therefore not appropriate to issue separate guidelines on marginal cost pricing of waiting list expenditure.

Huntington's Chorea

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were diagnosed with Huntington's chorea for each year since 1990; and what facilities for treatment are available.

Mr. Yeo: The latest year for which figures are held is 1989-90. In that year there were 725 admissions to national health service hospitals of patients whose diagnosis was Huntington's chorea. There is no known cure for this disease; the full range of NHS treatment and nursing and social care is available to people suffering from it. Because it is an inherited condition, genetic counselling is available to help with decisions about having children.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has been commissioned into Huntington's chorea.

Mr. Yeo: The Department of Health has not commissioned any research into Huntington's chorea. The Medical Research Council, which receives its grant in aid through the Office of Science and Technology, is the main Government agency for the promotion of medical and related biological research in this country. I understand that in the financial year 1991-92, the council's expenditure on research relevant to Huntington's chorea was £99,000. Other basic research funded by the council may, in part, have some relevance to Huntington's chorea. Universities and medical schools may also be funding relevant research.

GP Fund Holders

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish details of the formula used to calculate the moneys *(a)* paid to GP fund holders, *(b)* the data collection methods used to inform the actual distribution of moneys and *(c)* any changes to either *(a)* or *(b)* she plans.

Dr. Mawhinney: The methodology for setting general practitioner fund holders' 1993-94 budgets was published in EL 92(83) "General Practice Fundholding: Guidance on setting budgets for 1993-94", a copy of which is in the Library.

The responsibility for setting budgets rests with regional health authorities who organise data collection locally. We have no immediate plans to change the way budgets are set but will keep this under review.

Private Nurses

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many qualified nurses were employed in *(a)* private hospitals, *(b)* private nursing homes and *(c)* private nursing agencies in each year since 1985.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 8 February 1993]:* The available information is given in the table. The Department does not collect information about the staffing levels in private nursing agencies.

Qualified staff employed in private hospitals and nursing homes

	Hospitals		*Nursing homes*	
	Number	*W.T.E*	*Number*	*W.T.E*
1985	7,746	6,660	17,259	11,693
1986	8,210	7,001	21,825	14,682
1987-88	8,252	6,967	27,801	18,869
1988-89	8,907	7,579	32,044	21,487
1989-90	9,103	7,707	36,678	24,719
1990-91	9,048	7,581	43,865	29,730

Source: SBH 212. 1985-86.
K036 1987-88—1990-91.

W.T.E: Whole time equivalent number of staff based on contracted hours of employment in individual establishments.

PRIME MINISTER

Sandringham

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his statement on 11 February, *Official Report,* column 1111, if Sandringham will be treated as a royal palace or as a private residence of Her Majesty the Queen.

The Prime Minister: Sandringham, which has official as well as private use, is a private asset of Her Majesty the Queen.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Magistrates

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many magistrates have resigned before reaching retirement age in the last five years; and how many have offered as the reason for their decision the changes in the law and practice restricting their freedom of decision taking.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The number of resignations, other than on grounds of age, for the Lord Chancellor's area of responsibility in each of the last five years were:

Year	*Number*
1992	1,034
1991	820
1990	794
1989	799
1988	659

No information is collected centrally on how many magistrates have resigned with the reason offered being changes in the law and practice restricting their freedom of decision taking. Over the period the number of magistrates has grown from 24,112 to 25,340.

County Court Judgments

Mr. Channon: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he proposes to arrange for county courts' judgments under £5,000 to carry interest; if he will authorise such interest to apply retrospectively; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: My Department has recently conducted a wide-ranging public consultation to evaluate the scheme introduced in July 1991 which provides for interest on county court judgments over £5,000. Responses to this consultation are currently being evaluated. While it would not therefore be appropriate to make a statement about any extension of the scheme at this time, my officials will be writing to interested parties to inform them of the outcome of the evaluation during the spring. I can, however, confirm that any extension of the scheme would not provide for interest to apply retrospectively.

Mr. Channon: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when his evaluation of the question of county court judgments carrying interest will be concluded.

Mr. John M. Taylor: My Department's evaluation of the changes introduced in July 1991, which included a provision for interest on judgment debts over £5,000, will be completed by the end of this month.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Public Sector Spending

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discount rate was adopted by Her Majesty's Government for public sector spending in the periods *(a)* 1979 to 1989 and *(b)* 1989 to the present; what considerations underpinned the change made in 1989; and if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's future plans for the discount rate.

Mr. Portillo: The Government specify a standard rate of discount for the public services. It is set on the basis of long-term factors, and is changed infrequently.

The 1978 White Paper, "The Nationalised Industries", Cm 7131, introduced the concept of the required rate of return—RRR—a real return on the whole of each enterprise's investment programme. No discount rate was centrally specified for the enterprises, but in practice a rate of 5 per cent. in real terms—the same as the RRR—or sometimes a higher rate, was used as a discount rate for investment appraisal.

At the same time as Cm 7131 an announcement was made about the discount rates to be used in the public services—*Official Report*, 5 April 1978, columns *147-48*. A discount rate of 5 per cent. in real terms was specified for appraisals of choice of techniques, and a rate of 7 per cent. for other appraisals. In practice 7 per cent. was used only for the appraisal of roads.

A new regime was announced on 5 April 1989—*Official Report*, column *187*. The RRR for public enterprises was raised from 5 to 8 per cent., and the discount rate for the public services from 5 to 6 per cent. However for central Government trading activities selling commercially into private markets the discount rate should usually be at least 8 per cent. Other special cases are listed in "Economic Appraisal in Central Government: A Technical Guide for Government Departments"—the "Green Book"—annex G, paragraph 12.

The 1989 changes were a consequence of the long-term trend in the real rate of return on private sector assets between the late 1970s and late 1980s. The increase in the discount rate for the public sector services was more modest, reflecting the smaller increase in the cost of capital to a private sector company raising funds for low-risk purposes.

The discount rate is intended to reflect long-term conditions, rather than cyclical factors.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made on the effect on public sector investment in energy technology projects of the current level of discount rates.

Mr. Eggar: I have been asked to reply.

My Department's investment in energy technology projects is for research or regulatory purposes, for which assessment on a discounting basis is not appropriate. All the programmes are, however, subject to regular review. The public sector energy industries, which operate in a commercial environment, assess their investment programmes according to the appropriate Treasury guidelines.

Pornography

Mr. Richards: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures are being taken to stop the flow of illegal pornography from other European countries into the United Kingdom.

Sir John Cope: The importation of obscene material and indecent material featuring children into the United Kingdom from any country remains illegal. Routine frontier Customs controls on goods from EC countries ceased on 1 January 1993, but anti-smuggling checks better targeted in response to the known risks continue to prevent the importation of illegal goods. Routine checks also continue on goods from non-EC countries.

Income Tax

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the annual cost of introducing a 35 per cent. income tax rate for all income *(a)* between £23,700 and £26,000, *(b)* between £23,700 and £30,000, and *(c)* between £23,700 and £35,000; and what would be the annual revenue from introducing a 50 per cent. rate on (i) all income over £50,000, (ii) all income over £60,000 and (iii) all income over £70,000.

Mr. Dorrell: The latest estimates are as follows:

Band of taxable income over which 35 per cent. rate would be charged £	*Revenue cost in full year at 1992-93 income levels* £ *million*
23,700 to 26,000	170
23,700 to 30,000	400
23,700 to 35,000	600

Level of taxable income above which 50 per cent. rate would be charged £	*Revenue yield in a full year at 1992-93 income levels* £ *million*
50,000	1,360
60,000	1,120
70,000	950

The estimates do not allow for any behavioural effect that might result from such changes to the tax system and do not include capital gains tax.

Charities (Taxation)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has had from the Charities Tax Reform Group in regard to taxation on charities; what reply he is sending; what action he will be taking; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Cope: The Charities' Tax Reform Group—CTRG—has suggested that charities could be compensated by grant in aid for their irrecoverable VAT on non-business expenditure incurred in carrying out their charitable objectives.

I cannot anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget speech. I have replied to the CTRG along those lines. However, I am also expecting to meet the group shortly to receive further representations.

Balance of Payments

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the measures he is taking to endeavour to reduce the United Kingdom balance of payments deficit.

Mr. Portillo: The Government can best assist traders by keeping inflation and interest rates low. Inflation is now at its lowest level for 25 years and below the European Community average. Interest rates are the lowest for 15 years, and are the lowest in the European Community. The extra support for the Export Credits Guarantee Department announced in the autumn statement will also benefit many exporters.

The success of this approach is demonstrated by the number of overseas investors choosing to locate here. In 1991 the United Kingdom had over 40 per cent. of the stock of Japanese inward investment to the EC.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the net balance of trade in manufactured goods in the last month for which figures are available.

Mr. Nelson: The balance of trade in manufactured goods for December 1992 was published by the Central Statistical Office in the "UK Balance of Payments—Current Account in December" press notice which was published on 28 January 1993, copies of which are available in the House of Commons Library. The information is also available on the Central Statistical Office database which may be accessed by the House of Commons Library.

European Co-operative Statute

Mr. Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the Government's policy on the European co-operative statute, passed by the European Parliament on 22 January.

Mr. Nelson: The Government's views on the proposed European co-operative statute were set out in the explanatory memorandum on European Community legislation submitted to Parliament on 14 May 1992. The Government are analysing responses to a consultative document issued last year and will be reporting on their implications in a further explanatory memorandum later in the year.

European Investment Fund

Mr. George Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps are being taken to revise the terms of the Maastricht treaty and its protocols to take account of the decision at the Edinburgh European Council relating to a European investment fund; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Cope: None.

Tax Arrears

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will raise the income limits which govern the Inland Revenue's practice for remitting arrears of tax where information provided to the Revenue has not been used within a reasonable time.

Mr. Dorrell: I am pleased to announce that the limits are to be increased from today.

The Inland Revenue's practice of remitting tax in cases where the Department has not made timely use of information available is set out in the White Paper of July 1971—first report from the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration: Session 1970-71: cmnd 4729. The proportion of arrears collected varies according to the size of the taxpayer's gross income; the balance of the arrear is remitted.

The following new scale of limits will apply to arrears of tax, the actual or likely amount of which is first notified to the taxpayer or his agent on or after 17 February, 1993:

Gross Income £	*Remission*
15,500 or less	All
15,501-18,000	¾
18,001-22,000	½
22,001-26,000	¼
26,001-40,000	$\frac{1}{10}$
40,001 or more	None

These figures apply to all taxpayers and exceed the previously separate scale for pensioners which is abolished from today.

Quangos

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all those non-departmental public bodies for which his Department is responsible which have the power to compel individuals, firms, companies or other institutions to carry out their instructions at the expense of the individuals, firms, companies or other institutions, and also to charge fees for the cost to the non-departmental public bodies of assessing the work which needed to be done.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 16 February 1993]:* The Financial Services Tribunal.

EDUCATION

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proposals he has to obtain the power to sanction grant-maintained status to new schools established in *(a)* redundant local education authority premises and *(b)* redundant non-LEA premises.

Mr. Forth: It will be for promoters of new grant-maintained schools to provide premises. When determining such an application under the provisions of the Education Bill currently before the House, the Secretary of State will take into consideration the suitability of any premises. This would apply equally whether or not the premises were in LEA ownership.

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proposals he has to obtain the power to award grant-maintained status to new schools whose intake is selected on the grounds of *(a)* academic ability or *(b)* artistic, sporting, scientific or other ability.

Mr. Forth: The Education Bill currently under consideration in the House will enable the Secretary of State to award grant-maintained status to new schools that select on the grounds of academic ability or selection by specialism.

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proposals he has to obtain the power to allow an existing independent school company to establish a new grant-maintained school in *(a)* redundant local education authority premises and *(b)* non-LEA premises.

Mr. Forth: It would be for the promoters of an existing independent school company to provide the premises for a new grant-maintained school. If they wished to use the redundant LEA premises for their new GM school, this would be a matter between them and the local education authority. If they wished to establish the school in a non-LEA premises, they would be free to propose this.

The Government are considering bringing forward an amendment to the Education Bill to make it clear that promoters of existing independent schools, as well as voluntary bodies, will be able to seek grant-maintained status.

Secondary Schools

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to his answer of 28 January, *Official Report*, column *807*, what estimate he has made of the total number of places in secondary schools in England and Wales, the number he now believes are surplus to requirements and the number of the total, actual or estimated, that are currently located in temporary or mobile accommodation and the numbers located in laboratories, workshops or other specialist teaching space as defined in departmental circular 11/88 of 1988.

Mr. Forth: Questions about the level of surplus places in Welsh secondary schools are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales. On the basis of the Department's survey of school capacity, we estimate that in 1991 there were some 3·5 million secondary school places in England, of which up to 700,000 were surplus, although not all of these are practicably removable. It is not possible to say how many secondary school places were, or are, located in temporary or mobile accommodation, laboratories, workshops or other specialist teaching spaces.

Schools (Space Requirements)

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what criteria or evidence from practising teachers his Department took into account when formulating the space requirements for pupils in primary and secondary schools used in the content of Departmental circulars *(a)* 11/88 and *(b)* 6/91.

Mr. Forth: The Department undertakes fieldwork to monitor the use of teaching accommodation, including discussions with practising teachers, and the results are fed into the formulation of space requirements.

Special Needs Pupils

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make it his policy to amend section 2 of the Education Act 1981 to place the onus upon local education authorities to justify segregation of special needs education pupils away from mainstream schools.

Mr. Forth: The Education Bill currently before Parliament will put a qualified duty on LEAs to integrate children with statements in ordinary schools unless that duty is incompatible with the wishes of the parent. The Bill will also establish an independent special educational needs tribunal. LEAs will be required to justify their decisions over a child's placement on an appeal by the parent to the tribunal.

Further Education

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what action he is taking to assist towards improved success rates in further education and to increase motivation among those in the 16 to 19-year-old age groups who are involved.

Mr. Boswell: The Government's clear policy is to increase both the participation and attainment of 16 to 19-year-olds. Public expenditure plans already provide for a substantial expansion of provision. Within this framework, we are working with and through the new Further Education Funding Council, qualifications bodies and others to promote three high quality qualification pathways—GCE A-levels and AS, general national vocational qualifications and national vocational qualifications—and to help young people choose the courses which are best for them. We are also working to develop and publish indicators to demonstrate and encourage the improved performance that will follow this better match of provision to need.

Seven-year-olds (Testing)

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will publish a table covering a composite of English, mathematics, science and technology for the most recent standard assessment tests for seven-year-olds and ranking local education authorities according to level 3 attainment.

Mr. Forth: The table shows the ranking of local education authorities in England according to attainment at level 3 and above in a composite of English, mathematics, science and technology for the 1992 standard assessment tests for seven year olds.

Key stage 1 assessment 1992
(as at 15 December 1992)
Local education authority ranking
Composite of English, mathematics, science and technology

Local education authority	*Percentage at level 3 and above*
Bromley	24
Hackney	24
Harrow	24
Richmond upon Thames	24
Barnet	23
Camden	22
Hammersmith	22
Haringey	22
Hillingdon	22
Merton	22
Sutton	22
Hertfordshire	21
Islington	21
Redbridge	21
Westminster	21
Enfield	20
Isle of Wight	20
Tower Hamlets	20
Wandsworth	20
Ealing	19
Gloucestershire	19
Kensington and Chelsea	19
Lambeth	19
Lewisham	19
Trafford	19
West Sussex	19
Newcastle upon Tyne	18
South Tyneside	18
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	17
Derbyshire	17
East Sussex	17
Gateshead	17
North Yorkshire	17
Nottinghamshire	17
Oldham	17
Southwark	17
Tameside	17
Croydon	16
Dorset	16
Kirklees	16
Lincolnshire	16
Manchester	16
Waltham Forest	16
Warwickshire	16
Wiltshire	16
Wirral	16
Avon	15
Berkshire	15
Buckinghamshire	15
Cheshire	15
Cumbria	15
Doncaster	15
Greenwich	15
Hampshire	15
Kingston upon Thames	15
Leeds	15
Shropshire	15
Somerset	15
Barking	14
Bexley	14
Brent	14
Calderdale	14
Devon	14
Essex	14
Havering	14
Hereford and Worcester	14
Kent	14
Norfolk	14
Northumberland	14
Rochdale	14
Solihull	14
Surrey	14
Wolverhampton	14
Bradford	13
Cambridgeshire	13
Durham	13
Hounslow	13
Leicestershire	13
Oxfordshire	13
Rotherham	13
Sandwell	13
Sefton	13
Sheffield	13
St. Helens	13
Stockport	13
Suffolk	13
Bedfordshire	12
Birmingham	12
Bury	12
Humberside	12
Liverpool	12
Wakefield	12
Bolton	11
Dudley	11
Knowsley	11
North Tyneside	11
Northamptonshire	11
Salford	11
Sunderland	11
Walsall	11
Lancashire	10
Newham	10
Staffordshire	9
Barnsley	8
Cleveland	8
Coventry	8
Wigan	6
ENGLAND	15

Correspondence

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when he expects to reply to the letters dated 2 December and 2 February from Dr. D. Taylor, vice chairman of the governors at Churston grammar school, Brixham, South Devon, about the status of incremental enhancements in teachers' pay scales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: Both letters were answered on 16 February.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Drug Misuse

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he has considered an application for an exhibition relating to health education and drug misuse to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Administration Committee, arrangements have been made for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from 15 to 19 March 1993.

European Court (Phone Calls)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he will take steps to provide an abbreviated dialling code to allow hon. Members to make direct telephone calls from the House to the European Court of Justice.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I have arranged for the telephone numbers of the European Court of Justice and of the United Kingdom permanent representative to the EC to be included in the abbreviated dialling system.

Members' Pay

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Lord President of the Council what are the average costs in salary and allowances of one hon. Member of Parliament.

Mr. Newton: At 31 March 1992 the full parliamentary salary was payable at the rate of £30,854 per annum and the ceiling figures for the office costs allowance—OCA —and additional costs allowance—ACA—were £28,986 and £10,786 respectively.

For the year 1991-92 nearly all hon. Members claimed the permitted OCA maximum and most of the 621 hon. Members who were entitled to the ACA claimed the maximum.

Given the wide variation of travel costs for individual hon. Members, it is not possible to give a meaningful average.

Select Committees

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Lord President of the Council what proposals he has to strengthen the Select Committee system.

Mr. Newton: I have no particular plans to alter the workings of the Select Committee system, but am always ready to consider proposals from hon. and right hon. Members.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Market Testing

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total cost, including an estimate for the time of civil servants involved, of the conference on market testing held at the Queen Elizabeth II conference centre on 18 January.

Mr. Waldegrave: The total cost of this conference was met by the subscription fees paid by delegates. The cost of the time of the civil servants involved cannot be identified separately: discussions with private sector companies are an integral part of their work to take forward market testing.

Open Government

Dr. Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he expects to announce the results of his open government initiative.

Mr. Robert Jackson: The results of the open government review will be announced in a White Paper later this year.

Freedom of Information

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Chncellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will place in the Library a copy of the report into the operation of freedom of information laws in Australia, Canada and New Zealand submitted to the Cabinet Office by Mr. Robert Hazell at the conclusion of his civil service Nuffield and Leverhulme travelling fellowship in 1986-87.

Mr. Waldegrave: This report was prepared on the basis that views expressed by the federal and provincial governments concerned were given in confidence. They would need to be consulted before the report was made generally available. However, an article by Mr. Hazell based on the reports was published in the summer 1989 issue of the quarterly journal of the Royal Institute of Public Administration.

TRANSPORT

Seaborne Trade

Mr. Shore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the tonnage of the United Kingdom's seaborne trade in each year since 1979; and how much of this trade was carried *(a)* in United Kingdom registered ships and *(b)* in ships carried by United Kingdom ship owners.

Mr. Norris: The total tonnage of the United Kingdom's seaborne trade in each year since 1979 and the share of this trade carried in United Kingdom registered ships are given in the table:

	Total (thousand tonnes)	*Percentage in United Kingdom ships*
1979	251,276	29
1980	230,982	34
1981	242,654	28
1982	242,292	28
1983	247,108	24
1984	274,078	23
1985	286,070	23
1986	298,356	21
1987	297,940	22
1988	289,014	21
1989	287,324	21
1990	300,475	19
1991	299,601	18

No information is available on the basis of ship ownership.

Tankers

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the statutory provisions which currently exist for the purposes of regulating moored tankers in Lyme Bay and other United Kingdom waters.

Mr. Norris: At the present time, articles 9 and 14 of the Convention on the Territorial Seas and Contiguous Zone 1958 govern the freedom of all ships to proceed through and anchor in this region during the normal course of a passage.

Regulations have been drafted under section 35 of the Merchant Shipping Act 1988, to govern ship-to-ship transfers of dangerous goods, marine pollutants, noxious liquid substances in bulk, oil fuel bunkers, crude oil and refined products, within United Kingdom territorial limits beyond port limits, including Lyme bay. These regulations will be laid before Parliament in the near future.

In addition, United Kingdom regulations giving effect to the Safety of Life at Sea Convention 1972—SOLAS—and the Convention for Preventions of Pollution from Ships 1973-78—MARPOL—generally apply to non-United Kingdom ships within our territorial seas.

Shetland Oil Spill

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the economic cost of the MV Braer oil incident including the economic effect on fisheries, tourism and the local community.

Mr. Norris: Shetland Islands council is undertaking an economic impact study of the Braer incident. It is likely to be some time before the results are available.

Buses

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to publish a consultation document on possible amendments to the Transport Act 1985.

Mr. Freeman: I do not intend to alter the basic deregulatory regime set up by the Transport Act 1985. There may, however, be aspects of its working that could be improved and I intend to issue a consultation paper on them shortly.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action has been taken to implement commitment No. 77 in the "This Common Inheritance" second year report relating to the provision of better information to bus passengers and the development of measures for promoting the use of buses.

Mr. Freeman: I have allocated a further £15·5 million for measures to promote bus use in 1993-94, some of which relate to passenger information systems, and have also allocated funds to a trial of low-floor buses. I have commissioned research into the provision of information to bus passengers and will consider whether to issue guidelines in the light of this research.

Radioactive Materials

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 9 February, *Official Report*, c. *584*, to the hon. Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill), what consideration his Department has given to keeping a data base of movements of radioactive material by road, rail or air.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: It is not considered that the compilation of such a database would help the Department with its responsibilities for the safe transport of radioactive material.

Rail freight

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many British Rail employees were made redundant as a result of the ending of Trainload Freight seeking contracts on the West Highland line.

Mr. Freeman: None. British Rail will make every effort to redeploy displaced staff when this traffic ceases at the end of March.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many people were directly employed by Railfreight Distribution in each of the past five financial years;

(2) how many people were directly employed by Trainload Freight in each of the past five financial years.

Mr. Freeman: Railway staffing is a matter for BR.

Following is the information for Railfreight Distribution:

	Number
1987-88	1,394
1988-89	1,390
1989-90	1,579
1990-91	1,684
1991-92	2,898

Train crew are not included, as they are brought in from the passenger sectors and Trainload Freight. The increase in the numbers of staff for 1991-92 reflects the changes brought by the initiative "Organising for Quality"; operational regions have been abolished, and their staff are now employed by RfD. Previous increases in staffing can be attributed in the main to preparations for channel tunnel freight services.

Trainload Freight currently employs about 13,500 staff. Comparable historical data are not readily available.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received on freight losses from the railways; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The Department has received several representations from hon. Members and private interests. During the Railways Bill Second Reading debate, my right hon. Friend proposed three new measures intended to assist the rail freight industry.

British Airports Authority

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what statutory provisions and mechanisms exist to protect the customer and individual consumer of services provided by airports run by BAA.

Mr. Norris: All airports are governed by the Airports Act 1986, under which the Civil Aviation Authority can remedy or prevent unfair or discriminatory trade or pricing practices concerning the handling of aircraft, passengers and their baggage. In addition, at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted airports there is a statutory five-yearly review of all activities affecting airport users. The Office of Fair Trading also has powers to investigate other commercial activities at all BAA's airports under consumer and competition legislation.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration the Government have given to the scope for competition in respect of airports operated by BAA plc; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The Government believe in free, open and fair competition in the air travel and airports markets and will continue to ensure that the interests of consumers and operators alike are protected against anti-competitive practices. Charges at BAA's airports are subject to regulation by the Civil Aviation Authority, which has powers to remedy any specific instance of conduct which unreasonably discriminates against airport users or unfairly exploits an airport's market strength.

Public Transport

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of *(a)* bus services, *(b)* train services, *(c)* maritime ferry services and *(d)* other public transport services, in each year since 1981.

Mr. Freeman: Information on the number of public transport services in Scotland is not available. Figures that are available appear in the annual publications "Scottish Transport Statistics" and "Bus and Coach Statistics". The following table gives the number of vehicle kilometres on bus and coach services run by operators based in Scotland and by Strathclyde Passenger Transport Executive—Underground.

Vehicle kilometres by public transport

	Bus and coach services[1] (million)			*Strathclyde Passenger Transport Executive—Underground (thousand)*	
	Local (stage) services	*Other services*	*All services*		
1981	294	121	416	1981-82	1,022
1982	287	124	411	1982-83	1,070
1983	290	137	427	1983-84	1,069
1984	286	146	432	1984-85	1,078
1985-86	286	143	429	1985-86	1,062
1986-87	303	147	449	1986-87	1,120
1987-88	329	145	474	1987-88	1,089
1988-89	326	154	480	1988-89	1,166
1989-90	336	167	503	1989-90	1,165
1990-91	335	164	499	1990-91	1,122
1991-92	355	169	524	1991-92	1,137

[1] Figures are approximate, as only a sample of the smaller bus and coach operators is surveyed.

Figures for a range of different modes of public transport are available only in terms of the number of passenger journeys, which are given in the following table.

Passenger journeys by public transport in Scotland

Bus and coach travel on local (stage) services[1]		*Rail services passenger traffic originating in Scotland*		*Strathclyde Passenger Transport Executive—Underground*		*Maritime ferry services[2]*		*Air terminal passenger traffic to/from Scottish airports[3]*	
Year	*Million*	*Year*	*Million*	*Year*	*Thousand*	*Year*	*Thousand*	*Year*	*Thousand*
1981	716	1981	57·8	1981-82	10,634	1981	4,270	1981	6,498·5
1982	694	[4]1982	49·5	1982-83	11,792	1982	4,193	1982	6,369·9
1983	680	1983	55·7	1983-84	12,261	1983	4,511	1983	6,482·8
1984	669	[5]1984-85	64·1	1984-85	12,693	1984	4,665	1984	6,985·1
1985-86	671	1985-86	57·1	1985-86	13,148	1985	4,668	1985	6,942·6
1986-87	644	1986-87	53·1	1986-87	13,700	1986	4,851	1986	7,241·3
1987-88	647	1987-88	54·1	1987-88	13,518	1987	5,346	1987	7,810·4
1988-89	647	1988-89	54·0	1988-89	13,591	1988	5,655	1988	8,507·2
1989-90	613	[4]1989-90	51·8	1989-90	13,466	1989	6,176	1989	9,228·6
1990-91	585	1990-91	54·8	1990-91	13,670	1990	6,543	1990	9,861·4
1991-92	572	1991-92	—	1991-92	13,480	1991	6,800	1991	9,570·5

[1] Figures are approximate, as only a sample of the smaller bus and coach operators is surveyed.

[2] Covers Caledonian McBrayne and services to Orkney and Shetland.

[3] Includes double counting of flights within Scotland.

[4] Figures affected by industrial action.

[5] Figure refers to the 15 month period 1 January 1984 to 31 March 1985.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Whisky

Mr. Sims: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the result of the recent meeting of the Council of Ministers which reviewed the EC spirits definition regulations requiring a minimum alcoholic strength by volume for whisky.

Mr. Curry: The Council accepted a recommendation by the EC Commission that the minimum alcoholic strength of whisky should remain at 40 per cent. by volume.

Linseed Crop

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to bring this season's linseed crop into the set-aside regime.

Mr. Curry: The European Commission's price-fixing proposals include the addition of linseed to the list of crops eligible for aid in 1993 under the arable area payments scheme, which includes provisions for set-aside. The timing of this proposal takes no account of farming practice and causes considerable difficulties for linseed producers. I am therefore opposing it.

Inspectorate for Plant Health

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the powers of the inspectorate for plant health.

Mr. Curry: The powers of the plant health and seeds inspectorate are set out in the Plant Health (Great Britain) Order 1987.

The inspectorate is empowered to take appropriate action to ensure that a high plant health status is maintained, consistent with the necessity to allow the continuation of trade wherever possible. This will continue under the single market arrangements for plant health which are due to come into force on 1 June this year.

Ruminant-based Protein

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research has been carried out under the auspices of his Department to ascertain whether it is safe to feed pigs and poultry with ruminant-based protein.

Mr. Soames: There is no evidence of a naturally occurring spongiform encephalopathy in these species. The Tyrrell committee has advised that there are no grounds for extending the ban on the use of ruminant protein to non-ruminants, provided that the specified bovine offals are excluded. Nevertheless, studies are in hand involving the feeding of brain material from confirmed cases of BSE to pigs and poultry, and epidemiological surveillance of pigs and poultry is maintained.

Russian Food and Fish

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will consider taking anti-dumping action in relation to imports of Russian food and fish.

Mr. Curry: I am aware of the United Kingdom fishing industry's concern that the current weak market for some species may be caused in part by the importation of cheap Russian cod. The United Kingdom, along with other member states and the EC Commission, is urgently studying the situation on the Community market in relation to the reference prices and associated provisions set out in EC regulation 3759/92 on the common organisation of the market in fishery and aquaculture products.

Fishing Vessels

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what safeguards have been introduced to prevent the acquisition of days at sea entitlements by foreign-owned British-registered fishing vessels.

Mr. Curry: Days-at-sea conditions will be attached to the licences of all British registered fishing vessels of over 10 m in length, regardless of ownership.

Sea Fish Conservation Bill

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what were his estimates of the cost of enforcing and administering the Sea Fish Conservation Bill before the Bill was introduced; and what they are now.

Mr. Curry: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) on 2 February, column *133*.

Set-aside Land

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what area of agricultural land in Nottinghamshire is set aside under the common agricultural policy; and what is its annual value.

Mr. Curry: A total of 777 hectares of land are currently set aside in Nottinghamshire under the five-year set-aside scheme at an annual cost of around £146,000. Information on the land set aside under the new arable area payments scheme will not be available until growers have to declare the area later this year.

Drainage Authorities

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how set-aside land is treated in the investment appraisal carried out by a drainage authority when seeking central Government grant aid;

(2) which crops and livestock products are excluded from consideration as a cost or benefit in the investment appraisal carried out by a drainage authority when seeking central Government grant aid on the grounds that there are no net national costs or benefits due to supply control mechanisms.

Mr. Curry: The Ministry plans to publish next month revised and updated project appraisal guidelines on the investment appraisal of flood defence and coast protection capital works. The guidelines will contain specific instructions to drainage authorities covering these issues. A copy will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what guidance is given to drainage authorities on the maintenance of the original protection or drainage standard beyond the design life of an earlier scheme;

(2) what guidance is given to drainage authorities on the maintenance of previously grant-aided works where within the design life of the scheme *(a)* land use changes have occurred that mean that greater economic benefits could be gained by no longer maintaining that scheme and *(b)* damage to a site of acknowledged environmental interest is occurring through continuing to maintain that scheme.

Mr. Curry: Maintenance work is essential to the sound management of flood defences and is the responsibility of local flood defence and land drainage authorities. The Ministry does not issue separate guidance on the economic appraisal of maintenance, as opposed to capital, work, but authorities are expected to achieve value for money by keeping their maintenance programmes under review throughout the design life of defences and beyond if they remain sustainable. The Ministry intends to produce guidance on post-project evaluation of defences for authorities later this year.

The Ministry's publication "Conservation Guidelines for Drainage Authorities" advises that authorities should consult the statutory conservation bodies annually and in advance on their maintenance programmes for the following year. A separate Ministry guide, "Environmental Procedures for Inland Flood Defence Works", published last December jointly with English Nature and the National Rivers Authority, advises that the impact of defences on the environment should be audited and that mitigating action may be required if the environmental or engineering objectives have not been achieved.

Set-aside Land

Mr. Cox: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the environmental impact of rotational set-aside.

Mr. Curry: The Ministry has an ongoing programme of monitoring and research on the environmental effects of set-aside, including changes in botanical composition and impact on wildlife habitats, weeds, diseases, pests and nitrate leaching. We were able to draw on this and on advice from environmental organisations in establishing the rules for management of rotational set-aside under the new EC arable scheme last year. It is as yet too early to assess the impact of the rotational set-aside arrangements, which were introduced only last autumn, but we will be carrying out a full evaluation of both these and the non-rotational set-aside arrangements which are due to be introduced from this autumn.

SCOTLAND

Hospitals

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to meet representatives of the British Medical Association to discuss *(a)* bed closures, *(b)* cancelled operating lists and *(c)* hospitals running out of money before the end of the financial year.

Mr. Stewart: Although my right hon. Friend meets representatives from the British Medical Association from time to time, he has no immediate plans for a further meeting at present.

Heritage Sites

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what additional resources he will make available to Scottish Heritage to assist in the emergency preservation of architectural sites on the coasts of the Western Isles, Orkney Isles and Shetland Isles following the storms in January.

Sir Hector Monro: Although these storms did considerable damage, they were but one episode in a continuing problem which Historic Scotland is already addressing by monitoring, survey and excavation. I am satisfied that Historic Scotland has the resources it needs to continue this work.

Legal Aid

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a further statement on his proposed changes to eligibility for civil legal aid and advice and assistance.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has carefully considered the various representations he has received on the proposals to change the eligibility criteria for legal aid in Scotland as set out in my reply of 16 November 1992 to my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Robertson), *Official Report,* Vol. 214, col. *64.*

Given the distinctive features of the Scottish legal system and in particular the interface between advice and assistance and full civil and criminal legal aid, my right hon. Friend has decided to retain a contributory band of advice and assistance. Those on income support or family credit or with a weekly disposable income of less than £61 will be eligible for free advice and assistance. Those whose weekly disosable income falls between £61 and £147 will receive advice and assistance subject to the payment of a contribution on a sliding scale set by reference to the level of the applicant's disposable income. The retention of contributory advice and assistance will ensure that those on moderate incomes above income support level will continue to benefit from advice and assistance.

We intend to proceed with the changes to eligibility for civil legal aid as announced. The current eligibility criteria for criminal legal aid will remain unchanged.

These changes will ensure the achievement of our objective that reasonable access to legal aid continues to be provided for the most needy. Planned expenditure on legal aid is expected to rise by 40 per cent. over the next three years and more people than ever before are expected to be granted legal aid.

My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State has today written to all Scottish Members of Parliament explaining the revised proposals in more detail.

Greenock Prison

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if there is to be a fatal accident inquiry concerning the recent death of a prisoner in Her Majesty's prison, Greenock; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 15 February 1993]:* A fatal accident inquiry will be held into the death on 13 January 1993 of a prisoner in HM prison, Greenock although no date has yet been fixed. It would be improper to comment on the circumstances of the death until after the conclusion of the fatal accident inquiry.

Wood Products

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been for each year since 1979 *(a)* the cost of importing wood products and *(b)* the proportion of the total import costs represented by this figure.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 9 February 1993]:* I have been asked to reply.

The information is given in the following table.

	(a) *Cost of importing wood products*[1] *£ million*	*(b)* *Proportion of total visible imports* *per cent.*
1979	1,411	3·0
1980	1,282	2·6
1981	1,343	2·7
1982	1,435	2·5
1983	1,922	2·9
1984	2,119	2·7
1985	2,050	2·4
1986	2,306	2·7
1987	2,665	2·8
1988	3,004	2·8
1989	3,141	2·6
1990	3,109	2·5
1991	2,562	2·2

[1] Wood products are defined as the principal products of class 46 *less* group 466 of the Standard Industrial Classification.
Source: Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the domestic consumption of wood products each year since 1979.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 9 February 1993]:* I have been asked to reply.

The available information is given in the following table. Comparable data for the years 1979 to 1981 are not available.

Domestic consumption of wood products

	£ billion
1982	5·4
1983	6·5
1984	7·2
1985	7·5
1986	8·2
1987	9·5
1988	11·1
1989	11·4
1990	11·1
1991	10·3

Note: Wood products are defined as the principal products of class 46 less group 466 of the Standard Industrial Classification.
Source: Business Monitors, PAS series: Central Statistical Office.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Falkland Islands

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement regarding the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands continental shelf.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to a question from the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) on 16 February 1993, at column 119.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if his Department has provided a letter of comfort to the Falkland Islands Government in respect of the seismic survey activity in the Falkland Islands continental shelf of Geco-Prakla and Spectrum Energy and Information Technology Ltd; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to a question from the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) on 10 February 1993, at column *618*.

Thailand

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the British Government have urged the Government of Thailand to bring to justice those who are responsible for aiding or facilitating forced prostitution of women and children in that country, including both locals and foreign tourists who engage the services of child and other forced prostitutes.

Mr. Goodlad: Her Majesty's ambassador in Bangkok recently raised our concern about the problem of forced prostitution in Thailand, particularly of children, with the Thai Government. We will continue to encourage Thailand to take effective measures to tackle the problem.

Somalia and Kenya

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent visit by the Minister for Overseas Development to Somalia and Kenya.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: In Somalia, my noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development had discussions in Mogadishu, Baidoa and Hargeisa on the future prospects for relief and rehabilitation. She met key United Nations and United States officials engaged in "Operation Restore Hope" and representatives of British non-governmental organisations.

In Kenya, Baroness Chalker discussed political and economic issues with President Moi and other Kenyan leaders. She also visited a drought-affected district in the north-east to see relief and rehabilitation work.

Angola

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the MPLA in Angola regarding the detention and alleged maltreatment of UNITA officials and supporters.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Our embassy in Luanda has regularly raised this issue with the Angolan Government, and has taken it up with President dos Santos. The treatment and future of all detainees, including those held by UNITA, is one of several questions which can only be resolved by dialogue between the two parties. We have urged both sides to meet as a matter of urgency to continue the talks begun in Addis Ababa on 27 January.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Tools (Developing World)

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much, in cash terms and as a percentage of the ODA budget, has been spent by the ODA in each of the last five years on tools for distribution to the developing world; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The supply of appropriate technology, including hand tools, forms an important part of many aid projects, both those we support directly and those managed by non-governmental organisations. Data about spending on hand tools are not collated centrally.

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give the total budget of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the British contribution by financial year since its formation.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The European bank for reconstruction and development was inaugurated in April 1991. The information is as follows:

	Budget (ecu million)
1991	106·2
1992	111·2
1993	139·9

Members of the bank do not contribute directly to the budget; rather, they contribute to the bank's operating capital in direct proportion to their shareholding. The British shareholding is 8·5 per cent. worth 851·75 mecu, with a paid-in element of 30 per cent. over five years. Half is paid in cash and half in non-negotiable non-interest bearing promissory notes which are drawn down over three years. To date British capital subscription payments have been:

Capital subscription

Financial year	*£stg million*
1991-92	21·6
1992-93	31·8

As host country to the European bank for reconstruction and development, the British Government have additionally provided a grant of £40 million over three years to assist the European bank for reconstruction and development with the costs of establishing itself in London. This grant will be drawn down as follows:

United Kingdom grant

Financial year	*£stg million*
1991-92	12·5
1992-93	15·0
1993-94	12·5

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all of the countries eligible to borrow from the European bank for reconstruction and development, giving *(a)* the date on which they became eligible, *(b)* the total borrowed in each subsequent financial year to the latest available date and *(c)* any repayments made by financial year.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The table shows the value of loans and investments signed by the European bank for reconstruction and development for 60 projects in its countries of operation in the last two financial years together with the amounts disbursed.

Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan are not full members of the EBRD as yet. Membership procedures are currently under way for the following.

Czech Republic
Slovak Republic
Croatia
Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Recipient country	*Membership date*	*Borrowings committed 1991 (mecu)*	*Borrowings committed 1992 (mecu)*	*Amounts disbursed 1992 (mecu)*
Albania	18 December 1991	8·26	—	
Armenia	7 December 1992	—	—	
Belarus	10 June 1992	—	32·03	0·32
Bulgaria	15 April 1991	—	107·51	
CSFR	15 April 1991	—	227·08	41·01
Estonia	28 February 1992	—	70·45	
Georgia	26 May 1992	—	—	
Hungary	15 April 1991	98·21	150·9	65·08
Kyrgyzstan	5 June 1992	—	—	
Latvia	18 March 1992	—	32·3	
Lithuania	5 March 1992	—	15·86	
Moldova	5 May 1992	—	—	
Poland	15 April 1991	90·58	363·48	16·13
Romania	15 April 1991	165·00	80·52	0·75
Russia	9 April 1992	14·32	156·65	2·89
Turkmenistan	1 June 1992	—	—	
Ukraine	13 August 1992	—	2·89	
Uzbekistan	30 April 1992	—	—	

Note: (a) No amounts were due for repayment up to the end of 1992.

Know-how Fund

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all the countries covered by the know-how fund, giving *(a)* the date on which they became eligible for assistance and *(b)* the total spend for each subsequent financial year to the latest available.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The know-how fund was launched in June 1989. The date on which countries became eligible for assistance and expenditure for these in 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92 are as follows.

Countries	*Date eligible for assistance*	*1989-90 (£000)*	*1990-91 (£000)*	*1991-92 (£000)*
Poland	June 1989	2,000	10,900	10,700
Hungary	October 1989	—	1,600	6,300
CSFR	April 1990	n/a	2,000	6,600
Ex GDR	April to October 1990	n/a	500	n/a
Bulgaria	February 1991	n/a	—	1,200
Romania	May 1991	n/a	n/a	1,200

Countries	*Date eligible for assistance*	*1989-90 (£000)*	*1990-91 (£000)*	*1991-92 (£000)*
Slovenia	**July 1992**	**n/a**	**n/a**	**n/a**
Albania	**July 1992**	**n/a**	**n/a**	**n/a**
Estonia	**November 1990**	**n/a**	—	**10**
Latvia	**November 1990**	**n/a**	—	—
Lithuania	**November 1990**	**n/a**	—	**15**
Kazakhstan	**November 1990**	**n/a**	—	**10**
Uzbekistan	**November 1990**	**n/a**	—	—
Armenia	**November 1990**	**n/a**	—	—
Azerbaijan	**November 1990**	**n/a**	—	—
Georgia	**November 1990**	**n/a**	—	—
Belarus	**November 1990**	**n/a**	—	—
Ukraine	**November 1990**	**n/a**	—	**100**
Russia	**November 1990**	**n/a**	**1**	**26,623**

Total spending on all know-how fund programmes for 1992-93 will not be available until later this year.

Narmada Dam, India

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) how many people have been displaced by the Narmada dam project in India to date; and how many have been resettled;

(2) if he will make a statement on the mechanism for payment of compensation to each displaced person in connection with the Narmada dam project, India; and what information he has on the relative differentials in compensation to people displaced in Gujarat and in Madhya Pradesh;

(3) how much land each person displaced by the Narmada dam project and canal network receives; how many hectares of land have been allocated for displaced people; and if he will list the districts to which displaced people have been and will be located.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[holding answer 4 February 1993]*: A total of 5,500 families in Gujarat and Maharashtra have been resettled to date. Compensation mechanisms have been established, but compensation formulae differ from state to state depending on eligibility criteria. About 11,300 hectares of land have been allocated so far to those who have been displaced. My noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development will write to the hon. Member in more detail about his questions; copies of her letter will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police (Sick Leave)

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 2 February, *Official Report,* columns *126-28,* if he will give the figures for days lost in each police force in England and Wales due to *(a)* assault-related sick leave and *(b)* sick leave not due to assaults in 1990 and 1991 expressed as an average per officer employed in the force at these dates.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information requested is as follows.

Force	*Average days sickness per officer due to assault 1990*	*Average days sickness per officer non-assault 1990*	*Average days sickness per officer due to assault 1991*	*Average days sickness per officer non-assault 1991*
Avon and Somerset	**0·46**	**9·71**	**0·27**	**9·89**
Bedfordshire	**0·55**	**12·39**	**0·76**	**11·66**
Cambridgeshire	**0·18**	**12·24**	**0·48**	**10·10**
Cheshire	**0·59**	**10·04**	**0·49**	**11·82**
City of London	**0·05**	**12·55**	**0·01**	**10·93**
Cleveland	**0·49**	**19·01**	**0·41**	**15·83**
Cumbria	**0·14**	**11·15**	**0·30**	**10·25**
Derbyshire	**0·37**	**10·67**	**0·67**	**13·69**
Devon and Cornwall	**0·30**	**9·19**	**0·34**	**9·78**
Dorset	**0·32**	**7·27**	**0·25**	**10·72**
Durham	**0·87**	**10·77**	**0·82**	**11·48**
Dyfed Powys	**0·66**	**10·37**	**0·24**	**11·44**
Essex	**0·22**	**12·42**	**0·16**	**11·28**
Gloucestershire	**0·22**	**9·98**	**0·29**	**11·18**
Greater Manchester	**0·53**	**13·69**	**0·52**	**12·46**
Gwent	**0·33**	**10·60**	**0·13**	**13·68**
Hampshire	**0·69**	**9·79**	**0·29**	**13·58**
Hertfordshire	**0·39**	**13·06**	**0·38**	**13·49**
Humberside	**0·45**	**13·13**	**0·42**	**9·96**
Kent	**0·18**	**9·67**	**0·06**	**6·69**
Lancashire	**0·43**	**15·97**	**0·75**	**14·81**
Leicestershire	**0·36**	**13·22**	**0·37**	**13·52**
Lincolnshire	**0·56**	**13·02**	**0·63**	**14·36**
Merseyside	**0·87**	**16·09**	**0·93**	**18·93**
Norfolk	**0·27**	**12·42**	**0·11**	**10·79**
North Wales	**0·47**	**13·24**	**0·60**	**16·46**
North Yorkshire	**0·20**	**11·64**	**0·30**	**13·71**
Northamptonshire	**0·12**	**12·40**	**0·06**	**13·21**
Northumbria	**1·22**	**9·07**	**1·15**	**8·75**

Force	*Average days sickness per officer due to assault 1990*	*Average days sickness per officer non-assault 1990*	*Average days sickness per officer due to assault 1991*	*Average days sickness per officer non-assault 1991*
Nottinghamshire	0·56	11·54	0·46	11·54
South Wales	0·78	13·11	0·91	14·92
South Yorkshire	0·43	11·73	0·20	12·25
Staffordshire	0·51	14·45	0·50	15·98
Suffolk	0·37	7·44	0·28	7·19
Surrey	0·49	8·83	0·38	11·10
Sussex	0·34	9·76	0·58	13·11
Thames Valley	0·31	6·97	0·20	9·60
Warwickshire	0·43	11·81	0·27	13·78
West Mercia	0·24	12·08	0·20	12·76
West Midlands	0·00	7·09	0·19	9·37
West Yorkshire	0·46	10·42	0·56	12·02
Wiltshire	0·39	8·50	0·33	7·67
Metropolitan police	0·27	12·39	0·37	10·91

Calculated using authorised strength figures for 31 December 1990 and 1991

Police Funding

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to change the revenue grant system for police forces in England and Wales to one based on the allocation of grant on assessment of relative need.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My right hon. and learned Friend is considering a range of issues connected with the police service, including future funding arrangements. How grant is allocated is clearly one aspect of this. He will announce his conclusions on funding in due course.

Wolds Prison

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff of governor grade at the Wolds prison were previously employed at governor grade in the public prison sector.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: A contracted-out prison is run by a director, not a governor. The director and the head of custody at Wolds remand prison were formerly employed by HM prison service in governor grades.

Police, North Wales

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations he has received relating to the establishment figure for the north Wales police; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My right hon. and learned Friend has received in the last 12 months six letters from hon. Members. My right hon. and noble Friend met a delegation last June to hear views about policing in Anglesey.

The establishment of the North Wales police was increased in April 1992 by 17 officers, bringing the establishment of the force up to 1,369. In common with other forces, North Wales has not had an increase approved for 1993-94.

Blakenhurst Prison

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects Blakenhurst prison to open.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) on 21 January, at column *330.*

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the newly appointed governor and deputy governor of Blakenhurst prison were earlier employed at governor grade in the public prison sector.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: A contracted-out prison is run by a director not a governor. The director and deputy director of Blakenhurst prison were formerly employed by Her Majesty's prison service.

Police Numbers

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 29 January, *Official Report,* column *862-63,* if he will give the percentage of total employees in each police force in England and Wales in 1981 and 1991 that the figures for civilian staff represent.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information requested is set out in the table.

Civilian strength in England and Wales as at 31 December

	Civilian staff Percentage of total police service employees	
Force	*1981*	*1991*
Avon and Somerset	19·1	22·8
Bedfordshire	22·8	26·2
Cambridgeshire	21·6	26·7
Cheshire	18·5	21·5
Cleveland	14·9	22·7
Cumbria	18·9	25·4
Derbyshire	28·3	22·2
Devon and Cornwall	23·1	26·5
Dorset	21·0	30·3
Durham	26·5	27·9
Dyfed Powys	17·6	20·9
Essex	21·6	26·8
Gloucestershire	17·0	23·8
Greater Manchester	17·9	24·5
Gwent	18·2	23·4
Hampshire	19·2	24·6

Force	Civilian staff Percentage of total police service employees 1981	1991
Hertfordshire	19·5	24·7
Humberside	20·7	25·1
Kent	23·3	25·1
Lancashire	21·8	25·5
Leicestershire	19·9	27·2
Lincolnshire	22·0	27·6
Merseyside	18·2	25·4
Norfolk	17·5	23·8
Northamptonshire	20·5	26·6
Northumbria	20·0	25·6
North Wales	20·0	24·8
North Yorkshire	19·8	24·1
Nottinghamshire	20·5	23·2
South Wales	21·6	25·6
South Yorkshire	18·1	23·0
Staffordshire	22·9	25·5
Suffolk	23·2	29·4
Surrey	18·4	25·2
Sussex	20·2	23·4
Thames Valley	24·0	27·5
Warwickshire	16·8	24·3
West Mercia	21·9	29·4
West Midlands	18·2	24·8
West Yorkshire	20·1	26·3
Wiltshire	19·8	28·1
City of London	25·0	26·7
Metropolitan	35·6	33·4
Total	24·1	27·3

Chief Constables (Tendering)

188. **Ms. Walley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department under what circumstances he would seek an independent inquiry into aspects of tendering procedures undertaken by chief constables.

Mr. Charles Wardle: In exceptional circumstances my right hon. and learned Friend may choose to exercise his residual power under section 32 of the Police Act 1964 to cause a local inquiry to be held. Anyone who believes that a police authority or a chief constable has acted improperly or unlawfully may bring legal action against them in the same way as they would against any other body.

Data Protection

189. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which EC countries have enacted legislation based on the requirements of the Council of Europe convention on data protection, and have also applied the convention to manual files or have included requirements for obtaining the prior consent of data subjects to the use of their personal information.

Mr. Charles Wardle: All EC countries with the exception of Greece have enacted legislation which meets the requirements of the Council of Europe convention for the protection of individuals with regard to automatic processing of personal data. I understand that in Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Portugal, the legislation applies to manual files, as well as to computer files, either as a general rule or in some specific circumstances. I also understand that in Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, and Spain the data subject's consent is required in relation to the use either of all data or of sensitive data.

DNA Profiles

190. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation which would give a DNA profile the same status as a fingerprint for the purpose of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984; what consideration he has given to the comments on DNA profiles made by the Data Protection Registrar in his 1992 annual report; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 29 October 1992, at column *765*.

British Overseas Citizens

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is his Department's policy on the deportation or removal of British overseas citizens remaining in the United Kingdom as overstayers;

(2) what instructions his Department has issued to immigration officials since 1974 specifically on the deportation or removal of British overseas citizens.

Mr. Charles Wardle: British overseas citizens are subject to immigration control and the provisions of the immigration rules in the same way as any other national. I am not aware that any instructions relating specifically to the deportation or removal of British overseas citizens have been issued to immigration officials since 1974.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many notices of intention to deport have been issued since 1974 under the 1971 Act on British overseas citizens who remained in the United Kingdom as overstayers; and how many of those British overseas citizens issued with notices of intention to deport have been deported or removed from the United Kingdom since 1974.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Between 1987-91 no notices of intention to deport were served on British overseas citizens. In 1992, five notices of intention to deport were served on British overseas citizens of which four were for overstaying; so far one of these has made a supervised departure. This information is not readily available before 1987 and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Ecstasy

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total amount of the drug Ecstasy seized in each year since 1987.

Mr. Jack: The information requested is contained in table 1.1 of the Home Office statistical bulletin "Statistics of drugs seizures and offenders dealt with, United Kingdom, 1991", a copy of which is in the Library. Seizures of Ecstasy—MDMA—were not separately recorded before 1989.

Offenders, Waltham Forest

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what percentage of offenders appearing before the courts in the London borough of Waltham Forest were unemployed in each of the last three years for which figures are available;

(2) what percentage of offenders in the London borough of Waltham Forest were under 21 years old in the last three years for which figures are available.

Mr. Jack: Information is not collected centrally on the employment status of defendants appearing before the courts. The table shows the number and percentage of offenders by age convicted at Waltham Forest petty sessional division and at the Crown Court who were committed by Waltham Forest petty sessional division 1989 to 1991, which is provisional. Information on cautioning is available for police force areas.

Number and percentage of offenders under 21 and all ages found guilty at Waltham Forest petty sessional division and at the Crown Court by committing Waltham Forest petty sessional division and type of offence 1989-1991[1]

Year/Type of offence	*Under 21*		*All Ages*
	No.	*Per cent.*	*=100 per cent.*
1989			
Indictable offences	490	38	1,291
Summary non-motoring offences	233	14	1,661
Summary motoring offences	159	12	1,325
All offences	882	21	4,277
1990			
Indictable offences	468	37	1,281
Summary non-motoring offences	247	10	2,502
Summary motoring offences	114	11	1,077
All offences	829	17	4,860
1991[1]			
Indictable offences	428	33	1,293
Summary non-motoring offences	207	10	2,115
Summary motoring offences	184	7	2,564
All offences	819	14	5,972

[1] Provisional

Sheffield Community Literacy Team

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department why no bids were invited from Sheffield local education authority in respect of section 11 grant for the community literacy team.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Sheffield city council successfully applied for section 11 grant for its community literacy team project on the last occasion on which local authorities were invited to submit applications. Sheffield's application on that occasion related to the continuation of activities already being funded under the grant. Approval previously given in December 1990 was on the clear understanding that, in the particular circumstances of the case, grant would not be paid beyond 31 March 1993.

Vehicle Entry Devices

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 3 February, *Official Report*, column *198*, if he will consider introducing a sale by licence system for vehicle entry devices so that only those who have legitimate use may purchase them.

Mr. Jack: As I explained in the answer that I gave to the question from the hon. Member for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall) on 3 February, the Government have no plans at present to control the sale of vehicle entry devices, either through licensing their sale or otherwise. We will, however, keep the situation under review.

Ram Raiding

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many robberies involving ram raiding have taken place in each police authority area for each year since 1987.

Mr. Jack: The requested information is not available centrally.

Disabled Employees

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of employees in his Department are registered disabled.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: On 1 July 1992, the latest date for which figures are available, 185 members of staff in the Home Office were registered disabled, representing 0·4 per cent. of all staff. The Department employs many other people with disabilities who have chosen not to register, but no record has been kept of such staff.

Contracting Out

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide figures for the reduction in numbers of posts as a result of contracting out since 1979 in his Department and agencies for which he has responsibility.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: It is estimated that since 1979 there has been a reduction of about 700 staff in the Home Office as a result of contracting out. There have not been any reductions on these grounds in staff of the executive agencies in the Department since they were established.

Statutory Instruments

Ms. Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many statutory instruments were laid before Parliament by his Department in each year since 1980.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The number of statutory instruments laid before Parliament by my Department in each of the years 1980 to 1992 is as follows:

	Number
1980	57
1981	36
1982	55
1983	52
1984	34
1985	61
1986	66
1987	61
1988	53
1989	51
1990	53
1991	59
1992	74

Drug Offenders (Asset Seizures)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the value of *(a)* money and *(b)* assets that have been confiscated from people convicted by courts in England and Wales for drug offences in each of the last three years.

Mr. Jack: The number of offenders ordered to pay confiscation orders under the Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986 and the total amount confiscated from 1989 to 1991—figures for 1991 are provisional—are given in the table. Information collected centrally shows only the value of orders made.

Offenders ordered to pay confiscation orders under the Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986 by amount 1989 to 1991[1]
England and Wales

	1989	*1990*	[1]*1991*
Number of orders made	802	871	1,005
Total amount confiscated (£)	7,851,900	10,142,500	5,504,495

[1] Provisional.

Assaults

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases of causing actual bodily harm and of common assault were recorded in each of the last five years.

Mr. Jack: For notifiable offence purposes, offences of assault occasioning actual bodily harm are included within the "other wounding" offence classification which generally includes all offences of wounding which do not endanger life. The number of offences in this classification for the last five years were as follows:

	Number
1987	129,193
1988	144,781
1989	162,843
1990	169,764
1991	174,245

In addition, there were 686 notifiable offences of assault in 1987 and 503 in 1988. Following the Criminal Justice Act 1988, these assaults became summary offences and as such they are no longer collected centrally for the notifiable offence series.

Prosecutions

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of *(a)* cautions as alternatives to prosecution and *(b)* prosecutions in each of the last three years.

Mr. Jack: Information for 1989 to 1991, which is provisional, is given in the table.

Number and percentage of offenders cautioned and prosecuted as a total of all cautions and prosecutions by type of offences 1989-1991[1]
England and Wales *Number and percentages*

Year/Type of offence	*Cautions* *Number*	*Percentage*	*Prosecutions* *Number*	*Percentage*	*Total cautions and prosecutions [= 100 per cent.]*
1989					
Indictable offences	136,001	23	449,056	77	585,057
Summary non-motoring offences	102,030	15	568,469	85	670,499
All offences (excluding summary motoring)	238,031	19	1,017,525	81	1,255,556
1990					
Indictable offences	166,349	26	468,585	74	634,934
Summary non-motoring offences	102,763	15	576,977	85	679,740
All offences (excluding summary motoring)	269,112	20	1,045,562	80	1,314,674
1991[1]					
Indictable offences	179,885	27	489,057	73	668,942
Summary non-motoring offences	98,910	15	573,331	85	672,241
All offences (excluding summary motoring)	278,795	21	1,062,388	79	1,341,183

[1] Provisional.

Prisons (Utility Costs)

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average weekly cost per inmate of providing gas, electricity and water at *(a)* local and *(b)* remand prisons.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 16 February 1993]:* The average weekly cost per inmate of providing gas, electricity and water in 1991-92 was as follows:

	£
(a) Local prisons	6·69
(b) Remand centres[1]	7·04

[1] The remand centre figure refers only to Hindley which holds exclusively remand prisoners.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Market Testing

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all the market tests that have taken place in his Department since November 1991; whether the result was the maintenance of in-house provision or whether the service was contracted out; what was the name of the successful contractor where appropriate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *[holding answer 15 February 1993]*: Market testing within the Home Office covers the following areas:

Accommodation and Office Services
Computing Services
Internal Audit
Pay Services
Police Nationals Computer (Hendon Data Centre)
Prison Service
College, Training and facilities management
Computing Services
Dog Services
Prison Establishments
Canteens (prisoners' shops)
Warehousing, Distribution and fleet management

In addition the provision of prison education is the subject of competitive tender.

Work on market testing these projects is under way, but has not been completed.

Police Officers

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many uniformed police officers were in post, and what was the number of *(a)* reported incidents, *(b)* burglaries of all types and *(c)* offences of taking vehicles without the owner's consent per officer in each police authority in 1979, 1980, 1991 and 1992.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 2 February 1993]*: The available information is given in the tables. Information for 1992 is not yet available. Statistics are not held separately on the number of uniformed officers.

Notifiable offences of burglary recorded by the police, police strength and number of offences per officer

England and Wales

Police force area	*1979* *Recorded offences*	*1979* *Police strength*	*1979* *Offences per officer*	*1980* *Recorded offences*	*1980* *Police strength*	*1980* *Offences per officer*	*1991* *Recorded offences*	*1991* *Police strength*	*1991* *Offences per officer*
Avon and Somerset	9,059	2,861	3·2	11,484	2,962	3·9	33,961	3,072	11·1
Bedfordshire	4,731	923	5·1	5,604	963	5·8	12,873	1,090	11·8
Cambridgeshire	4,182	1,087	3·8	4,859	1,086	4·5	11,897	1,239	9·6
Cheshire	6,679	1,803	3·7	8,176	1,833	4·5	16,537	1,867	8·9
Cleveland	7,902	1,411	5·6	8,962	1,454	6·2	17,278	1,477	11·7
Cumbria	3,801	1,072	3·5	4,064	1,104	3·7	10,826	1,183	9·2
Derbyshire	8,089	1,757	4·6	9,087	1,832	5·0	18,500	1,706	10·8
Devon and Cornwall	7,647	2,639	2·9	8,850	2,721	3·3	25,708	2,876	8·9
Dorset	3,998	1,159	3·4	4,567	1,167	3·9	9,287	1,280	7·3
Durham	6,017	1,313	4·6	7,711	1,345	5·7	13,565	1,378	9·8
Essex	10,296	2,503	4·1	11,347	2,609	4·3	24,980	2,878	8·7
Gloucestershire	3,009	1,099	2·7	3,930	1,119	3·5	12,601	1,178	10·7
Greater Manchester	39,124	6,653	5·9	46,949	6,923	6·8	97,715	6,975	14·0
Hampshire	12,518	2,945	4·3	13,297	3,058	4·3	32,003	3,177	10·1
Hertfordshire	4,603	1,466	3·1	5,807	1,518	3·8	10,890	1,679	6·5
Humberside	10,912	1,879	5·8	12,710	1,951	6·5	32,949	2,016	16·3
Kent	10,439	2,808	3·7	10,429	2,871	3·6	26,535	3,039	8·7
Lancashire	12,448	3,089	4·0	12,728	3,120	4·1	25,045	3,205	7·8
Leicestershire	5,701	1,701	3·4	7,162	1,720	4·2	21,526	1,808	11·9
Lincolnshire	3,281	1,167	2·8	3,532	1,183	3·0	8,991	1,198	7·5
London, City of	1,139	834	1·4	1,071	843	1·3	1,070	809	1·3
Merseyside	31,183	4,469	7·0	34,801	4,591	7·6	33,609	4,605	7·3
Metropolitan Police District	117,001	22,528	5·2	125,944	23,608	5·3	191,482	28,126	6·8
Norfolk	4,306	1,237	3·5	5,273	1,249	4·2	15,336	1,419	10·8
Northamptonshire	4,451	926	4·8	6,048	971	6·2	12,148	1,156	10·5
Northumbria	27,014	3,339	8·1	31,068	3,340	9·3	66,101	3,460	19·1
North Yorkshire	4,774	1,338	3·6	5,283	1,352	3·9	12,338	1,382	8·9
Nottinghamshire	16,494	2,125	7·8	18,161	2,209	8·2	30,568	2,334	13·1
South Yorkshire	12,601	2,644	4·8	15,641	2,842	5·5	35,261	2,989	11·8
Staffordshire	8,005	2,015	4·0	8,750	2,071	4·2	23,523	2,185	10·8
Suffolk	2,848	1,105	2·6	3,223	1,122	2·9	7,638	1,203	6·3
Surrey	4,790	1,460	3·3	5,084	1,589	3·2	11,437	1,681	6·8
Sussex	9,254	2,777	3·3	9,970	2,823	3·5	26,474	2,969	8·9
Thames Valley	13,858	2,764	5·0	15,227	3,043	5·0	34,065	3,722	9·2
Warwickshire	2,827	883	3·2	3,289	916	3·6	10,290	1,005	10·2
West Mercia	5,933	1,837	3·2	7,096	1,939	3·7	14,595	2,028	7·2
West Midlands	39,863	6,160	6·5	49,783	6,539	7·6	84,084	6,893	12·2
West Yorkshire	32,145	4,799	6·7	35,303	5,040	7·0	78,626	5,143	15·3
Wiltshire	3,526	1,007	3·5	3,780	1,032	3·7	8,158	1,212	6·7
Dyfed-Powys	1,714	918	1·9	1,829	929	2·0	4,696	944	5·0
Gwent	3,319	958	3·5	3,967	973	4·1	7,477	995	7·5
North Wales	4,656	1,271	3·7	6,107	1,290	4·7	10,184	1,343	7·6
South Wales	17,900	3,025	5·9	20,437	3,068	6·7	36,637	3,142	11·7
England and Wales	544,037	111,754	4·9	618,390	115,918	5·3	1,219,464	125,066	9·8

Notifiable offences of theft or unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle recorded by the police, police strength and number of offences per officer
England and Wales

		1979			1980			1991	
Police force area	*Recorded offences*	*Police strength*	*Offences per officer*	*Recorded offences*	*Police strength*	*Offences per officer*	*Recorded offences*	*Police strength*	*Offences per officer*
Avon and Somerset	7,320	2,861	2·6	7,950	2,962	2·7	19,903	3,072	6·5
Bedfordshire	3,701	923	4·0	3,781	963	3·9	8,292	1,090	7·6
Cambridgeshire	1,809	1,087	1·7	1,760	1,086	1·6	4,655	1,239	3·8
Cheshire	3,521	1,803	2·0	3,911	1,833	2·1	8,289	1,867	4·4
Cleveland	3,344	1,411	2·4	3,046	1,454	2·1	11,712	1,477	7·9
Cumbria	1,620	1,072	1·5	1,305	1,104	1·2	3,632	1,183	3·1
Derbyshire	3,253	1,757	1·9	3,177	1,832	1·7	7,410	1,706	4·3
Devon and Cornwall	3,726	2,639	1·4	3,846	2,721	1·4	7,923	2,876	2·8
Dorset	2,072	1,159	1·8	2,037	1,167	1·7	4,560	1,280	3·6
Durham	2,278	1,313	1·7	2,414	1,345	1·8	8,640	1,378	6·3
Essex	6,830	2,503	2·7	6,622	2,609	2·5	11,377	2,878	4·0
Gloucestershire	1,449	1,099	1·3	1,456	1,119	1·3	3,927	1,178	3·3
Greater Manchester	27,181	6,653	4·1	27,776	6,923	4·0	55,338	6,975	7·9
Hampshire	6,477	2,945	2·2	6,502	3,058	2·1	11,919	3,177	3·8
Hertfordshire	4,295	1,466	2·9	4,378	1,518	2·9	6,149	1,679	3·7
Humberside	3,261	1,879	1·7	3,217	1,951	1·6	8,506	2,016	4·2
Kent	8,212	2,808	2·9	8,652	2,871	3·0	17,962	3,039	5·9
Lancashire	6,619	3,089	2·1	6,042	3,120	1·9	11,042	3,205	3·4
Leicestershire	3,692	1,701	2·2	4,025	1,720	2·3	10,751	1,808	5·9
Lincolnshire	1,006	1,167	0·9	1,020	1,183	0·9	2,779	1,198	2·3
London, City of	536	834	0·6	504	843	0·6	239	809	0·3
Merseyside	16,865	4,469	3·8	16,125	4,591	3·5	16,983	4,605	3·7
Metropolitan Police District	76,188	22,528	3·4	88,112	23,608	3·7	81,173	28,126	2·9
Norfolk	1,659	1,237	1·3	2,051	1,249	1·6	5,510	1,419	3·9
Northamptonshire	2,789	926	3·0	2,721	971	2·8	6,514	1,156	5·6
Northumbria	13,515	3,339	4·0	14,229	3,340	4·3	30,356	3,460	8·8
North Yorkshire	1,615	1,338	1·2	1,540	1,352	1·1	4,999	1,382	3·6
Nottinghamshire	6,650	2,125	3·1	6,850	2,209	3·1	17,603	2,334	7·5
South Yorkshire	6,368	2,644	2·4	7,115	2,842	2·5	16,323	2,989	5·5
Staffordshire	2,876	2,015	1·4	3,325	2,071	1·6	9,290	2,185	4·3
Suffolk	1,213	1,105	1·1	1,208	1,122	1·1	2,721	1,203	2·3
Surrey	2,270	1,460	1·6	2,283	1,589	1·4	4,860	1,681	2·9
Sussex	3,685	2,777	1·3	3,864	2,823	1·4	9,251	2,969	3·1
Thames Valley	10,244	2,764	3·7	9,454	3,043	3·1	22,556	3,722	6·1
Warwickshire	1,400	883	1·6	1,522	916	1·7	4,700	1,005	4·7
West Mercia	2,940	1,837	1·6	3,215	1,939	1·7	8,652	2,028	4·3
West Midlands	25,658	6,160	4·2	26,197	6,539	4·0	41,415	6,893	6·0
West Yorkshire	14,571	4,799	3·0	14,486	5,040	2·9	40,235	5,143	7·8
Wiltshire	1,709	1,007	1·7	1,426	1,032	1·4	2,967	1,212	2·4
Dyfed-Powys	783	918	0·9	823	929	0·9	1,476	944	1·6
Gwent	2,057	958	2·1	1,913	973	2·0	3,240	995	3·3
North Wales	2,161	1,271	1·7	2,164	1,290	1·7	3,102	1,343	2·3
South Wales	9,827	3,025	3·2	10,310	3,068	3·4	22,970	3,142	7·3
England and Wales	309,245	111,754	2·8	324,354	115,918	2·8	581,901	125,066	4·7

Total notifiable offences recorded by the police, police strength and number of offences per officer
England and Wales

		1979			1980			1991	
Police force area	*Recorded offences*	*Police strength*	*Offences per officer*	*Recorded offences*	*Police strength*	*Offences per officer*	*Recorded offences*	*Police strength*	*Offences per officer*
Avon and Somerset	51,333	2,861	17·9	57,835	2,962	19·5	153,770	3,072	50·1
Bedfordshire	28,097	923	30·4	28,185	963	29·3	57,121	1,090	52·4
Cambridgeshire	24,645	1,087	22·7	29,793	1,085	27·4	58,167	1,239	46·9
Cheshire	30,396	1,803	16·9	34,280	1,833	18·7	66,298	1,867	35·5
Cleveland	34,846	1,411	24·7	37,018	1,454	25·5	78,053	1,477	52·8
Cumbria	19,531	1,072	18·2	18,314	1,104	16·6	45,088	1,183	38·1
Derbyshire	38,640	1,757	22·0	38,961	1,832	21·3	75,636	1,706	44·3
Devon and Cornwall	43,480	2,639	16·5	47,860	2,721	17·6	108,208	2,876	37·6
Dorset	23,260	1,159	20·1	24,763	1,167	21·2	51,552	1,280	40·3
Durham	27,351	1,313	20·8	30,527	1,345	22·7	65,218	1,378	47·3
Essex	54,060	2,503	21·6	55,644	2,609	21·3	108,427	2,878	37·7
Gloucestershire	16,589	1,099	15·1	19,085	1,119	17·1	55,980	1,178	47·5
Greater Manchester	169,749	6,653	25·5	189,121	6,923	27·3	380,809	6,975	54·6
Hampshire	66,910	2,945	22·7	66,866	3,058	21·9	143,904	3,177	45·3
Hertfordshire	38,801	1,466	26·5	35,405	1,518	23·3	55,573	1,679	33·1
Humberside	48,195	1,879	25·6	51,848	1,951	26·6	118,830	2,016	58·9
Kent	55,370	2,808	19·7	55,064	2,871	19·2	138,435	3,039	45·6
Lancashire	57,105	3,089	18·5	61,171	3,120	19·6	122,474	3,205	38·2

	1979			*1980*			*1991*		
Police force area	*Recorded offences*	*Police strength*	*Offences per officer*	*Recorded offences*	*Police strength*	*Offences per officer*	*Recorded offences*	*Police strength*	*Offences per officer*
Leicestershire	30,351	1,701	17·8	35,042	1,720	20·4	89,754	1,808	49·6
Lincolnshire	17,539	1,167	15·0	19,043	1,183	16·1	44,860	1,198	37·4
London, City of	6,809	834	8·2	6,459	843	7·7	7,575	809	9·4
Merseyside	108,433	4,469	24·3	115,906	4,591	25·2	148,835	4,605	32·3
Metropolitan Police District	557,378	22,528	24·7	584,137	23,608	24·7	926,203	28,126	32·9
Norfolk	22,655	1,237	18·3	25,919	1,249	20·8	64,115	1,419	45·2
Northamptonshire	22,966	926	24·8	25,241	971	26·0	58,470	1,156	50·6
Northumbria	99,512	3,339	29·8	108,303	3,340	32·4	226,193	3,460	65·4
North Yorkshire	21,887	1,338	16·4	21,699	1,352	16·0	51,471	1,382	37·2
Nottinghamshire	72,659	2,125	34·2	77,440	2,209	35·1	150,551	2,334	64·5
South Yorkshire	56,340	2,644	21·3	62,968	2,842	22·2	125,559	2,989	42·0
Staffordshire	37,952	2,015	18·8	37,988	2,071	18·3	86,285	2,185	39·5
Suffolk	20,152	1,105	18·2	19,767	1,122	17·6	39,924	1,203	33·2
Surrey	26,965	1,460	18·5	24,863	1,589	15·6	50,083	1,681	29·8
Sussex	48,609	2,777	17·5	48,064	2,823	17·0	112,203	2,969	37·8
Thames Valley	75,740	2,764	27·4	74,423	3,043	24·5	187,185	3,722	50·3
Warwickshire	13,986	883	15·8	14,606	916	15·9	40,474	1,005	40·3
West Mercia	35,088	1,837	19·1	37,597	1,939	19·4	74,188	2,028	36·6
West Midlands	156,671	6,160	25·4	176,580	6,539	27·0	302,864	6,893	43·9
West Yorkshire	128,675	4,799	26·8	137,390	5,040	27·3	295,479	5,143	57·5
Wiltshire	20,545	1,007	20·4	20,787	1,032	20·1	39,321	1,212	32·4
Dyfed-Powys	11,752	918	12·8	11,870	929	12·8	25,970	944	27·5
Gwent	20,498	958	21·4	20,070	973	20·6	38,673	995	38·9
North Wales	23,589	1,271	18·6	24,117	1,290	18·7	44,418	1,343	33·1
South Wales	71,628	3,025	23·7	76,215	3,068	24·8	161,977	3,142	51·6
England and Wales	2,536,737	111,754	22·7	2,688,235	115,918	23·2	5,276,173	125,066	42·2

Prisoners (Self-Injury)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many attempted suicides took place in prisons in England and Wales in 1992.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 13 January 1993]:* There were 2,920 incidents of deliberate self harm by prisoners in prisons in England and Wales in 1992. No distinction is made according to the degree of apparent suicidal intent.

Quangos

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all those non-departmental public bodies for which his Department is responsible, which have the power to compel individuals, firms, companies or other institutions to carry out their instructions at the expense of the individuals, firms, companies or other institutions, and also to charge fees for the cost to the non-departmental public bodies of assessing the work which needed to be done.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *[holding answer 16 February 1993]:* None.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what basis the formula in paragraph 3 of appendix B to the special grant support report (No. 5) was arrived at; and whether this formula will be applied to expenditure by local authorities incurred and notified to his Department after 8 January.

Mr. Robin Squire: I have been asked to reply.

The formula for the payment of Yugoslav displaced persons grant in respect of 1992-93 expenditure is the same as would apply under the Bellwin scheme of special financial assistance for emergencies. The threshold under the Bellwin scheme is calculated as an amount per head of relevant population (as defined in schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1988). Different thresholds apply for different classes of authority, reflecting their responsibilities for different services. Only those authorities named in the "Special Grant Report (No. 5)" will be eligible for grant and their entitlement will not exceed the amount specified in the report. A fresh scheme will apply for 1993-94.

Blyth Valley

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total number of persons registered in Blyth Valley on an electoral register and community charge register.

Mr. Robin Squire: I have been asked to reply.

The latest information available to the Department is that there were 61,701 persons in Blyth valley on the electoral register in February 1992 and 58,459 persons on the community charge register in September 1991 who were subject to a personal community charge on 1 June 1991. The electoral register will include some people who were exempt from payment of the community charge.

Yugoslav Displaced Persons Grant

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what basis Aylesbury Vale, Rochford and Uttlesford were awarded Yugoslav displaced persons grant; which authorities were turned down in their applications for such grants; how many refugees each authority accepted; and how much unreimbursed expenditure each incurred.

Mr. Robin Squire: I have been asked to reply.

Yugoslav displaced persons grant is paid on qualifying expenditure above a threshold. Local authorities were invited to submit estimates of the expenditure they had incurred or expected to incur during 1992-93. Sixty-one local authorities did so, as listed in the table. The table also shows the threshold which applies in each case. Only Aylesbury Vale, Rochford and Uttlesford district councils exceeded their respective thresholds. No figures are available centrally on the numbers of refugees accepted by each authority.

Yugoslav displaced persons

Local authority estimates of 1992-93 expenditure and thresholds

	Expenditure	*Threshold*	*Difference*
Aylesbury Vale	61,500	31,000	30,500
Rochford	21,000	17,000	4,000
Uttlesford	72,049	14,000	58,049
Barnet	9,000	424,000	415,000
Bedfordshire County Council	13,000	772,000	759,000
Berkshire County Council	52,239	1,096,000	1,043,761
Birmingham	32,000	1,466,000	1,433,300
Bolton	1,964	399,000	397,036
Brent	66,400	367,000	300,600
Brighton	7,000	31,000	24,000
Buckinghamshire County Council	13,000	926,000	913,000
Camden	81,600	272,000	190,400
Cleveland	83,783	822,000	738,217
Corporation of London	4,000	215,000	211,000
Croydon	16,000	476,000	460,000
Cumbria County Council	63,000	745,000	682,000
Devon County Council	24,242	1,561,000	1,536,758
Durham County Council	13,000	901,000	888,000
Ealing	73,000	419,000	346,000
East Hertfordshire	7,000	26,000	19,000
East Sussex County Council	10,000	1,055,000	1,045,000
Enfield	32,900	393,000	360,100
Essex County Council	84,000	2,330,000	2,246,000
Guildford	12,000	27,000	15,000
Hammersmith and Fulham	149,000	240,000	41,000
Hereford County Council	2,000	1,020,000	1,018,000
Hillingdon	8,822	355,000	346,178
Hounslow	57,000	301,000	244,000
Humberside County Council	27,000	1,297,000	1,270,000
Islington	20,000	251,000	231,000
Kensington and Chelsea	13,060	212,000	198,940
Kent County Council	11,181	2,279,000	2,267,819
Lancashire County Council	7,000	2,070,000	2,063,000
Leeds	28,700	1,066,000	1,037,300
Leicestershire County Council	6,085	1,294,000	1,287,915
Leicester	4,917	57,000	52,083
Lewisham	25,000	336,000	311,000
Manchester	22,900	602,000	579,000
Mansfield	825	22,000	21,175
Merton	33,000	261,000	228,000
Newham	35,000	312,000	277,000
Norfolk County Council	31,000	1,149,000	1,118,000
Northamptonshire County Council	48,000	856,000	808,000
Northampton	8,235	39,000	30,765
Nottinghamshire County Council	20,000	1,513,000	1,493,000
Oadby and Wigston	3,403	11,000	7,597
Richmond Upon Thames	44,938	246,000	201,062
Sandwell	56,000	458,000	402,000
Somerset County Council	4,500	708,000	703,500
South Lakeland	6,000	22,000	16,000
Southwark	106,575	340,000	233,425
Stockport	63,000	444,000	381,000
Three Rivers	3,320	17,000	13,680
Thurrock	3,114	28,000	24,886
Tower Hamlets	10,000	237,000	227,000
Waltham Forest	8,808	322,000	313,192
Wandsworth	25,000	378,000	353,000

	Expenditure	Threshold	Difference
Watford	4,090	17,000	12,910
Westminster	56,048	274,000	217,952
Wiltshire County Council	87,500	853,000	765,500
York	830	22,000	21,170

EMPLOYMENT

Disabled Employees

113. **Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of employees in her Department is registered disabled.

117. **Mr. Michael Forsyth:** A total of 3·3 per cent. at 1 July 1992, the latest date for which figures are available. The Department also employs other people with disabilities who have chosen not to register.

Disabled People (Employment)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will issue a Green Paper on employment for disabled people.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend, the Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) on 26 January 1993, *Official Report*, column 659.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment under what circumstances it is her Department's policy to invoke prosecutions of employers under the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 15 February 1993]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State believes that every effort should be made to educate and persuade employers to adopt positive employment policies towards disabled people and thereby comply with the Act.

Officials will therefore seek to resolve such matters by negotiation and advice wherever possible. Where this is unsuccessful or inappropriate, prosecution will be considered on the basis of the circumstances of the case, the strength of the evidence and the public policy interest.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) under what circumstances an employer would be refused an application for bulk permits to employ people not registered disabled;

(2) how many applications for bulk permits to employ people not registered disabled have been refused in the last 15 years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 15 February 1993]:* Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Eric Illsley, dated 17 February 1993:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to write to you direct to respond to your Parliamentary Questions to her about bulk permits. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

A bulk permit would be refused if my local Disability Employment Adviser considered that sufficient suitably qualified registered disabled people are likely to be available to fill the employers vacancies.

A bulk permit would also be refused where the employer fails to show they will take reasonable steps towards recruiting suitable registered disabled people. The permit is issued on the understanding the employer will notify vacancies to the Jobcentre and will consider sympathetically the engagement of any suitable registered disabled people.

I regret I am unable to say how many bulk permits have been refused in the last fifteen years as such information is not held centrally.

As decided by the Administration Committee of the House of Commons, Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary Questions will now be published in the Official Report. I will also place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many campaigns the Government have organised in the last 15 years to encourage disabled people to register their disabilities with her Department.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 15 February 1993]:* We have not run any specific campaign to encourage disabled people to register under the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944. However disability employment advisers in local jobcentres provide disabled people with information about registering as disabled.

Sheltered Employment

311. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the level of funding allocated to the sheltered employment programme and the sheltered placement scheme for the next financial year; and if she will provide comparable figures for each of the last two years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The level of employment service funding for the sheltered employment programme, which includes Remploy is shown in the table:

	1991-92 (actual) £	1992-93 (actual) £	1993-94 (actual) £
Total programme	122,445,000	137,870,000	140,297,000
Of which sheltered placement scheme	18,763,000	18,533,000	19,635,000

Sheltered Workshops

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many employees were in sheltered workshops, excluding Remploy Ltd., at the latest available date and at a year before that date.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Graham Allen, dated 17 February 1993:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to write to you direct to respond to your Parliamentary Question to her about employees in sheltered workshops. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

The latest available statistics providing numbers employed in sheltered workshops, excluding Remploy Ltd., that are supported by the Employment Service's Sheltered Employment Programme relate to the end of December 1992. The information you asked for is given in the attached annex.

I hope this is helpful.

As decided by the Administration Committee of the House of Commons, Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary questions will now be published in the Official Report. I will also place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Annex

Employees in sheltered workshops

	December 1992	*December 1991*
People with severe disabilities	4,922	5,125
Non-disabled people	1,629	1,602
TOTALS	6,551	6,727

Quangos

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will list all those non-departmental public bodies, for which her Department is responsible, which have the power to compel individuals, firms, companies or other institutions to carry out their instructions at the expense of the individuals, firms, companies or other institutions, and also to charge fees for the cost to the non-departmental public bodies of assessing the work which needed to be done.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 16 February 1993]:* The Health and Safety Executive is the only non-departmental public body for which my Department has responsibility that has the power to require compliance with legislation which may be at the cost of others. The HSE does not make any charges for the work it undertakes in securing compliance with the legislation by others. It does however charge under regulations for approvals, licences etc. and by agreement for publications and certain services.

Transfer of Undertakings Regulations

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how the transfer of undertakings directive applies to takeovers by companies based in other EC countries of a British company.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 16 February 1993]:* The Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 have the effect of continuing certain statutory and contractual rights of employees when an undertaking is transferred from one employer to another. It is immaterial whether the employer in the United Kingdom is or becomes controlled by a company in another country within or outside the EC.

DEFENCE

Warships

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on the proportion of warship-building capacity that is state-owned in *(a)* France, *(b)* the Netherlands, *(c)* Belgium, *(d)* Italy and *(e)* Germany.

Mr. Aitken: My Department does not maintain records on the ownership of defence industrial capacity in other countries. However, on the information available to me, I understand that almost all of the warshipbuilding capacity in France and Italy is, effectively, state owned, while that in Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium is not.

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on current Independent European Programme Group-Western European Union arrangements for reciprocal purchasing in the field of warship hulls.

Mr. Aitken: Efforts by the Independent European Programme Group nations, which now all participate in the Western European Union, to open progressively the European market for defence equipment have not extended to warship hulls.

UNPROFOR II

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which major unit has been warned off to relieve 1st Battalion the Cheshire Regiment as part of UNPROFOR II; when that unit last undertook an emergency tour, and where; from which other units reinforcements to that battalion will be drawn; when they last completed an emergency tour and where; whether soldiers from reinforcing units are trained to operate with Warrior armoured vehicles; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: 1 Prince of Wales Own Regiment from Osnabruck will replace 1 Cheshire Regiment, currently forming the basis of our battalion group in Bosnia, in May 1993. The Prince of Wales Own Regiment will be augmented by a platoon of Gordon Highlanders from Berlin; a platoon of the Queen's Lancashire Regiment from Berlin; and a platoon of 1 Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders from Minden.

Other units of the present battalion group will be replaced by a squadron of Light Dragoons from Hohne —to replace the squadron from 9/12 Lancers—and elements of 21 Engineer Regiment from Nienburg—to replace elements of 35 Engineer Regiment. Soldiers from units deploying are trained to work with Warrior armoured vehicles.

It is not possible to say where the earmarked individuals and their sub-units undertook their last emergency tour, but the last emergency tour details of the regiments from which the units are drawn are as follows:

Regiment	Last emergency tour Where	When
1 Prince of Wales Own Regiment	Belfast	November 1991—May 1992
Gordon Highlanders	Northern Ireland	January 1990—July 1990
Queen's Lancashire Regiment	Northern Ireland	February 1987—August 1987
1 Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders	Northern Ireland	March 1992—July 1992
Light Dragoons:		
13/18th Hussars	Cyprus	August 1991—February 1992
15/19th Hussars	UNFICYP Roulement Regiment	December 1991—January 1992
21 Engineer Regiment	Northern Ireland	March 1992—September 1992

HMS Calpe

87. **Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current role, annual cost and strength of the headquarters unit at HMS Calpe, Gibraltar; when he intends to close it; how and by whom its wartime task will be fulfilled henceforth; what role HMS Calpe played in the seatrain during Operation Granby; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The current role of HMS Calpe is to provide Royal Naval Reserve personnel to undertake naval control of shipping duties. The unit also provides additional operational support to the Commander British Forces Gibraltar including some augmentation to the manning of the maritime headquarters in periods of tension and war. The annual cost of the unit is £180,000. The strength is 21 officers, 56 ratings and three civilians. HMS Calpe will close by 31 March 1993. In future, the naval control of shipping tasks will be undertaken by staff deployed from the United Kingdom should the need arise. Tasks previously undertaken by RNR personnel serving in the maritime headquarters will now be undertaken by service personnel using modern visual aids and computers. HMS Calpe was not involved in the seatrain during Operation Granby.

Royal Naval Reserve

90. **Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the RNR sea training centre at HMS Graham, Glasgow is to close; at what annual savings; what is the current RNR strength; what was the rate of usage of HMS Dovey over the last full year for which figures are available; what plans he has for her future use; what seagoing alternatives are to be available for RNR volunteers from the west of Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Subject to consultation with the trades unions, it is proposed that HMS Graham will close by 1 October 1993 with annual savings of £150,000. Its current Royal Naval Reserve strength is 90 officers and 200 ratings. The usage of HMS Dovery during the calendar year 1992 was as follows:

	Days	*Per cent.*
Time at Sea	75	20·5
Planned Maintenance	30	8·2
Unscheduled Maintenance	70	19·2
Harbour Training	22	6·0
Leave (RN personnel)	42	11·5
Berthed	126	34·6

Note: Total Distance Run—11,672 nautical miles

HMS Dovey will be transferred to the RNR headquarters unit, HMS Dalriada, Greenock. Arrangements have been made for RNR volunteers from the west coast of Scotland to conduct their sea training activities from HMS Dalriada.

Mercenary Soldiers

88. **Mr. Conway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he takes to prevent those known to have been mercenary soldiers enlisting in regular or territorial forces.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There is no specific bar to prevent anyone who has served as a mercenary from enlisting into the regular or reserve forces. Information about an applicant's service as a mercenary should normally be revealed during the selection process and each would be considered on its own merits.

Electromagnetic Radiation

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the *(a)* make and *(b)* model of each type of equipment in use by the military in border areas of Northern Ireland which emits electromagnetic radiation; and if he will indicate details of emissions in each case.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensions

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 1 February, *Official Report*, column 26, if he will publish similar figures showing the value of the basic retirement pension and state earnings-related pension based on the assumption of earnings uprating, including estimates for 1993-94 *(a)* expressed as a proportion of average earnings and *(b)* showing what the monetary equivalents would be if the proportions were applied to estimated average earnings in 1993-94.

Miss Widdecombe: The information is given in the tables.

Retirement pension as a proportion of average earnings (per cent.)

	1993-94	*2015-16*	*2025-26*	*2035-36*	*2045-46*
Basic pension	16·9	16·9	16·9	16·9	16·9
Average AP (women)	10·6	12·9	11·5	11·4	11·4
Average AP (men)	17·0	20·2	17·9	16·7	16·7

Proportions applied to 1993-94 average earnings (£ per week)

	1993-94	*2015-16*	*2025-26*	*2035-36*	*2045-46*
Basic pension	56·10	56·10	56·10	56·10	56·10
Average AP (women)	34·95	42·80	38·15	37·90	37·90
Average AP (men)	56·45	67·00	59·25	55·45	55·35

Notes:

1. Amounts rounded to nearest 5p.
2. Assumes that LEL, UEL and Basic RP increase in line with earnings from April 1994.
3. AP represents the Additional Pension of an individual on average earnings in each year of his working life.

Carers

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what efforts are currently undertaken by his Department to consult carers and their representatives organisations concerning the income needs of carers.

Mr. Scott: We consider carefully all representations made from and on behalf of carers.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what research work has been undertaken by his Department to date to evaluate the costs of caring.

Mr. Scott: This Department helps to sponsor a number of large-scale surveys that collect data about the financial circumstances of carers. These include:

British Household Panel Study
Family Resources Survey and
General Household Survey.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to *(a)* raise the level of invalid care allowance to that of the basic state pension and *(b)* raise the level of income support carer premium to that of a pensioner premium for a person aged under 75 years; and if he will indicate the estimated costs of implementing both *(a)* and *(b)*.

Mr. Scott: We have no plans to do so.

The estimated costs, at 1992-93 prices and benefit levels are:

(a) £156 million
(b) £15 million[1]

[1] Figure rounded to the nearest £5 million and does not include housing benefit and community charge benefit costs.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy for the Benefits Agency to establish a dedicated advice line for carers.

Mr. Scott: Operational matters are a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Dafydd Wigley, dated 16 February 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking if the Agency will establish a dedicated advice line for carers.

The Agency is committed to providing both an efficient and effective service accessible to all our customers. To this end, specific consideration has been given to people with disabilities and those who care for them, and a number of initiatives have been set up.

With the success of the general Freeline service a number of similar services were introduced including the Benefit Enquiry Line (BEL). This provides advice and information to people with disabilities as well as to the people who care for them. It is also able to assist with the completion of claim forms over the telephone. At present, forms can be completed for visually impaired customers in braille or large print. However, as a development of the BEL, a full form completion service covering the full range of benefits for people with disabilities and their carers will be introduced in April this year. The benefits covered will include Disability Living Allowance, Disability Working Allowance, Attendance Allowance, Severe Disablement Allowance and Invalid Care Allowance.

With carers being catered for by the Benefit Enquiry Line the Agency does not have any plans, at this stage, to establish a further advice line.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the Official Report. A copy will also be placed in the Library.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many statutory instruments were laid before Parliament by his Department in each year since 1980.

Mr. Scott: The available information is shown in the table. Information relating to previous years is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

	Statutory Instruments Laid
1991	79
1992	72

Vibration White Finger

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claims for benefit in respect of vibration white finger were made in each of the past six years in *(a)* Benefits Agency offices in Greenock and Port Glasgow, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole; and how many of these applications led to the payment of such benefits.

Mr. Scott: The information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Asbestosis

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has to allow persons suffering from asbestosis or related ailments who are in receipt of income support or other social security incomes, to be provided with independent medical examinations free of charge; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: An independent medical examination may be arranged, and paid for, by the Department where it is considered necessary for the purposes of determining entitlement to benefit. Reports of such examinations may be copied free of charge to claimants on request, to the extent that they do not contain harmful information. We have no plans to arrange other independent medical examinations free of charge.

Mr. Black, Greenock

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when Mr. Black of Greenock, can expect to receive information concerning the reference back of his case, for second-tier adjudication, made by social security commissioner Douglas Reith on 19 October 1992—commissioner's file No. CSA/95/92; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: Following the commissioner's decision on 19 October 1992 Mr. Black's case has received second-tier adjudication and Mr. Black was advised of the outcome on 12 November 1992. Another copy of the findings have been sent to Mr. Black.

Attendance Allowance

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will take steps to resolve the attendance allowance claim of Mrs. June Stanley—NI number YE 25 22 49 C—outstanding from February 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The administration of disability living allowance is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write shortly to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Graham Allen, dated 16 February 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, it is my responsibility to answer questions raised about relevant operational matters. I am therfore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security, about when he will take steps to resolve the Attendance Allowance claim of Mrs. June Stanley which is outstanding from February 1992.

A decision on Mrs. Stanley's Attendance Allowance claim was made on 21 January 1992 and a further review decision on 15 June 1992. Mrs. Stanley subsequently appealed on 1 September against the review decision and arrangements are now being made for a Disability Appeal Tribunal to consider her appeal. I have written to you separately and in greater detail about this matter.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the Official Report. A copy will also be placed in the Library.

Benefits Agency (Leeds)

163. **Ms Gordon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of replies from the Benefits Agency in Leeds to customer queries is within 20 working days; and what percentage of such replies have taken six months or over, during the past 12 month period.

Mr. Burt: The arrangements for reply to correspondence to the Benefits Agency is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Ms. Mildred Gordon, dated 15 February 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent parliamentary question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the time taken to respond to correspondence by the Benefits Agency in Leeds.

You ask what percentage of letters in the past twelve month period have been cleared within 20 working days and what percentage took six months or over to reply. The information for 1992 is as follows:

		Per cent.
Total replies to Members from Chief Executive:	4,461	(100)
of which,		
Replied within 20 working days	1,274	(29)
Reply took 6 months or more	32	(0·7)

I very much regret that the Benefits Agency has not recently been meeting its target for responding to Members' letters and that some very long delays have occurred. As I explained in my letter to you of 27 January on an individual case you had raised, the delays are due to the backlog of correspondence that has built up in the Disability Living Allowance Unit following the greater than expected workload faced by the Unit in the early months of the DLA scheme.

The delay in replying to Members' letters about DLA does not, of course, mean that action is not proceeding on a customer's claim. In fact in most cases where there is a long outstanding reply the claim will have been resolved much earlier. You will recall that in the case discussed in my letter of 27 January, full benefit entitlement was paid in September 1992. I understand this followed contact you had with the special Hotline telephone enquiry service for Members I have set up at the DLA Unit. But clearly you should have had a reply to your letter from me much sooner than you did and I apologise for this.

A recovery plan for clearing the backlog of correspondence at the DLA Unit is now in operation with a view to substantially reducing the number of letters awaiting reply by the end of this month. Once the backlog is cleared it will be our aim to respond to all future correspondence on DLA within the Agency's target of twenty working days, as is already the case for correspondence about other subjects.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the *Official Report* and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Regional Assistance

17. **Mr. O'Hara:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the number of regional assistance grants paid to businesses in Knowsley in each of the past three years.

Mr. Sainsbury: In the three years to the end of March 1992 my Department supported in the Knowsley area 41 projects with regional selective assistance; 69 projects with regional development grants—the revised scheme—and 54 projects with regional enterprise grants.

I will publish a more detailed breakdown of these grants in the *Official Report*.

In addition, I am announcing this afternoon a grant of £799,000 to Kodak to extend its Acornfield road factory on the Knowsley industrial park.

Number of projects in the local authority district of Knowsley supported by RSA, RDG, or REG 1989-90 to 1991-92

	1989-90	*1990-91*	*1991-92*
RSA project grants	15	13	13
Revised RDG	48	14	7
REG	12	20	22

Pâté de Foie Gras

18. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy to ban the import of pâté de foie gras into the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: No.

Free Flight Offers

19. **Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what further steps he has taken to regulate free flight offers which accompany the sale of goods or services.

24. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what further steps he has taken to regulate free flight offers which accompany the sale of goods or services.

Mr. Leigh: I have no evidence that such offers are other than bona fide sales promotions and have no plans for specific regulation of them.

Deregulation

20. **Mr. Sproat:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how he proposes to monitor deregulation throughout Whitehall.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Progress under the deregulation initiative in all regulatory departments is co-ordinated and monitored by the central deregulation unit in my Department. As the Minister with particular responsibility, for the initiative, I take an active lead in liaising with deregulation Ministers in other Departments and monitoring their activities.

Railway Rolling Stock

21. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what help his Department is giving British railway rolling stock manufacturing.

Mr. Sainsbury: My Department supports the UK railway equipment manufacturers under its schemes of regional selective assistance, innovation and export promotion. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in the autumn statement additional measures to release £150 million for rolling stock orders by British Rail. In addition, he announced the Government's continuing commitment to the Jubilee line extension.

Coal Mines (Wales)

22. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will state, on the basis of the latest information available to him, what are the prospects for each of the four remaining coal mines in Wales; and what discussions he has had with the NCB of plans for the sinking of new mines in Wales.

Mr. Eggar: Betws and Taff Merthyr are the subject of a consultation process currently being conducted by British Coal. Point of Ayr is being considered in the context of the coal review.

We have had no discussions with British Coal about opening new mines in Wales.

Japanese-owned Plants

23. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the benefits to United Kingdom industry of experience of working practices in Japanese-owned plants in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Sainsbury: My Department keeps a watching brief on all relevant aspects of inward investment. I am particularly encouraged by the experience of Japanese investors in adapting their own working practices to UK circumstances. I have also noted that a number of UK companies have learnt from these practices.

Ireland (Market Development Fund)

25. **Mr. Trimble:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what response he has received from the European Commission with regard to his representations on the Republic of Ireland's market development fund.

Mr. Needham: As a result of representations made to the European Commission a number of important changes were made to the initial proposal so as to minimise the potential impact on United Kingdom businesses. The scheme is confined to companies employing fewer than 250 people and whose turnover does not exceed 20 mecu. Companies which are more than one quarter owned by one or more larger companies are ineligible. The aid is limited for a maximum of six months and will end in March 1993. The scheme can also be suspended if the average rate of sterling against the Irish pound closes below parity within any working week. I understand the Commission has ruled out any extension.

Pit Closures

26. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on his latest proposals regarding coal mine closures.

Mr. Heseltine: We are engaged in a wide-ranging review of the prospects for 21 of the pits proposed for closure by British Coal, in the context of the Government's energy policy. We will shortly be publishing a White Paper setting out the results of that review, which will then be debated by the House.

Steel Exports (USA)

27. **Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to protect steel exports to the United States of America.

Mr. Heseltine: I raised this subject with Barbara Franklin, the then United States Secretary of Commerce, by letter on 11 December. I have also written to her successor, Ron Brown, urging him to focus on these matters at the earliest opportunity.

The issue was raised at the Foreign Affairs Council on 2 February, when the United Kingdom joined other member states in condemning the United States actions as unacceptable. As a result the Community has requested formal consultations with the United States in accordance with the GATT subsidies code.

In addition, the EC fully supported Brazil in its denunciation of the United States decisions at the GATT Council on 9 February.

Timeshare Companies

28. **Dr. Wright:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what further steps he is taking to protect consumers against disreputable timeshare companies.

Mr. Leigh: The EC Commission has submitted a draft directive on timeshare to the Council of Ministers. The United Kingdom is seeking to secure the early adoption of this directive.

Gas (Exempt Supplies) Act 1993

29. **Mr. Duncan:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the entry into force of the Gas (Exempt Supplies) Act 1993.

Mr. Eggar: We have made it clear that the Gas (Exempt Supplies) Act 1993 will not come into force until the Health and Safety Commission has had sufficient time to put appropriate safety arrangements in place. We therefore plan to bring the Act into force once revisions to the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1984 are in place, probably early in 1994.

One-stop Shops

30. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress his Department is making towards setting up one-stop shops.

Mr. Heseltine: A total of 57 partnerships have submitted bids for funding pilot one-stop shops. Many of these bids cover wide geographical areas and make proposals for establishing one-stop shops in more than one local area. This is an excellent response. I intend to announce the winning bids by the end of March.

Steel Exports (USA)

31. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations have been made by Her Majesty's Government in relation to penal tariffs on the importation of steel into the United States of America.

Mr. Heseltine: I raised this with Barbara Franklin, the then United States Secretary of Commerce, by letter on 11 December. I have also written to her successor, Ron Brown, urging him to focus on these matters at the earliest opportunity.

Post Office

32. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will estimate the current value of the assets of the Post Office.

Mr. Leigh: The value of the Post Office's net assets at 27 September 1992, as reported in the 1992-93 half-year results, was £2,205 million.

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many Crown post offices have been closed in each of the last five years; and what number of Crown post offices there are expected to be by the end of 1993.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 15 February 1993]:* The figures requested are as follows:

Year	*Number of Crown office closures*
1987-88	4
1988-89	6
1989-90	154
1990-91	172
1991-92	148
Up to 31 January 1993	57
Total	541

These outlets have been replaced by 529 new agency-operated outlets which offer the full range of transactions and in many cases extended hours of opening. The Post Office will continue to review the opportunities for conversion of Crown offices to agency status throughout 1993.

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many *(a)* franchised post offices and *(b)* non-franchised sub-post offices there are expected to be by the end of 1993.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 15 February 1993]:* There are at present 53 franchise post offices and 18,974 sub-post offices in operation. The Post Office will review opportunities for further franchise offices as they arise throughout 1993 and some modest increase can be expected. The number of sub-post offices is expected to be broadly similar at the end of 1993, although closures occur from time to time as a result of local circumstances. The Government are committed to the maintenance of a nationwide network of post offices.

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many *(a)* crown post offices and *(b)* sub-post offices have become franchised sub-post offices in each of the last five years.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 15 February 1993]:* Since 1990 42 Crown offices have been converted to franchise status operating in major retail outlets such as supermarkets and newsagents. Five existing sub-post offices have been upgraded to franchise status. There have also been six openings of franchise offices in entirely new locations. No franchise offices were opened before 1990.

Motor Industry (Energy Strategy)

33. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to meet motor manufacturers to discuss the implications for the motor industry of his revised energy strategy.

Mr. Sainsbury: None.

Coal Industry

34. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to announce his plans for the future of the coal industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: I hope to set out the Government's plans for the future of the coal industry in a White Paper to be published later this month.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether the cost of continued pumping at pits in the Durham coalfield was taken into account *(a)* before the announcement of the proposed closures and *(b)* in the recent review of their viability.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 15 February 1993]:* The factors which British Coal considered before making its announcement of proposed pit closures on 13 October are a matter for the corporation. The studies by John T. Boyd Company of pits proposed for closure have taken account of the costs of pumping at those pits.

United States of America

35. **Mr. Gallie:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on trade with the United States of America.

Mr. Heseltine: The United States is our largest trading partner outside Europe and our trading relationship is therefore of the greatest significance. I have already conveyed to my counterparts in the new Administration the importance I attach to finding constructive solutions to the current EC-US bilateral issues, particularly in the steel and vehicles sector, and in bringing the Uruguay round to a successful conclusion. The position adopted by the EC Commission in its talks last week with the United States Administration on these matters has our full support.

The reviving United States economy provides considerable opportunities for British companies in the United States. I hope shortly to announce a major new campaign to encourage our exporters to seize these opportunities.

Postage Stamps (Royal Emblems)

36. **Ms. Hoey:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consideration he has given to the future use of royal emblems on postage stamps in connection with his proposals to privatise the Post Office.

Mr. Leigh: The review of Post Office organisation and structure is not yet complete. No decision has been taken to privatise the Post Office. Full consideration is being given to all relevant issues.

Arms Conversion

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy to consult the Secretary of the National Steering Committee of Nuclear Free Zone Local Authorities about arms conversion.

Mr. Sainsbury: No.

Laboratories (Expenditure)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the expenditure of *(a)* the Warren Spring Laboratory, *(b)* the National Engineering Laboratory, *(c)* the National Physical Laboratory and *(d)* the Laboratory of the Government Chemist in each year since 1989; what is the projected expenditure for the next three years; and how much income was generated from (i) Government sources outside his Department and (ii) non-Government sources since 1989.

Mr. Leigh: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the chief executives of the four agencies concerned. I have therefore asked Dr. Richard Worswick, Laboratory of Government Chemist; Mr. William Edgar, National Engineering Laboratory; Dr. Peter Clapham, National Physical Laboratory; and Dr. Doug Cormack, Warren Spring Laboratory, to arrange for replies to be given.

Letter from Dr. D. Cormack to Mr. Jim Cousins, dated 10 February 1993:

I am replying to your question to the President of the Board of Trade in respect of Warren Spring Laboratory. The figures are as follows:

	Vote expenditure £ million
1989-90	10·3
1990-91	11·7
1991-92	12·7
1992-93	13·0
1993-94	13·0
1994-95	14·0
1995-96	14·0

£ million

	1989-90	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	[1] *1992-93*
Vote income from:				
OGDs	4·2	5·4	6·8	6·4
Non-Government	1·8	1·9	3·0	3·1

[1] The figures for 1992-93 are the latest forecast outturn.

Letter from W. Edgar to Mr. Jim Cousins, dated 12 February 1993:

The information you asked for is as follows:

	Gross expenditure £ million	*Income from Government sources excluding DTI £ million*	*Income from non-Government sources £ million*
Year to 31 March			
90—Actual	19·6	0·4	4·0
91—Actual	18·2	0·3	4·3
92—Actual	17·8	0·5	6·1
93—Forecast	23·3	0·5	6·0
94—Projected	23·5		
95—Projected	24·5		
96—Projected	25·1		

I trust this meets your requirements.

Letter from Peter Clapham to Mr. Jim Cousins, dated 11 February 1993:

I refer to your recent Parliamentary Question, asking the President of the Board of Trade if he will give the expenditure of *(a)* the Warren Spring Laboratory, *(b)* the National Engineering Laboratory, *(c)* the National Physical Laboratory and (d) the Laboratory of the Government Chemist in each year since 1989; what is the projected expenditure for the next three years and how much income was generated from (i) government sources outside his Department and (ii) non government sources since 1989.

I have been asked to reply in respect of the Agency for which I am responsible, the National Physical Laboratory.

The historic information requested is as follows:

£ million

	1989-90	*1990-91*	*1991-92*
Expenditure	35	40	44
Income from			
(i) government sources outside DTI	0·6	0·7	0·6
(ii) non government sources	4·2	4·4	6·2

The latest published projections of gross expenditure for the current year and the next three years are as follows:

£ million

1992-93 (estimated outturn)	*1993-94*	*1994-95*	*1995-96*
47	48	53	56

However, it is likely that the projections for 1994-95 and beyond will need to be revised downwards in the light of reductions in the budgets available to our major customers.

Letter from R. D. Worswick to Mr. Jim Cousins, dated 12 February 1993:

As Chief Executive I am replying to this question in respect of the Laboratory of the Government Chemist (LGC), an Executive Agency since 30 October 1989.

From 1 April 1990 LGC has been subject to net running cost control. It is expected to finance current expenditure (including capital charges) from income from payments by customers, principally Government Departments (including the Department of Trade and Industry), for work commissioned. LGC undertakes work for customers on a full economic cost basis.

Against this background, the details you requested about LGC's Vote Expenditure and Receipts are as follows:

Table 1: Expenditure

	£ million
1989-90	10·2
1990-91	11·0
1991-92	12·8
1992-93	16·5
1993-94	16·7
1994-95	17·5
1995-96	17·3

Table 2: Receipts

	Government sources outside DTI £ million	*Non-Government sources £ million*
1989-90	7·0	0·6
1990-91	7·8	1·0
1991-92	7·1	1·0
1992-93[1]	7·2	1·0

Note:

[1] The figures for 1992-93 are based on the latest income forecasts for the present financial year.

I hope this information is helpful.

Coal Imports

Sir David Steel: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimates he has made of the change in the price of imported coal in 1992 due to currency fluctuations.

Mr. Eggar: Based on figures of spot purchases of coal delivered to Europe, published by the *International Coal Report*, the sterling price of imported coal declined from 93p per gigajoule in January 1992 to 74p per GJ in September, mainly due to a decline in the dollar price of imported coal. The price increased to 92p per GJ in December due to the exchange rate changes.

Manufactures

Mr. Spearing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the manufactured products which have ceased to be manufactured in the United Kingdom since 1980.

Mr. Sainsbury: There are a number of sources of information on manufacturing products, but none is sufficiently comprehensive to allow for an accurate answer.

KissLine

Mr. Dickens: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps are being taken in connection with the KissLine telephone service; and what steps are being taken to prevent such services from being advertised in children's comics.

Mr. Leigh: The Independent Committee for the Supervision of Standards of Telephone Information Services sets and reviews standards relating to premium rate telephone services through the ICSTIS code of practice. ICSTIS recognises that children are a vulnerable audience for premium rate services and the code of practice contains a number of measures which help to protect children and their parents. Children's services must not, for example, include references to practices that a reasonable parent would not wish his or her child to hear or learn about in this way.

ICSTIS has considered the children's service entitled "Kissing: All the Secrets" and has decided that the content of the service was so mild that the appearance of an advertisement for it in a children's comic did not breach the ICSTIS code of practice.

Bank of Credit and Commerce International

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received concerning the lack of staff representation on the interim creditor committee of BCCI.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Such representations have been received from the hon. Member for Leicester, East and from members of the BCCI campaign committee.

Insolvency Act

Mr. Dowd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many individual voluntary arrangements under part VIII of the Insolvency Act 1986 have been notified to his Department in each of the last three years for which records are available; what is the total value of debt written off in this fashion over this period; how many businesses have thereby been thus enabled to continue trading; and how many creditors have suffered irrecoverable losses as a result of the operation of this part of the Act.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The number of individual voluntary arrangements in each year are published on my Department's behalf in "Business Briefing" by the Association of British Chambers of Commerce, copies of which are available in the Library. The further information sought by the hon. Member is not maintained and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

European Structural Funds

Mr. Coe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he considers that Cornwall should be eligible for grants from the European structural funds.

Mr. Sainsbury: Yes. The Government believe that Northern Ireland, the highlands and islands, Merseyside, Devon and Cornwall, rural Wales and South Yorkshire should be eligible for grants under objective 1 of these funds.

Industrial Strategy

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the Government's industrial strategy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) on 16 November 1992, *Official Report*, column *71*, and the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry to my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) on 27 January 1993, *Official Report*, column *735*.

Dounreay

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the future of Dounreay.

Mr. Eggar: The prototype fast reactor at Dounreay is due to cease operation on 31 March 1994, after which decommissioning operations will commence. Other decomissioning and radioactive waste management operations already under way will continue for some time to come. Dounreay is also the base of the Atomic Energy Authority's fuel services business. Future commercial activities there are a matter for the AEA.

Hospital Radio

Mr. Illsley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what discussions have taken place between his Department and the National Association of Hospital Broadcasting Organisations regarding the allocation of an FM frequency for hospital broadcasting services;

(2) whether the use of a freely radiating FM frequency will be made available to hospital broadcasting services.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 15 February 1993]:* I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that I gave on 9 February 1993, *Official Report*, column *569*.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish a table of information showing for regions of the United Kingdom, with Greater London shown as a separate region, the number of VAT registrations and de-registrations for each year since 1979.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 15 February 1993]:* Regional estimates of VAT registratio:ns and deregistrations, for the years 1980 to 1991, were published in CSO bulletin (5/93) on 15 January 1993, a copy of which is available in the Library.

International Atomic Energy Authority

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the IAEA meeting in Oslo from 1 to 5 February on dumping in the Kara and Barents seas.

Mr. Curry: I have been asked to reply.

The meeting was held under the joint auspices of the International Atomic Energy Authority, the Norwegian Radiation Protection Authority and the Federal Hydrometeorological Committee of Russia. Officials from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and from the Ministry of Defence attended.

The meeting launched "The International Arctic Seas Assessment Project (IASAP) 1993-95", a scientific programme designed to assess the implications for human health and the environment of radioactive wastes dumped in the Kara and Barents seas by the former Soviet Union and to consider any necessary remedial action. I welcome the co-operation being offered by the Russian authorities and look forward to seeing the results of this investigation.

WALES

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) which company won the contract for printing the brochure, "Grant-maintained Schools—Questions Staff Ask"; if the contract was open to competitive tender; and what was the total cost of production and distribution;

(2) which company won the contract for printing the brochure, "Grant-maintained Schools—Questions Parents Ask"; if the contract was open to competitive tender; and what was the total cost of production and distribution;

(3) which company won the contract for printing the brochure, "How to become a Grant-maintained School"; for school governors; if the contract was open to competitive tender; and what was the cost of production and distribution.

Sir Wyn Roberts: These booklets were produced for the Welsh Office by the Central Office of Information and details relating to their production are a matter for the chief executive of COI. The production and distribution cost of each booklet cannot be separately identified as all three were produced together. The cost of producing and distributing all booklets was £23,900.

Contracting Out

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will provide figures for the reduction in numbers of posts as a result of contracting out since 1979 in his Department and agencies for which he has responsibility.

Mr. David Hunt: Information in the form requested is not readily available and could be compiled only at disproportionate cost.

Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action is currently undertaken by his Department to ensure that local authorities fulfil obligations outlined in section 2 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: We expect local authorities to be well aware of their statutory duties under section 2(1) of the 1970 Act, to provide a range of services for disabled people, where they accept that there is an assessed need. Each case is assessed on its own merits and the decision as to the kind of assistance to be provided is for the local authority to make, being best placed to judge an individual's needs. The Department receives annual returns and, as appropriate, follows up specific cases referred to the Department, where it is alleged that a local authority is in breach of its statutory duties.

Mental Illness

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what new money and transitional funding he has allocated to each county in Wales in respect of the all-Wales mental illness strategy 1993-94; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will allocate extra funding to the all-Wales mental illness strategy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The allocation has been announced of an extra £1·2 million for 1993-94, in addition to what is required to maintain existing projects. The distribution of the allocation has yet to be decided. Discussions are continuing about the amount and duration of transitional funding needed to develop new services within each county.

Energy Conservation

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what initiatives he will take to boost energy conservation in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: I have already taken several initiatives to encourage the efficient use of energy. In December 1991 I launched the "Energy Plan for Wales for the 1990s", which outlines our approach to energy conservation. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House. At the same time I wrote to all local authorities stressing the importance of energy conservation.

Very recently I have supplemented this initiative by joining the corporate commitment campaign started by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. This campaign is aimed at top management of both the commercial and public sectors. I myself signed the commitment on behalf of the Welsh Office last December. Details of this campaign have also been placed in the Library of the House. My officials are at present very active in promulgating this message throughout Wales.

Community Care

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make available extra funding for community care in 1993-94; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my announcement of 2 October that £35·9 million will be made available to local authorities in 1993-94 to meet the cost of their new responsibilities for community care. This includes the Department of Social Security transfer of £27·5 million, with a further £8·4 million for additional costs.

Schools and Colleges

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* infant schools, *(b)* primary schools, *(c)* secondary schools and *(d)* colleges of further education there were in Wales in each year since 1979; and how many places were offered by each category.

Mr. David Hunt: The number of infant, primary and secondary schools and colleges of further education in Wales in each year since 1979 is shown in the following table together with the total number of full and part-time pupils in schools and the number of enrolments in further education colleges. Information on the number of places offered by each category is not collected centrally.

Number of establishments

	Infant[1]	*Primary*[1]	*Secondary*[1]	*FE colleges*[2]
1979-80	420	1,505	241	45
1980-81	410	1,498	239	45
1981-82	379	1,494	241	45
1982-83	353	1,491	238	46
1983-84	337	1,484	236	44
1984-85	314	1,482	237	43
1985-86	305	1,469	237	39
1986-87	299	1,463	234	39
1987-88	295	1,458	233	39
1988-89	291	1,452	232	39
1989-90	279	1,450	231	36
1990-91	271	1,446	230	37
1991-92	264	1,440	229	34

Number of students-pupils on roll

	Infant[1]	*Primary*[1]	*Secondary*[1]	*FE colleges*[2]
1979-80	62,091	233,136	240,771	62,207
1980-81	57,944	225,491	239,641	61,973
1981-82	52,670	220,532	237,156	64,081
1982-83	48,858	213,711	235,625	63,671
1983-84	48,515	210,127	231,512	67,548
1984-85	48,383	208,912	226,446	65,477
1985-86	48,901	207,897	218,378	65,870
1986-87	47,967	210,032	209,909	70,546
1987-88	46,951	214,750	199,279	73,942
1988-89	46,847	221,641	191,999	79,534
1989-90	45,960	228,648	185,723	84,144
1990-91	45,819	231,016	185,193	85,755
1991-92	46,316	232,341	189,002	90,860

[1] At January each year.

[2] At November each year. All colleges offering further education courses each year (both further education and higher education

colleges) are included in the table. The total number of further education enrolments is also shown irrespective of whether the course was run at a further education or higher education establishment.

Class Sizes

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the average class size of *(a)* primary schools, *(b)* secondary schools, *(c)* sixth form colleges, *(d)* colleges of further education, *(e)* colleges of higher education and *(f)* infant schools in each year since 1979.

Mr. David Hunt: The average class size in primary and secondary schools and further and higher education courses in Wales since 1979 is shown in the following table. Figures are not available for further and higher education courses before 1982-83 and for secondary schools before 1986-87. Information on the average class size of infant schools and sixth form colleges is not collected separately. Information for the colleges of the University of Wales is not available.

	Primary	*Secondary*[1]	*Further Education*[2]	*Higher Education*[2]
1979-80	24·3	n/a	n/a	n/a
1980-81	23·9	n/a	n/a	n/a
1981-82	24·1	n/a	n/a	n/a
1982-83	23·9	n/a	13·5	12·5
1983-84	23·7	n/a	13·5	13·2
1984-85	24·1	n/a	14·0	13·7
1985-86	24·3	n/a	13·3	13·4
1986-87	24·4	19·4	13·2	14·2
1987-88	24·5	19·1	13·5	14·1
1988-89	24·8	19·0	[3]14·0	[3]13·5
1989-90	24·8	18·9	14·0	13·9
1990-91	23·1	19·2	14·3	15·7
1991-92	25·4	21·5	n/a	n/a

[1] Prior to 1986-87 information on the size of classes in secondary schools was collected on a different basis. These data, relating to the numbers of classes by size, are given in the Secondary Education section of 'Statistics of Education in Wales: Schools', copies of which are available in the Library.

[2] Average class sizes for Wales are calculated on a further education or higher education basis and the figures do include a small number of further education courses run at higher education establishments and higher education courses at further education establishments.

[3] Changes in methodology, introduced in 1988-89, may affect comparisons of indicators between 1987-88 and 1988-89.

Waiting List Initiative

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidelines he has given to purchasers and providers of health care concerning the use of marginal cost pricing for waiting list initiative expenditure; in what circumstances purchaser-provider arrangements for operations can be based on marginal cost pricing; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Negotiations between purchasers and providers, whether in respect of mainstream business, or specific initiatives such as that on waiting times, take place within the well-established ground rules for NHS contracting.

Office Furniture

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to order office furniture before 31 March; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Orders to the value of approximately £600 are waiting to be placed. Futher purchases may be made as required.

ENVIRONMENT

Halon Bank

Mr. Couchman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has for establishing a United Kingdom halon bank.

Mr. Maclean: The Government do not plan to establish a Government-run United Kingdom halon bank. However, following discussions between Government halon users and the fire industry, I am pleased to announce the establishment of the project phase of the Halon Users' National Consortium (HUNC). HUNC is being set up by halon users and the fire industry with the aim of managing the United Kingdom installed bank of halons. It will act as a clearing house putting those who need to continue using halons in contact with those who do not. Unlike halon bank management proposals elsewhere in the world, HUNC will be a non-profit making organisation. It will be funded by members' subscriptions rather than from a levy on sales.

As its contribution to HUNC, my Department is funding publicity which is being issued to UK halon users this week. The set up costs for HUNC are being met by halon users and the fire industry. This is an excellent example of Government and industry co-operation.

Office of Water Services

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what plans he has to increase the transparency of Ofwat;

(2) what plans he has to review the powers and accountability of Ofwat;

(3) what representations he has received concerning the powers and accountability of Ofwat; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The Director General of Water Services already operates an open regulatory regime, for example by consulting widely on issues such as future charging policy. The responses to these public consultations inform his decisions, which are published in press releases. Information notes are also available which explain Ofwat policy.

The powers of the Director General were reviewed in preparation for the Competition and Service (Utilities) Act 1992, which enhanced his powers in certain respects, for example in the resolution of disputes.

The Director General reports each year to the Secretary of State on the discharge of his duties. The Secretary of State lays a copy of the report before Parliament, and Select Committees may call the Director General to give evidence. Whilst my Department occasionally receives representations from consumers about the powers and accountability of the Director General, I have no current plans to review them further.

Pay-when-paid Policy

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide details of the pay-when-paid policy of the Property Services Agency and of its purpose and origins; and if he will make a statement on the application to this policy of the Government's requiring Departments to pay their private contractors as quickly as possible.

Mr. Redwood: New payment arrangements are being implemented by the PSA building management businesses, where they are acting as agents for the Ministry of Defence for payment purposes under MOD property management contracts, such that subcontractors are paid no later than seven days following receipt of payment from the client, MOD. There is an existing obligation on the MOD to pay promptly and this together with the new payment arrangements being adopted by the PSAS will ensure that subcontractors should be paid within 30 days from validation.

The development of the appropriate systems and procedural changes is underway so that by 1 April 1993 the five BM businesses are operating on this new basis. As these arrangements are introduced, I am demanding better performance from PSA in reducing delays in payments to contractors by getting invoices to MOD more promptly.

These arrangements create a contractual commitment on the managing contractor to make payment to subcontractors whose invoices have been accepted for payment by MOD and should be distinguished from other forms of "pay-when-paid" for capital works contracts whereby main contractors may withhold payments to subcontractors. This latter practice is inconsistent with the Government's prompt payment policy.

While the building management businesses are still in Government ownership, and they retain the obligations of the Government's prompt payment policy in their own right, a safety net will be in place so that PSA can ensure prompt payment to its contractors even where MOD has not paid PSA.

Landfill

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when his Department intends to implement section 61 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. and learned Friend is still considering the appropriate time to implement section 61 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Lambeth Council

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimates he has made of that part of Lambeth's current notional expenditure which consists of *(a)* interest charges and *(b)* debt write-off.

Mr. Robin Squire: The relevant notional amount specified for Lambeth in "The Limitation of Council Tax and Precepts (Relevant Notional Amounts) Report (England) 1993-94" reflects the authority's own estimate of the amounts of interest charges and debt write-off which it made when setting its 1992-93 budget and community charges.

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much Lambeth council is currently permitted to borrow excluding capital projects.

Mr. Robin Squire: The limit on an authority's borrowing is its aggregate credit limit (ACL), or any lower limit the authority itself may have set. The ACL is determined by a formula. As the ACL can fluctuate from day to day, the ACL which is current at any time would have to be ascertained from the council.

Housing Association Grant

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment to what extent discretion is used in determining the amount of housing association grant available in each local authority's area; and what performance indicators are used in the exercise of the discretion.

Mr. Baldry: The Housing Corporation allocates 80 per cent. of the resources to a particular local authority area, over a three year period, in accordance with housing need, as measured by the housing needs indicator (HNI). The remaining 20 per cent. is distributed in the light of particular local circumstances, including the value for money of projects submitted by housing associations. Local priorities are discussed between housing authorities and the regional offices of the Housing Corporation before decisions are taken.

Water Disconnections

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he will take to make it unlawful for water companies or others to cause a disconnection of a consumer's water supply.

Mr. Maclean: None. It is right that bills should be paid, but equally that companies should deal sympathetically with customers who are having difficulty meeting their bills. The Director General of Water Services is responsible for protecting customers' interests. He has expressed his concern over the level of disconnections, and issued guidance to water companies last year on the subject of debt and disconnection to ensure they take a consistent and fair approach towards customers with unpaid charges. The Director General is in addition proposing to carry out research to find out more about the reasons people are disconnected. The Government welcome the actions he is taking.

Tenants Charter

Ms. Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many copies of the full council tenants charter have been requested from his Department.

Mr. Baldry: Copies of the full tenants charter were sent to all local housing authorities, housing organisations, citizens advice bureaux and law centres. In addition, over 200,000 copies of the English and ethnic language versions of the full council tenants charter have been directly requested from my Department, mainly by tenants.

Ms. Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many copies of the full tenants charter were printed in each language; and at what cost.

Mr. Baldry: One million copies of the English language version of the full tenants charter have been printed at a cost of £123,176. Five thousand copies of each of the five ethnic language versions (Hindi, Greek, Vietnamese, Bengali and Urdu) have been printed at a cost of £41,422.

Drinking Water

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the legislation or regulations requiring that information regarding the quality of drinking water is made available to the public by the water companies.

Mr. Maclean: Regulation 30 of The Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 1989, SI No. 1147, requires that a water undertaker shall make available for inspection by the public at all reasonable hours and free of charge, at such of its offices as are normally open to the public, and record maintained by it in accordance with regulation 29. This includes for each water supply zone, its name, the supplying water treatment works, its population, particulars of any relaxation granted or undertakings given in respect of the water supply in the zone and particulars of the result of analyses of samples taken in accordance with other parts of the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations.

In addition, regulation 31 requires water undertakers to prepare for publication an annual report in accordance with the terms of that regulation. A copy must be sent to the local authority for each area in which it supplies water.

Direct Labour Organisations

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the methods used to monitor direct labour organisations and the publication of comparability studies showing performance indicators of efficiency, effectiveness, employment and value for money in respect of each local authority.

Mr. Robin Squire: Local authorities carrying out work within an activity defined under the Local Government Planning and Land Act 1980 or the Local Government Act 1988 are required to keep accounts and to meet a financial objective set by my right hon. and learned Friend. They are also required to submit annual reports on these matters to my right hon. and learned Friend who considers in each case whether there are grounds for exercising his sanction powers. The introduction of local government performance indicators is a key feature in this Government's determination to raise the standard of public services. I believe that the methods adopted by the Audit Commission will enable the citizen to judge the performance of their local council in comparison with those of a similar background.

Tenants

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the responses received by his Department to the consultation paper "Compensation for Tenants' Improvements".

Sir George Young: Some 61 responses to the consultation paper have been received to date. A list of the respondents has been placed in the Library of the House. The responses will be held for six months in the Department's central library.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the ratio of expenditure on administration to total expenditure for *(a)* county councils and *(b)* shire district councils; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: The budgeted ratio of expenditure on general administration (not allocated to other services) to total expenditure on services (both measured net of sales, fees and charges) in 1992-93 was 0·3 per cent. in county councils and 3 per cent. in shire district councils.

Housing

116. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish responses to the consultation paper draft explanatory note on planning and affordable housing.

Sir George Young: We will place copies in the Library of the House of Commons once we have finished considering them and have issued a final version of the guidance.

Council Leaseholders

117. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he has taken to assist council leaseholders.

Sir George Young: The Government legislated in 1986 to meet concerns over high service charges on flats sold under the right to buy. Purchasers now have binding estimates of the maximum charges for repairs and improvements during the first five years of the lease, and the right to a loan for particularly high charges.

Leaseholders have nevertheless reported difficulties over service charges and over resale. The Department is looking into these with landlords and the Council of Mortgage Lenders.

Housing, Tower Hamlets

120. **Mr. Peter Shore:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many public sector dwellings were started and completed by the Tower Hamlets local authority and by housing associations in Tower Hamlets in each year since 1986.

Mr. Baldry: Estimates of housebuilding starts and completions by sector in Tower Hamlets for each year from 1986 to 1991 and for the first half of 1992 are shown in the October 1992 edition of "Local Housing Statistics" (issue No. 103), tables 1(b) to 1(h). A copy of this publication is in the Library.

Substandard Accommodation

121. **Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of *(a)* Asian and *(b)* white households live in substandard accommodation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: This information is not available.

Inner City Projects, Coventry

124. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the total amount of grants for inner city projects in Coventry given in each of the last five years.

Mr. Robin Squire: This Department has provided the following inner cities grants to Coventry in the last five years:

(All figures given are in £ millions)

	1992-93	*1991-92*	*1990-91*	*1989-90*	*1988-89*
Urban Programme	4·645	4·772	4·798	4·575	4·79
City Grant	0·580	0·590	—	0·620	1·630
Task Force	1·500	1·273	0·808	0·881	1·169
	6·725	6·635	5·606	6·076	7·589
Derelict Land Grant	0·109	—	—	0·002	0·002
Energy Efficiency	—	0·020			
Section 73 Grants	0·087	0·079	0·028		
Home Improvement Agencies (HIA)	0·037	0·038			
	0·233	0·162	0·053	0·002	0·002
	6·958	6·797	5·659	6·078	7·595
Estate Action (Total for period—£13 million)					

125. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has received for schemes for inner city projects in Coventry which he does not propose to fund.

Mr. Robin Squire: We have received a number of proposals from Coventry along with other local authorities of support for inner city projects which we have not been able to assist. Clearly we do not have unlimited funds. However it is open to local authorities to support such projects through use of their capital receipts and any private sector or other contributions.

Inner City Policies

126. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library the reviews that have been undertaken by his Department on the operation of the Government's inner city policies.

Mr. Robin Squire: My Department has carried out a number of evaluations of its various programmes for urban areas including, most recently, the achievements of three of the inner cities task forces; relevant reports are in the Library. Further details of my Department's urban policies and programmes are in the 1993 DOE annual report published 10 February.

Local Government Commission

128. **Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will set out the full proposed timetable for the second tranche of the work of the Local Government Commission;

(2) what steps he is taking to ensure that all local authorities are given adequate advance warning of the start time of the local government review in their area;

(3) if he will make it his policy not to require the Local Government Commission to begin any review in the period immediately before or immediately after the 1993 local elections.

Mr. Robin Squire: In reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for the Isle of Wight (Mr. Field), my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Local Government and Inner Cities announced on 4 February the timetable for the Local Government Commission's second tranche reviews, and placed a copy in the House Library.

All local authorities in the areas in the second tranche were sent a copy of the announcement, together with the timetable. This gives them a minimum of three months to prepare their initial submissions to the commission.

The Secretary of State intends to direct the commission to begin the first review in the second tranche on 10 May 1993, immediately after the county council elections. There is no need to delay the beginning of the reviews any further.

Homelessness

129. **Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentages of *(a)* ethnic minorities and *(b)* white people are homeless in London.

Mr. Baldry: Local authorities report the number of households for whom they accept responsibility to secure permanent accommodation under the homelessness provisions of the Housing Act 1985 in their quarterly P1(E) return.

In the quarter ending September 1992 only 17 out of 33 London boroughs provided the information classified by ethnic origin. On average in those boroughs 47 per cent. of households accepted as homeless were from ethnic minorities and 53 per cent. were white.

Housing Associations

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the Hambros report into the actuarial margin of risk of private sector borrowing by housing associations.

Sir George Young: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) on Monday 18 January at column *113*.

135. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the change

in the share of housing association programmes dedicated to rehabilitation of existing stock; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: The Department has commissioned research into the amount of rehabilitation work undertaken by housing associations. The first part of the research, undertaken by PIEDA plc in association with Rodney Dykes Housing Services Ltd, was published at the end of January. I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Library of the House.

The results show that there are a number of factors which have resulted in fewer dwellings being rehabilitated by housing associations than in the past. In addition to the changes brought about by the new financial regime, introduced by the Housing Act 1988, they include: the availability of cheaper land relative to the acquisition costs of properties in need of repair, which encourages new build; increasing opportunities for off-the-shelf purchases of new dwellings from private builders; and the drying up of suitable properties available for rehabilitation in some areas.

The Department has recently let a contract for the second part of the research, which will examine the effects of the decline. The research will again be undertaken by PIEDA, which is due to report in December this year. In the meantime, I have asked the Housing Corporation to aim to maintain rehabat at least at its current level.

Local Authority Housing

140. **Mr. Peter Shore:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authority dwellings were reported as vacant in the London borough of Tower Hamlets in 1992; what percentage of the local authority housing stock this figure respresents; and what is the comparable percentage in other London boroughs.

Mr. Robin Squire: Local authorities report the numbers of their own dwellings that are vacant in their annual housing investment programme (HIP1) returns. At 1 April 1992 Tower Hamlets reported 1,703 of their dwellings as empty, 4·2 per cent. of their dwelling stock. The comparable percentage for the other London boroughs is 2·3 per cent.

House Completions, Leicester

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many houses were completed in Leicester in 1979, 1989 and 1992 respectively.

Mr. Baldry: The total number of housebuilding completions in the city of Leicester local authority area in 1979 was 1,247, in 1989, 227 and for 1992, provisionally, 534.

Uniform Business Rate

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the next uniform business rate revaluation is due to take place.

Mr. Robin Squire: New rating lists will be compiled on 1 April 1995 based on 1 April 1993 values.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the sum paid by British Coal in uniform business rates for 1992 *(a)* in total and *(b)* in respect of the 31 pits due for closure.

Mr. Robin Squire: Information on the rates paid by British Coal is not held centrally by the Government.

English Nature

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance he has given to English Nature concerning its obligation to disseminate to the public data and information on the state of the environment; and what steps are being taken by English Nature to advertise its new responsibilities relating to the provision of environmental information.

Mr. Maclean: English Nature already disseminates information on nature conservation as one of its key functions. My Department has provided guidance on the new Environmental Information Regulations which took effect in December and English Nature will be taking steps to inform its customers and partners of how it intends to meet its obligations under the regulations.

Environmental Data

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will instruct the Joint Nature Conservation Committee to institute a system to ensure that enviornmental data or information disseminated by English Nature, Scottish Natural Heritage or the Countryside Council for Wales are made available in a mutually consistent form.

Mr. Maclean: No. This is a matter for the committee to consider in consultation with the three councils.

Parliament Square (Air Quality)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 10 January, *Official Report*, columns *654-55*, what is the nearest point to Parliament square, Westminster, for which he has records of air quality; and if he will undertake a sample survey of air quality in Parliament square.

Mr. Maclean: The site nearest to Parliament square at which air quality is monitored is at Bridge place, Victoria. The Department has no plans to undertake air quality monitoring in Parliament square.

Darwin Initiative

Mr. Milligan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the Advisory Committee on the Darwin Initiative and indicate its membership.

Mr. Howard: The Prime Minister signed the convention on biological diversity in Rio de Janiero at the UN conference on environment and development. In order to support the aims of the convention he launched at that time the Darwin initiative for the survival of species. The initiative aims to deploy British scientific, managerial and commercial strengths in biodiversity to assist with the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and natural habitats.

In December a consultation paper was issued to a wide variety of individuals, organisations and individuals seeking views on the scope of the initiative and ideas for projects which might meet the initiative's objectives. I announced at that time that I intended to establish an advisory committee on the Darwin initiative. This committee will have regard to the work already in progress on biodiversity and the available resources, and will make recommendations on the areas on which the Darwin initiative should initially be targeted, the relative priority to be given to different programmes, and the financial support to be made available to them. Sir Crispin Tickell has agreed to be chairman of that committee, and I am pleased to announce that the other members of the committee are: Ms. Janet Barber, Dr. Brian Bayne FIBiol, Dr. Eileen Buttle FIBiol, Mr. Robin Herbert DL JP, David Horrobin, professor Robert May FRS and Sir David Smith FRS FRSE. The committee held its first meeting on 15 February.

Olympic Bid

Mr. Sumberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made on the Manchester 2000 Olympic bid; and if he will make a statement on Government support.

Mr. Howard: The details of the formal bid submitted by the Manchester Olympic Bid Committee to the International Olympic Committee will be made public today. I am arranging for a copy of the candidature file and the executive summary to be placed in the Library of the House.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities previously announced on Tuesday 26 January—*Official Report* column *600*—that the Government are providing up to £75 million to support the bid in advance of the IOC's decision on the nomination. In addition, the candidature file sets out the undertakings made by the Government if Manchester is successful. In particular, the Government will ensure that all the necessary facilities will be built, partly by private finance and partly by substantial public funding. We also intend to legislate at the earliest opportunity following the IOC's nomination of Manchester to ensure that the Organising Committee for the Games has the necessary powers to plan and implement this event. The Government are backing wholeheartedly Manchester's bid for the 2000 Olympic Games.

London Boroughs (Debt)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assistance he proposes to make available to London boroughs and the Common Council during 1993-94 in respect of extra costs due to his decisions on housing revenue account subsidy in respect of debt inherited from the former Greater London Council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: It is my right hon. Friend's firm intention to issue capitalisation directions and supplementary credit approvals (SCAs) to authorities facing during 1993-94 extra costs due to his decision that housing revenue account subsidy is not payable under the statute in respect of certain debts inherited from the former Greater London council. The court yesterday upheld this decision.

Authorities which face such extra costs will be able to apply for capitalisation directions and SCAs during a period which my right hon. Friend intends to specify and which will not be shorter than six months from yesterday when the court gave its judgment.

In deciding the amount of a direction and SCA to issue to an authority, my right hon. Friend intends to have regard inter alia to the resources available to him under the Government's public expenditure plans, the authority's 1993-94 budget—in particular the scope for the authority to accommodate the extra costs within that budget, and to the financial reserves and useable capital receipts available to the authority. To the extent that costs are covered by directions and SCAs their impact on the council tax is spread over a number of years.

I am arranging for London boroughs and the Common Council to be sent today the details of the scheme for issuing these directions and SCAs which my right hon. Friend intends to adopt. Authorities will need to take account of these intentions when setting their 1993-94 budgets.

River Pollution

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what assessment his Department has made of the impact of the closure of pits in the Durham coalfield on the pollution of the River Wear and other local waterways;

(2) what response he has made to the report on the probable environmental impact of the closure of Vane Tempest and Easington collieries by Dr. Paul Younger of Newcastle university; and what steps he is taking to avoid pollution of the River Wear.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 15 February 1993]:* None. It is for British Coal and the National Rivers Authority, in the first place, to assess the environmental effects of pit closures and any relevant reports on the subject, and to consider what action may need to be taken to avoid pollution. My officials and the staff of the NRA have been in frequent contact about pollution from closed mines, and arrangements have been made between British Coal and the NRA for effective liaison over any proposed pit closures.

Unified Housing Waiting Lists

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will hold talks with the National Federation of Housing Associations, the Association of Metropolitan Authorities and the Association of district councils to discuss the establishment of unified housing waiting lists between local authorities and housing associations.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 12 February 1993]*: My Department held a seminar which discussed the subject last year; attendance included representatives of the organisations mentioned. We are considering holding a further seminar to review developments.

Audit Commission (Lambeth)

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what reports he has received from the Audit Commission that arising out of the discharge of its own duties it has discovered substantial fraud, corruption or other crimes, or substantial ultra vires expenditure, in Lambeth.

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 16 February 1993]:* Neither the Audit Commission nor the auditor report to my right hon. and learned Friend: they perform their duties independently. I understand, however, that Lambeth's auditor is preparing a report which will deal with allegations of fraud, corruption and related matters.

Seven Estuary (Pollution)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total annual discharge into the Severn estuary from English counties of *(a)* ammonia, *(b)* cadmium, *(c)* lead, *(d)* copper, *(e)* chromium, *)f)* cyanide, *(g)* nickel, *(h)* mercury and *(i)* zince in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 16 February 1993]:* The information requested is not held centrally. Details of maximum authorised loads contained in relevant discharge consents, and related water quality monitoring results for the Severn estuary, are available on public registers in the National Rivers Authority regions concerned.

Minewater Pumping

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussion he has had with the National Rivers Authority about the consequences of stopping minewater pumping in the Tyneside area.

Mr. MacLean*[holding answer 19 January 1993]:* My right hon. Friend and I have not discussed this specific matter with the National Rivers Authority. It is for British Coal and the NRA, in the first place, to assess any environmental consquences of stopping minewater pumping.

Drivers (Criminal Convictions)

109. **Ms. Walley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research he has conducted into the extent to which drivers seeking licences to drive hackney carriages and private hire carriages have failed to disclose information relating to *(a)* rape offences and *(b)* other criminal convictions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I have been asked to reply.

No such research has been undertaken. Outside London, district councils issue licences to drive hackney carriages and private hire vehicles and since 1 April 1992 they have been able to request a police check of the possible criminal record of applicants for licences. Only each individual council, after obtaining criminal record details, would be able to gauge the extent to which licence holders had failed to disclose previous convictions. I do not believe there is any need to hold such information centrally.

119. **Ms. Walley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to ensure that licences to drive hackney carriages and private hire vehicles are not issued to men with criminal records which include rape.

Mr. Freeman: I have been asked to reply.

Section 47 of the Road Traffic Act 1991 gives local authorities a power to check with the police if applicants for hackney carriage and PHV drivers' licences have any criminal convictions. A copy of the guidance issued to police and local authorities last year on how the vetting arrangements should operate was placed in the House of Commons Library.

District councils must decide, on the basis of all the information at their disposal, whether an applicant is a fit and proper person to hold such a licence. They should not take into account any convictions which are "spent" by virtue of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 18 February 1993

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Justices of the Peace

Mr. Hoon: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* women and *(b)* members of ethnic minorities have been appointed as justices of the peace in Nottinghamshire since 1989.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Since 1989, 151 persons have been appointed as justices of the peace in Nottinghamshire. Of that number there were 74 females and eight members of ethnic minorities—four males and four females.

Statutory Instruments

Ms. Corston: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many statutory instruments were laid before Parliament by his Department in each year since 1980.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Palestine Liberation Organisation

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to continue to decline to hold meetings at ministerial level with the leaders of the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway) on 10 February, at column *680*.

Ozone-depleting Substances

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many chlorofluorocarbon and hydrochlorofluorocarbon installations are contained within his Department's buildings.

Mr. Goodlad: Four hundred and thirty nine.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much funding has been allocated or spent specifically to deal with measures to reduce his Department's consumption of ozone-depleting substances.

Mr. Goodlad: The Department has allocated £75,000 in the 1993-94 financial year for absorption chiller plant to reduce its use of CFCs/HCFCs, and £157,000 on high-frequency lighting to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many refrigeration and air conditioning systems in the Department are equipped with automatic leak detection systems.

Mr. Goodlad: None.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how the departmental green Minister has promoted protection of the ozone layer with specific policy measures; which possible measures have been considered and rejected; and on what grounds.

Mr. Goodlad: The green Ministers for the Department continue to promote protection of the ozone layer through active FCO involvement in international environmental policy, the planned reduction of energy consumption in the Department and the reduction of use of ozone-depleting substances.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which current uses of ozone-depleting chemicals by his Department are considered essential.

Mr. Goodlad: The Department is advised that the only ozone-depleting chemicals considered essential are those in inhalants supplied to posts overseas for medicinal purposes.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs by what date his Department's use of ozone-depleting chemicals will conform to EC regulations on limits on these chemicals.

Mr. Goodlad: The Department is advised that it is only the production and supply of new ozone-depleting substances which must conform to EC Regulations. The Department will, however, reduce its use of ozone-depleting substances as soon as practicable.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what targets have been set for the recycling of ozone-depleting chemicals within Departmental buildings.

Mr. Goodlad: None. Information is currently being compiled to enable targets to be set.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many chlorofluorocarbon domestic fridges are contained within his Department's buildings.

Mr. Goodlad: Three hundred and sixty-seven.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many catastrophic leaks of ozone-depleting substances have occurred within his Department's buildings on the last five years.

Mr. Goodlad: None.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures have been taken to ensure that ozone-destroying substances in use by his Department identified as controlled waste under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 do not reach the atmosphere.

Mr. Goodlad: Equipment containing ozone-depleting substances is returned to the manufacturers for recycling.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give an undertaking to purchase only ozone-friendly fridges that do not contain chlorofluorocarbons or hydrochlorofluorocarbons for his Department.

Mr. Goodlad: The Department does not purchase fridges containing CFCs or HCFCs where acceptable alternatives offering value for money are available.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what guidance has been sought and received on alternatives or substitutes to the ozone-destroying chemicals in use by his Department.

Mr. Goodlad: In 1992, the Department appointed a firm of consultants to carry out a programme of environmental audits of its home estate. A primary purpose of the audits was to seek advice on alternatives or substitutes to the ozone-destroying chemicals in use in the Department. The consultants are due to report shortly.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commowealth Affairs how many portable halon fire extinguishers are contained within Departmental buildings; and what measures are being taken to ensure their recycling and replacement.

Mr. Goodlad: One hundred and forty-five. They will be replaced this year and returned to the manufacturers for recycling.

Kashmir

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when a United Kingdom Government Minister last visited the Indian-controlled area of Kashmir; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I am not aware that any official visits have been made by United Kingdom Government Ministers to Kashmir in recent years.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussion he has had with the Pakistan Government as to possible aid from Her Majesty's Government to help resettle Kashmiri people who have fled from the Indian-controlled area of Kashmir; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have had no discussion with the Pakistan Government about helping to resettle Kashmiris.

Birmingham Summit

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 5 February, *official Report*, column *393*, what subheads of what votes will be used to meet the cost of the Birmingham summit; and how these costs were apportioned.

Mr. Garel-Jones The costs of the Birmingham European summit were met as follows:

	£ million
FCO vote 1, subhead A 1 (1)	2.3
Home Office vote 1, subhead D1. Specific grant at 51 per cent. of the additional policing costs	0.8

Eastern Europe

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to open new posts in the independent states of the former Soviet Union and in eastern Europe; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: I am pleased to announce that we shall be opening three new embassies in the former Soviet Union and eastern Europe. They will be in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan; Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan; and Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia. All of these countries are going through an important and difficult process of political and economic change. We want to be in the best position to help and encourage the development of democratic societies pursuing liberal economic policies and to promote trade and investment. In the case of both Baku and Tashkent, we are responding to direct requests from British industry to open embassies in each place.

This decision has been made possible by savings in support areas at home and overseas.

DEFENCE

Radiation Workers

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to introduce a no fault compensation scheme for radiation workers employed by or contracted to his Department similar to the scheme adopted by British Nuclear Fuels and the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority.

Mr. Aitken: Consideration is being given to the introduction of radiation compensation arrangements similar in effect to those of the civil nuclear industry. The possibility of my Department's membership of, or association with, the BNFL/AEA scheme is under discussion with the industry and the trade unions.

Mr. Rudi Molinari

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department spent on legal fees for participation in the court case involving the claim for compensation by Mr. Rudi Molinari, a former employee at the royal dockyard at Chatham, against his Department for damage claimed to have been received from radiation exposure at the shipyard.

Mr. Aitken: This case is the subject of continuing legal proceedings and the costs are not yet known.

Helicopter Carrier Ship

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will outline the programme for the procurement of the helicopter carrier ship.

Mr. Aitken: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 9 February, *Official Report*, column *574*.

Statutory Instruments

Ms. Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many statutory instruments were laid before Parliament by his Department in each year since 1980.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested is as follows:

Year	*Number*
1980	13
1981	7
1982	13
1983	15
1984	6
1985	10
1986	29
1987	11
1988	5
1989	10
1990	7
1991	9
1992	7

Contracting Out

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide figures for the reduction in numbers of posts as a result of contracting out since 1979 in his Department and agencies for which he has responsibility.

Mr. Aitken: We estimate that, since 1979, competition for defence support services has resulted in a reduction of 18,000 posts in my Department and in the agencies for which we are responsible.

Armed Forces (Sexual Behaviour)

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proposals he has for the regulation of inappropriate sexual behaviour between heterosexual members of the armed forces; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Service personnel are made aware of the standards of behaviour required and that inappropriate sexual behaviour of any kind can lead to administrative or disciplinary action. Inappropriate sexual conduct of a heterosexual nature by members of the armed forces is dealt with under existing service regulations.

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will bring forward proposals governing the conduct of British troops serving with homosexual armed forces personnel in combined NATO or UN peace-keeping forces; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: British Armed Forces personnel are well aware of the standards of behaviour expected of them and the consequences of any misconduct, heterosexual, homosexual or otherwise. We have no plans, therefore, to introduce regulations specific to those serving with NATO or UN peace-keeping forces alongside homosexual personnel of other armed forces.

MFV Pescado

99. **Ms Walley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will deploy Royal Navy facilities to raise the MFV Pescado.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The raising of the MFV Pescado is a matter for the civil authorities. Any request for assistance would, however, be given careful consideration.

TRANSPORT

Traffic Calming

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when consultation on regulations under the Traffic Calming Act 1992 is to start.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Commencing today, the Department of Transport and the Welsh Office are consulting widely on draft regulations with the local authority associations and other interested parties. We aim to draw the consultation to a close before Easter.

MV Goldeneye

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the reasons for awarding MV Goldeneye a load line exemption certificate; what is the registration of MV Goldeneye; and if he will carry out a port state control inspection of MV Goldeneye.

Mr. Norris: The owners of the unregistered salvage vessel Goldeneye applied for a load line exemption certificate which was issued after survey by a Department surveyor.

The ship is subject to inspection at any time and arrangements will be made accordingly within the inspection programme.

Unseaworthy Vessels

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of foreign ships inspected in British ports in each of the last five years under the provisions of the 1982 memorandum of understanding to secure compliance of ships with international standards; how many ships were found to have deficiencies; under which flag those ships with deficiencies were sailing and what was the amount of deficiencies per individual country; how many ships were detained pending the correction of deficiencies; and what financial penalties were imposed.

Mr. Norris: The numbers of foreign flag ships inspected under the provisions of the memorandum of understanding on port state control 1982 and the number found to have at least one deficiency were as follows:

Year	*Number*	*Number with deficiencies*
1988	1839	915
1989	1,692	1,003
1990	2,118	1,272
1991	2,500	1,647
1992	[1]2,105	[1]1,439

[1] Provisional figure

Deficiencies were found on ships flying the following flags during 1991 and 1992:

Algeria, Antigua and Barbuda, Australia, Austria, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burma, Canada, Chile, China, Cyprus, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Egypt, Estonia, Ethiopia, Faeroe Islands, Finland, France, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Honduras, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iran, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Korea, Latvia, Lebanon, Liberia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mexico, Morocco, Myanmar, Netherlands, Netherland Antilles, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Panama, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Romania, Russia, Saudia Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, St. Vincent and Grenadines, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Taiwan, Togo, Turkey, Tunisia, Tuvalu, USA, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, Uruguay, Vanuatu, Venezuela, Vietnam, Yugoslavia.

The average numbers of deficiencies per ship inspection for the port state control region as a whole were:

Year	*Number*
1988	1·35
1989	1·49
1990	1·62
1991	1·80
1992	[1]—

[1] Not yet available.

Individual figures for the United Kingdom are not readily available; nor are figures for individual flags.

The numbers of foreign ships detained were:

Year	*Number*
1988	37
1989	44
1990	79
1991	116
1992	124

Financial penalties cannot readily be measured, but usually comprise three main elements: the often considerable loss of revenue arising from delays in sailing, the cost of rectifying deficiencies found and the cost of any further inspection to ensure that these deficiencies have been satisfactorily rectified.

Railway Privatisation

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is the date by which comments were sought on his Department's consultative document "Railway Privatisation: A Voice for the Passengers"; and when copies of this document were made available in the Vote Office;

(2) how many copies of his Department's consultative document "Railway Privatisation: A Voice for the Passenger" were printed; and how and when these documents were made available to British Rail passengers.

Mr. Freeman: The document was published on 16 December 1992 and 2,000 copies were printed. It was placed in the Vote Office the same day and copies were sent to bodies likely to have an interest in the future of the consultative committees. The availability of the document was publicised in a press notice and copies have been provided free of charge on request. The requested reply date for comments was 22 January 1993.

Zebra Crossings

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many pedestrians have been hit by a motor vehicle while crossing a zebra crossing in England and Wales during the year 1992.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Data are not yet available for 1992. There were 1,673 pedestrians injured by motor vehicles on zebra crossings in 1991 in England and Wales.

Oil Tankers

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what immediate steps he proposes to take to improve safety regulations on oil tankers within British waters.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 12 February 1993]:* Regulations governing tankers are under constant review within the International Maritime Organisation. The Department is at the forefront of these discussions and developments.

In addition, an initiative has been taken by national and international organisations concerned with tanker operations to develop a voluntary code with regard to tanker routeing around the United Kingdom coast. They have also given an undertaking to re-emphasise to masters the need to pay greater attention to passage planning and to provide early advice to coastal states when tankers are experiencing problems which affect their navigation.

Radio Transponders

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on how many occasions since 1 January 1988 Ministers and officials of his Department have taken part in meetings of the International Maritime Organisation or its committees to discuss the subject of fitting radio transponders on vessels.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 16 February 1993]:* Department officials have taken part in four meetings of the sub-committee on safety of navigation and one meeting of the sub-committee on radiocommunications at the International Maritime Organisation since 1 January 1988 with regard to developing radio transponders for use on vessels.

Vessel Inspections

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many port state inspections of vessels have been undertaken by officials of his Department at *(a)* Sullom Voe and *(b)* Flotta in each year since 1990 and in January 1993; and what percentage of vessels visiting these respective ports the numbers constitute.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 16 February 1993]:* The directors of marine at Sullom Voe and Flotta carry out their own vetting procedure of visiting ships and alert the Department if they are concerned by the condition of a visiting ship.

In addition the number of port state control inspections undertaken at Sullom Voe and Flotta for the years in question is given in the table.

Number of Inspections

Year	*Sullom Voe*	*Flotta*
1990	15	Nil
1991	9	3
1992	4	1
January 1993	Nil	Nil

These inspections constituted the following percentages of individual foreign ships which visited these ports.

Year	*Sullom Voe*	*Flotta*
1990	10	Nil
1991	5	4
1992	2	1
January 1993	Nil	Nil

HOME DEPARTMENT

Overseas Political Organisations

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what circumstances he would take steps to prevent political organisations of other countries from maintaining offices in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Jack: People in this country are free to engage in what political activities they like, including working for foreign political organisations, provided of course that their activities remain within the law.

Devon and Cornwall Police

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 8 February, *Official Report*, column *439*, how many recruits began service with the Devon and Cornwall constabulary on 7 December 1992.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Sixteen recruits began service with the Devon and Cornwall constabulary on 7 December 1992.

Royal Commission on Criminal Justice

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the report of the Royal Commission on criminal justice is due to be completed; and when he expects to publish it.

Mr. Jack: The Royal Commission on criminal justice hopes to complete its report by the end of June. The report will be published as soon thereafter as printing schedules allow.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how the Council for Europe convention on data protection provides a framework for harmonisation of European Community data protection laws.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Council of Europe convention for the protection of individuals with regard to automatic processing of personal data prescribes the basic principles which have to be observed in handling personal data within states party to the convention. Accession to the convention by all European Community member states, and the enactment of the necessary domestic legislation to give effect to the convention's requirements, would thus provide for a consistent data protection regime within the Community.

Children's Rights

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will introduce legislation to give United Kingdom courts jurisdiction to try British nationals and residents for sexual offences against children abroad; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what measures the British Government are taking to comply with article 34 of the United Nations convention on the rights of the child.

Mr. Jack: The Government wholly support the principles set out in the United Nations convention on the rights of the child, which we ratified in 1991. Our law against the sexual abuse and exploitation of children is rightly severe.

We have no plans, however, to extend the largely territorial jurisdiction of our courts to deal with offences committed abroad against children; nor is there any requirement for us to do so in order to fulfil our obligations under article 34 of the convention. Where such offences have been committed abroad it is for the country concerned to enforce its own law. We are always ready, however, to assist through extradition and by giving legal assistance under the Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Act 1990.

Sex Tourism

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action the British Government have taken to discourage the promotion of sex tourism through holiday brochures, magazines and other forms of mass communications in this country.

Mr. Jack: While the Government have no power to ban or censor publications, anyone publishing brochures promoting sex tourism could risk prosecution under the Obscene Publications Act 1959, or for an offence of conspiracy to corrupt public morals at common law. It would, however, be for the courts to decide whether an offence had been committed in any individual case.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of notifiableoffences were cleared up in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1991 and *(c)* July 1991 to June 1992, in each offence category and for each police force region.

Mr. Jack: The requested information for 1990 is published in table 2.22 of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales 1990," a copy of which is available in the Library. Information for 1991 is published in the table. Information for the 12 months to June 1992 is not available.

Notifiable offences recorded by the police: clear-up rate by offence group and police force area
England and Wales 1991

Percentages

Police force area	*Total*[1]	*Violence against the person*	*Sexual offences*	*Robbery*	*Burglary*	*Theft and handling goods*	*Fraud and forgery*	*Criminal damage*[1]	*Other*
Avon and Somerset	24	78	78	27	15	20	61	19	95
Bedfordshire	19	78	60	18	12	18	42	13	96
Cambridgeshire	36	85	75	40	29	35	59	23	97
Cheshire	41	91	96	52	29	37	87	41	100
Cleveland	33	75	82	42	37	31	47	19	[2]110
Cumbria	40	87	87	68	32	40	70	31	97
Derbyshire	28	85	89	33	22	25	53	19	95
Devon and Cornwall	29	84	83	40	20	27	70	21	99
Dorset	41	85	90	45	33	36	88	28	97
Durham	30	84	92	47	25	26	76	22	99
Essex	32	79	79	32	26	33	45	16	94
Gloucestershire	35	87	88	46	21	37	57	24	92
Greater Manchester	36	76	76	29	33	35	72	21	99
Hampshire	28	81	81	39	20	26	68	22	97
Hertfordshire	33	92	93	37	24	33	63	22	100
Humberside	32	78	66	41	26	31	54	20	94
Kent	23	75	85	42	16	21	42	17	98
Lancashire	40	81	89	55	39	36	79	37	99
Leicestershire	29	81	84	34	25	26	58	19	100
Lincolnshire	46	92	[2]101	53	35	48	71	25	[2]103
London, City of	20	80	85	28	19	15	40	28	90
Merseyside	45	67	75	21	41	47	71	21	96
Metropolitan Police District	17	63	54	12	11	13	44	10	92
Norfolk	37	85	91	47	29	38	60	20	99
Northamptonshire	31	81	81	28	28	32	47	16	92
Northumbria	35	76	78	27	29	37	44	33	100
North Yorkshire	36	90	90	50	20	37	68	34	[2]107
Nottinghamshire	27	76	71	33	22	24	42	18	98
South Yorkshire	36	84	81	36	27	37	67	26	97
Staffordshire	37	86	74	46	33	35	50	26	94
Suffolk	37	85	85	50	20	37	64	27	91
Surrey	23	82	75	33	15	20	49	19	97
Sussex	23	71	62	28	12	22	47	18	89
Thames Valley	22	75	73	29	14	21	49	13	94
Warwickshire	24	81	87	35	22	21	52	16	100
West Mercia	35	89	89	53	33	32	59	26	96
West Midlands	31	76	73	31	28	30	42	18	97
West Yorkshire	28	82	81	31	22	27	56	17	92
Wiltshire	40	[2]106	[2]114	40	25	35	75	34	[2]115
ENGLAND	29	77	75	23	23	27	55	19	96
Dyfed-Powys	50	92	92	50	42	46	70	39	95
Gwent	47	92	95	58	40	44	78	37	100
North Wales	36	91	93	54	27	32	77	27	100
South Wales	29	84	93	43	21	30	48	19	99
WALES	35	88	93	48	26	34	62	24	99
ENGLAND AND WALES	29	77	76	23	23	28	55	19	96

[1] Excluding offences of "other criminal damage" of value £20 and under.

[2] Offences cleared up in current year may have been initially recorded in an earlier year.

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has as to the police manpower levels, crime statistics and clear-up rates of police forces in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* other EC countries.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The police forces of England and Wales provide monthly statistical returns of strength for police officers and civilian support staff. Information on notifiable offences recorded by the police and clear-up rates is collected on a regular basis and the statistics are published half-yearly in a Home Office statistical bulletin and annually in the Command Paper "Criminal Statistics: England and Wales".

Comparable statistical data on police service complementing or crime rates for member states of the EC are not available.

Obscenity

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 5 February to the hon. Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) *Official Report*, column *350*, if he will indicate the precise terms in which he is currently consulting about the subject of obscenity; if he will make it his policy to include an invitation to comment on the provisions of the Obscene Publications Act 1959 as distinct from the means of its enforcement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: I have asked my officials to consider, in consultation with other parties, whether improvements might be made in the enforcement of the Obscene Publications Acts 1959 and 1964, and other legislation relating to obscenity. I have not asked them to invite wider comment on the provisions of the Obscene Publications Act 1959, although as I indicated in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point, I am receiving representations relating to the Act, which I keep under review.

Ecstasy

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have died from the use of the drug Ecstasy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: This information is not collected centrally.

Ram Raiding

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures are being taken to alert businesses to the threat of ram raiding.

Mr. Jack: In areas where ram raiding is a problem, the local police are able to alert businesses to the risks and, drawing on their own experience and the expertise of the Home Office crime prevention centre at Stafford, they are always ready to give specialist advice on what measures the owners can take to protect their premises against this type of offence.

Bosnian Refugees

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many refugees from Bosnia have arrived in each EC country; and how many are expected in the next six months.

Mr. Charles Wardle: In the period January 1992 to January 1993 inclusive around 5,900 nationals of the former Yugoslavia, excluding dependants, have applied for asylum in the United Kingdom. The large majority of these applications are still under consideration and the applicants are being allowed to stay in the meantime. More detailed data on the origin of the applicants are not available.

In addition, as I announced to the House on 30 November 1992, we are willing to accept 1,000 ex-detainees from Bosnia and other parts of the former Yugoslavia, together with their dependants, totalling perhaps 4,000 in all. The first two groups have already arrived.

The available information on applicants to other EC member states is given in the table.

It is not feasible to make a forecast of future applications, in view of the uncertainties.

Asylum applications[1] [2] by nationals of the former Yugoslavia to certain other EC member states from around mid 1991 to the latter part of 1992

	Applications
Belgium	2,000
Denmark	6,400
France	2,400
Germany	171,000
Greece	10
Irish Republic	—
Italy	100
Luxembourg	—
Netherlands	6,900
Spain	120

[1] Including dependants.

[2] *Source:* Inter-Governmental Consultations Group on Asylum, Refugee and Migration Policies in Europe, North America and Australia.

Deaths in Custody

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he intends to take on the suggestion in the report of the Ashworth special hospital inquiry 1992, chaired by Sir Louis Blom Cooper, that the Government should make a modest contribution annually to the organisation Inquest to allow it to represent those who die in legal custody.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 15 February 1993]:* The Government have no plans to contribute to the funding of the organisation Inquest.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Research and Development

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the expenditure on *(a)* the second framework research and development programme 1987 to 1991 and *(b)* the third framework research and development programme from 1990 to1994 in total and broken down by programme area; what is the share of spend in each programme by the United Kingdom and Germany in total and for each programme area; and if he will express the figures in pound sterling and in ecus.

Mr. Waldegrave: The second EC framework programme, adopted on 28 September 1987, amounted to 5.396 billion ecu—£4.088 billion at current exchange rates—and was distributed between the main programme areas as set out in table A.

The third EC framework programme, adopted on 23 April 1990, amounted to 5.7 billion ecu—£4.318 billion—and the Council reached a common orientation for a supplement of 900 million ecu—£682 million—on 31 December 1992. The funds will be allocated between the main areas of research as set out in table B.

EC research programmes under the overlapping frameworks are managed mainly by directorates general XII and XIII of the European Commission. Information on the share of funds awarded to research organisations in member states, in the form of shared cost contracts, has been derived from Commission statistics for the period 1987-1991. For this purpose the Commission has grouped the specific research programmes of the second framework programme in the same format as the third framework programme, and its analysis includes all contracts awarded after 1986, including some made under the first framework programme of 1984-87.

The difference between total contract expenditure of 3,038·78 million ecu in table C and the overall amount agreed for the second framework programme of 5,396 million ecu in table A includes expenditure on other mechanisms for developing Community research, such as concerted actions, conferences, workshops, publications, direct research activities at the joint research centre, fusion research, and sums yet to be committed.

The funds under the first and second framework programmes awarded to United Kingdom and German research organisations between 1987-1991 are summarised by programme, according to Commission statistics, in table C. A full statistical table showing funds awarded to all member states will be placed in the Library.

Because of delays in implementation, only preliminary statistics are available for the third framework programme. These are set out in table D.

Table A

Second framework programme of community activities on research and development (1987-1991)

Breakdown of the amount deemed necessary between the various activities

	(million ecu)	*(£ million)*
Health	80	61
Radiation protection	34	26
Environment	261	198
Information technologies	1,600	1,212
Telecommunications	550	416
New services of common interest (including transport)	125	95
Manufacturing industry	400	303
Advanced materials	220	167
Raw materials and recycling	45	34
Technical standards, measurement, and ref. materials	180	136
Biotechnology	120	91
Agro-industrial research	105	79
Competitiveness of agriculture and management of resources	55	42
Nuclear fission safety	440	333
Controlled nuclear fusion	611	463
Non-nuclear energies and rational use of energies	122	92
Science and technology for development	80	61
Marine sciences and technology	50	38
Fisheries	30	23
Stimulation, enhancement and use of human resources	180	136
Use of major installation	30	23
Forecasting and assessment and statistics	23	17
Dissemination and utilisation of S&T research results	55	42
Total	5,396	4,088

Table B

Third framework programme of community activities on research and development 1990-94

Breakdown of the amount deemed necessary between the various activities

	Previous breakdown of FP3		*Breakdown of supplement*		*Revised sums*	
	Million ecu	*£ million*	*Million ecu*	*£ million*	*Million mecu*	*£ million*
Information technology	1,352	1,024	180	136	1,532	1,161
Communication technology	489	370	65	49	554	420
Telematics	380	288	50	39	430	326
Industrial and materials	748	567	100	76	848	642
Measurement and testing	140	106	19	14	159	120
Environment	414	314	55	42	469	355
Marine sciences and technology	104	79	14	11	118	89
Biotechnology	164	124	22	17	186	141
Agri and agro-industrial	333	252	44	33	377	286
Biomedicine and health	133	101	18	14	151	114
Life sciences for development	111	84	15	11	126	95
Non-nuclear energies	157	119	60	45	217	164
Nuclear fission	199	151	29	22	228	173
Fusion	458	347	110	83	568	430
Human capital and mobility	518	392	69	52	587	445
TOTAL	5,700	4,318	[1]900	[1]682	[1]6,600	[1]5,000

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[1] 50 mecu in reserve with priority for non-nuclear energy; conversion from ecu to £ sterling = 1.32:1 (sterling figures rounded to nearest £ million).

Table C

The Second Framework Programme for European Community Research and Development (1987-91)

Programme	*Germany* *mecu*	*Germany* *£ million*	*UK* *mecu*	*UK* *£ million*	*Total EC funding mecu*	*Total EC funding £ million*
Information technologies	316·047	239·429	252·728	191·461	1,408·662	1,067·168
Communication technologies	88·975	67·405	69·098	52·347	346·673	262·631
Telematics	15·691	11·887	17·440	13·212	83·520	63·273
Industrial materials technologies	75·499	57·196	73·788	55·900	380·786	288·474
Measurement and testing	10·196	7·724	9·835	7·451	44·088	33·400
Environment	16·068	12·173	18·535	14·042	87·990	66·659
Marine sciences and technology	3,·308	2·506	4·916	3·724	22·558	17·089
Biotechnology	12·001	9·092	11·875	8·996	68·427	51·839
Agro-industrial technology	1·273	·964	5·749	4·355	29·239	22·151
Biomedicine and health	4·760	3·606	10·899	8·257	45·636	34·573
Life sciences for development	5·497	4·164	9·644	7·306	53·939	40·863
Non-nuclear energies	37·549	28·446	26·888	20·370	192·895	146·133
Controlled nuclear fission	33·289	25·219	27·042	20·486	131·411	99·554
Human capital and mobility	18·398	13·938	30·492	23·100	122·090	92·492
Central dissemination of results	·738	·559	4·587	3·475	15·413	11·677
Monitor	·937	·710	1·085	·822	5·454	4·132
Total (nearest 50,000)	640·23	485·02	574·60	435·30	3,038·78	2,302·11

Source: Commission of the European Communities. (note: figures also include contracts awarded since 1986 under the first Framework Programme; excludes fusion and JRC statistics).

Table D

The Third Framework Programme for European Community Research and Development (1990-94)

Programme	*Germany* *mecu*	*Germany* *£ million*	*UK* *mecu*	*UK* *£ million*	*Total EC funding mecu*	*Total EC funding £ million*
Communication technologies	8·283	6·275	7·356	5·573	42·847	32·460
Telematics	3·224	2·442	4·652	3·524	25·787	19·536
Environment	1·207	·914	·289	·219	2·048	1·552
Total (nearest 50,000)	12·71	9·63	12·30	9·32	70·68	53·55

Contracting Out

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will provide figures for the reduction in number of posts as a result of contracting out since 1979 in his Department and agencies for which he has responsibility.

Mr. Waldegrave: This information is not available except at disproportionate cost.

Public Record Office

Dr. Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has recently received about the release of specific retained documents by the Public Record Office; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert Jackson: In response to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy's invitation to historians in June 1992 to inform him of blocks of closed records that should now be considered for release, he has received more than 50 representations relating to the release of such records.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Apple Juice

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will name the brands of apple juice containing high levels of patulin which have been on sale in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Soames: It is not the Department's general policy to publish details of the brands of products examined in the course of food surveillance unless there is a particular need to do so. In this case I believe it would not be helpful to publish the brands involved. The evidence we have is that, as with any naturally occurring toxicant, there is likely to be a good deal of variation in contamination levels between batches of apple juice regardless of the producer. Furthermore, the manufacturers involved have now taken steps to avoid a recurrence of the problem.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the danger of *(a)* cancer and *(b)* birth defects resulting from consumption of apple juice containing high levels of patulin.

Mr. Soames: There is no evidence linking the consumption of apple juice containing patulin with any cases of cancer or birth defects. However, the Department of Health has advised me that patulin has been shown to be a mutagen in both in vitro and in vivo studies in animals and should be regarded as a potential carcinogen. The

Department's committee on toxicity has therefore advised that patulin levels in food should be reduced to the lowest level that is technologically achievable.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Authorities (Employees' Remuneration)

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will require each local authority to publish annually the level of salary and the total remuneration package, including pension arrangements, payable to the authority's chief executive and directors.

Mr. Redwood: There is a strong case for local authorities to publish details of the pay of their senior staff in broadly the same way as companies are required to publish details of the pay of their senior employees. However, I am also keen to keep new obligations on local authorities under control.

My Department will consider what information it would be appropriate for local authorities to publish and the best way for the local authorities to be encouraged to make that information public. Of course, no new stipulations would be introduced without consultation with the local authority associations.

Environmental Technology Innovation Scheme

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the initial three-year budget of his Department's environmental technology innovation scheme launched in October 1990; and how much has been spent to date.

Mr. Maclean: The initial budget for the environmental technology innovation scheme—ETIS—was £12 million divided equally between my Department and the Department of Trade and Industry. Of the £4·6 million so far committed by the DOE on approved projects, £1·25 million has been spent to date. These two figures include grants to projects initially submitted under DOE's predecessor scheme which was subsumed into ETIS in October 1990.

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to finalise the environmental technology innovation scheme budget for the next financial year.

Mr. Maclean: Provision for my Department's expenditure on grants under the scheme will be included in the main supply estimates which will be published next month.

Noise Pollution

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimates his Department has made of the level of noise pollution generated by seismic survey activity; and what studies his Department has made of the effect of noise pollution on marine life in United Kingdom coastal water.

Mr. Maclean: Seismic survey activity is usually undertaken to support oil and gas exploration and is therefore a matter for my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade. My Department has recently established a working group on acoustic disturbance to small cetaceans, under the chairmanship of the Natural Environment Research Council's sea mammals research unit.

Waste Shipments

Mr. Carttiss: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress was made during the United Kingdom presidency of the EC in regulating transfrontier shipments of waste.

Mr. Maclean: The Environment Council reached agreement on the waste shipments regulation and on a decision on the conclusion, by the Community and its member states, of the United Nations Environment Programme's Basel convention on the control of transboundary movements of hazardous wastes and their disposal.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms. Walley) on 27 October 1992, *Official Report*, column *534* and the answer my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment gave my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason) on 17 December, *Official Report*, column *506*.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a detailed breakdown of the increase from 1991-92 to 1992-93 for the energy efficiency office as listed at figures 8 and 20 of his Department's annual report 1993, Cm. 2207; and if he will make a statement on the effects upon the office of transfer to his Department.

Mr. Maclean: A breakdown of expenditure by the Energy Efficiency Office by programme area is given in figure 20 of the Department's annual report. This lists annual expenditure and future plans for the period 1987-88 to 1995-96.

The Government remain fully committed to the work of the EEO, which was transferred to the Department of the Environment in view of the environmental importance of energy efficiency. The EEO continues to offer and develop a wide range of programmes designed to encourage cost-effective improvements in energy efficiency in industry, commerce and the public sector and in the home.

Planning, South-East

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the draft regional planning guidance for the south-east will be published.

Mr. Baldry: My Department expects to publish new draft regional planning guidance for the south-east shortly.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans his Department has to publish draft planning guidance for regions of the United Kingdom other than the south-east; and what account these will take of the plans for the south-east.

Mr. Baldry: Regional planning guidance was published for East Anglia in July 1991. Draft regional planning guidance for the northern region was issued for consultation on 10 February 1993. Regional planning guidance will be issued for all other English regions by the end of 1993 or as early as possible thereafter. All regional planning guidance will take account of planning policies in other regions. Planning policies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are the responsibility of the respective Secretaries of State.

Business Rate

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his Department's estimate of the extent of the practice whereby buildings and property are stripped to avoid liability under the uniform business rate.

Mr. Robin Squire: We know of some cases where preliminary refurbishment or redevelopment work may have been brought forward to avoid rates. However, we are not aware of any empty properties that have been made unusable simply in order to avoid them.

West End Scheme, Bradford

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the current position regarding the application by 3Ds Ltd. for city grant for the west end scheme in Bradford.

Mr. Robin Squire: An application has been made in respect of a first phase of the project. The appraisal was completed in November, but no decision has been taken because the applicants have yet to confirm whether they wish to proceed with the project.

Home Improvement Agencies

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the total allocation, for each region, to home improvement agencies in England in 1991-92 and 1992-93.

Sir George Young: The total regional allocations in respect of home improvement agencies—HIAs—in 1991-92 and 1992-93 are set out in the table. In addition, we have allocated £290,000 in 1991-92 and £361,995 in 1992-93 to Care and Repair Ltd. as the national co-ordinating body for HIAs with responsibility for monitoring performance, providing training and specialist advice to agencies and undertaking scheme development.

Region	*1991-92* £	*1992-93* £
North	131,853	182,233
North West	459,279	539,342
Yorks/Humberside	206,562	275,947
East Midlands	309,514	372,827
West Midlands	330,995	327,271
East Anglia	242,017	378,497
South East	531,241	635,328
South West	138,347	204,876
Greater London	374,943	542,805
England	2,724,751	3,459,126

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total value of the bids for funding of home improvement agencies in England, in each region, in 1991-92, 1992-93 and 1993-94.

Sir George Young: The total values of the bids for funding of home improvement agencies in England, by region in 1991-92, 1992-93 and 1993-94 are as follows:

Region	*1991-92* £	*1992-93* £	*1993-94* £
North	405,933	205,439	188,974
North West	952,973	712,820	735,614
Yorkshire/ Humberside	409,690	335,608	279,522
East Midlands	428,982	414,346	401,357
West Midlands	650,537	419,330	395,874
East Anglia	585,868	445,742	472,815
South East	764,895	635,328	654,094
South West	311,461	257,037	299,277
Greater London	1,016,326	646,001	673,142
England	5,526,665	4,071,651	4,100,669

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total number of applications from local authorities in respect of home improvements agencies in each region for the years 1991-92, 1992-93 and 1993-94.

Sir George Young: The total numbers of applications from local authorities in respect of home improvement agencies by region in 1991-92, 1992-93 and 1993-94 are as follows:

Region	*1991-92*	*1992-93*	*1993-94*
North	9	9	8
North West	31	26	28
Yorks/Humberside	15	10	9
East Midlands	14	14	13
West Midlands	23	17	16
East Anglia	20	16	16
South East	26	22	23
South West	10	9	10
Greater London	23	18	18
England	171	141	141

Urban Partnership Fund

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which local authorities will receive assistance from the urban partnership fund; and if he will make a statement on the progress of the capital partnership programme.

Mr. Robin Squire *[pursuant to the reply, 12 February 1993, c.834-35.]:* An amended list of proposed projects for which we have offered support from the urban partnership fund has been placed in the Library today.

Capital Receipts

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library on disk, and publish as soon as possible, a table showing for each local authority *(a)* its original estimate of capital receipts in 1992-93 and *(b)* its revised estimate capital receipts in 1992-93 recently supplied to his Department.

Mr. Howard: I have today placed in the Library a table showing the estimates of capital receipts in 1992-93 provided by each local authority on each of the three statistical returns received so far. All the estimates were made before the relaxation in the rules governing the use of capital receipts by local authorities which was announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his autumn statement.

Credit Liabilities

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library on disk, and publish as soon as it is available, a table showing for each local authority and for each region the amount set aside by local authorities as provision for credit liabilities at 31 March 1992.

Mr. Howard: Yes, when the full set of data from authorities is available. In previous years this has been about 15 months after the date to which the information relates.

Police Areas (Populations)

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the resident population of each police force area in England in 1981 and 1991; and what was the day-time working population for the City of London police force area in 1981 and 1991.

Mr. Sackville: I have been asked to reply.

Estimated resident populations of the police force areas in England in 1981 and 1991 are shown in the table. The day-time working population of the City of London was about 300,000 in 1981. The results from the 1991 census of population, which are required to provide a corresponding figure for that year, are expected later this year.

Police force area population estimates mid 1981 and mid 1991

Thousands

Police force area	*Persons all ages*	
	1981	*1991*
Avon and Somerset	1,359·9	1,431·4
Bedfordshire	510·3	534·3
Cambridgeshire	591·3	669·9
Cheshire	932·4	966·5
Cleveland	570·3	557·5
Cumbria	481·2	489·7
Derbyshire	914·3	939·8
Devon and Cornwall	1,392·1	1,515·2
Dorset	598·6	662·9
Durham	611·4	604·3
Essex[1]	1,411·8	1,477·4
Gloucestershire	505·7	538·8
Greater Manchester	2,619·1	2,561·6
Hampshire and Isle of Wight	1,606·5	1,705·3
Hertfordshire[1]	819·7	842·5
Humberside	857·7	874·4
Kent	1,484·4	1,538·8
Lancashire	1,385·5	1,408·3
Leicestershire	858·8	890·8
Lincolnshire	552·7	592·6
Merseyside	1,522·2	1,441·1
Norfolk	701·7	759·4
North Yorkshire	676·7	720·9
Northamptonshire	532·5	587·1
Northumbria	1,454·5	1,432·7
Nottinghamshire	994·4	1,015·5
South Yorkshire	1,317·1	1,292·7
Staffordshire	1,019·1	1,047·4
Suffolk	601·6	661·9
Surrey[1]	748·8	768·2
Sussex	1,331·6	1,430·1
Thames Valley	1,807·4	1,972·3
Warwickshire	477·2	489·9
West Mercia	1,017·1	1,098·6
West Midlands	2,673·1	2,619·0
West Yorkshire	2,066·9	2,066·2
Wiltshire	525·1	575·1
Metropolitan Police District	7,284·7	7,284·6
City of London	5·4	4·1

[1] Does not coincide exactly with the geographical county as part of the county is included in the Metropolitan police district.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Security Service

Mr. Winnick: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, what inquiries are made from the security services before appointments are made at Officer level in the House.

Mr. Beith: The security clearance procedures which apply to all staff of the House of Commons, whether Officers of the House or not, are directly analogous to those which apply to public servants. These were described in detail by the then Prime Minister on 24 July 1990 at columns *159-61*.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many Adjournment debates on aspects of the security service took place in the Parliaments beginning in 1983 and 1987.

Mr. Newton: Three: on 4 April 1985, 3 December 1986 and 23 November 1988.

EDUCATION

School Meals (Newcastle)

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list for each school in the city of Newcastle education authority area the percentage of children receiving free school meals.

Mr. Forth: The percentages of day pupils taking a free school meal in each maintained school in Newcastle local education authority on 16 January 1992 are shown in the table.

Percentages of day pupils taking a free school meal in maintained schools in Newcastle LEA on 16 January 1992

School	*Percentage of day-pupils taking a free school meal*
Archbishop Runcie C of E First School	2·0
Archibald First School	4·2
Ashfield Nursery School	48·5
Atkinson Road Primary School	49·6
Atkinson Road Nursery School	60·0
Benfield School	20·2
Benton Park Primary School	11·4
Blakelaw School	30·4
Bolam Street Primary School	45·3
Broadway East First School	3·9
Broadwood Infant School	34·7
Broadwood Junior School	33·2
Brunswick Beech School	53·7
Canning Street Primary School	37·6
Castle Dene School	47·4

School	*Percentage of day-pupils taking a free school meal*
Chapel House Middle School	8·0
Chapel Park Middle School	13·4
Cheviot First School	48·1
Chevyside Middle School	45·2
Chillingham Road Primary School	27·7
Christ Church Primary School	44·7
Cowgate Primary School	53·3
Cragside Primary School	11·8
Cruddas Park Nursery School	55·1
Delaval Primary School	87·9
Denton Road Infant School	72·1
Denton Road Junior School	68·4
Denton Park Middle School	33·1
Dinnington Village First School	9·4
English Martyrs' R C Primary School	21·4
Farne First School	36·4
Gosforth East Middle School	4·9
Gosforth Central Middle School	7·6
Gosforth High School	3·8
Gosforth Park First School	5·1
Gosforth West Middle School	19·7
Grange First School	17·2
Hawthorn Primary School	65·4
Heaton Manor Comprehensive School	10·5
Hillsview Primary School	41·8
Hilton Primary School	43·6
Hotspur Primary School	26·8
Jesmond Dene House School	0·0
Kenton Bar Primary School	39·9
Kenton Lodge Residential Middle School	0·0
Kenton School	14·0
Kingston Park Primary School	7·0
Knoplaw First School	5·0
Lemington First School	40·1
Lemington Middle School	22·6
Linhope First School	47·3
Mary Trevelyan Primary School	69·7
Milecastle First School	10·5
Monkchester Road Nursery School	43·1
Montagu Primary School	68·8
Moorside Community Primary School	40·9
Mountfield Infant School	41·1
Mountfield Junior School	39·5
Newburn Manor First School	40·6
Newburn Manor Nursery School	33·3
North Fawdon Primary School	35·5
Oakfield College	35·0
Our Lady and St. Anne's Primary School	44·4
Parkway School	43·3
Pendower Hall School	47·4
Pendower Primary School	50·8
Raby Street Primary School	55·8
Ravenswood Primary School	12·6
Redewood School	37·0
Regent Farm First School	17·3
Rutherford School	23·6
Sacred Heart Comprehensive	14·0
Sacred Heart Primary School	6·1
St. Alban's Roman Catholic Primary School	20·0
St. Anthony's Church of England School	56·3
St. Bede's Roman Catholic Primary School	22·6
St. Catherine's Roman Catholic Primary School	9·9
St. Charles' Roman Catholic Primary School	5·9
St. Cuthbert's Roman Catholic Primary School, Drayton Road	26·9
St. Cuthbert's High School	10·7
St. Cuthbert's Roman Catholic School, Walbottle Village	15·8
St. George's R C Primary School	20·6
St. John Vianney R C Primary School	8·9
St. Joseph's R C Primary School	51·0
St. Lawrence's R C Primary School	34·2
St. Mark's R C Primary School	43·6
St. Mary's R C Comprehensive School	14·1
St. Michael's Infant School	60·7
St. Michael's R C Junior School	52·4
St. Oswald's R C Primary School	5·0
St. Paul's C of E Primary School	63·5
St. Peter's School	52·2
St. Teresa's R C Primary School	13·4
St. Vincent's R C Primary School	42·4
Simonside First School	43·0
South Benwell Primary School	61·9
South Gosforth First School	5·7
Stocksfield Avenue Primary School	16·5
Thomas Walling Primary School	38·2
Throckley First School	32·6
Throckley Middle School	24·9
Tyneview Primary School	33·3
Valley View Nursery School	78·8
Walbottle High School	9·7
Walbottle Village First School	14·8
Walker School	24·3
Walkerdene School	3·9
Walkergate Infant School	24·8
Walkergate Junior School	30·9
Walkergate Nursery School	25·8
Waverley First School	15·1
Welbeck Primary School	49·6
West Denton High School	12·9
West Denton First School	25·6
West Jesmond Infant School	2·2
West Jesmond Junior School	2·4
West Walker Primary School	56·4
Westerhope First School	10·0
Westgate Hill Primary School	41·6
Westlands School	58·6
Wharrier Street Primary School	59·3
Wingrove Infant School	18·9
Wingrove Junior School	22·6
Wyndham Primary School	22·3

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proposals he has to permit an existing independent school to seek grant-maintained status.

Mr. Forth: It is the Government's intention to enable an existing independent school to propose that it be established as a new grant-maintained school, once the funding authority has a parallel responsibility for the provision of school places in the relevant area.

NATIONAL FINANCE

World Summit for Children

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what effect the goals agreed at the world summit for children have had on public expenditure for 1993-94.

Mr. Portillo: The outcome of the world summit for children was one of many factors taken into account in setting the public expenditure plans for 1993-94.

Bus Fares (VAT)

190. **Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has had about the impact of VAT on bus fares; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Cope: I have received a number of such representations in recent weeks, all of which are considered carefully.

Rugby Union Players

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his reply of 15 February, *Official Report*, column *23*, what steps the Inland Revenue takes to ascertain the taxable income or benefits received by rugby union players as a result of their sporting activities.

Mr. Dorrell: The Inland Revenue ascertains the taxable income or benefits received by rugby union players in the same way as for sums received by other sportsmen or women. Amounts shown on a player's tax return are taken into account in calculating any tax due. As with any other taxpayer, if there is any information, either in the tax return or received from other sources, which suggests that income may have been omitted, the Inland Revenue makes appropriate inquiries.

Parliamentary Questions (Cost)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to raise the advisory cost limit of £400 for answering parliamentary questions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The advisory cost limit was last increased in 1992—*Official Report*, 14 January 1992, column *546* —and is to be further increased to £450 from today. This increase has been rounded up to the nearest £50 for convenience of application.

The average cost of preparing answers to a parliamentary question—PQ—was last published in 1991 following a survey conducted by Treasury in that year—*Official Report*, 10 December 1991, column *369*. These costs have been updated and are now assessed as £94 for a written PQ and £218 for an oral PQ. The 1991 comparative figures were £87 and £202 respectively.

The purpose and application of the advisory cost limit remain unchanged from 1992. It is intended to act as a threshold for disproportionate cost PQs. Any written PQ where the marginal cost of preparing the answer is considered likely to exceed the threshold may be referred to the appropriate Minister and an answer may be refused in whole or in part on the ground of disproportionate cost. Alternatively the Minister may decide that the PQ is to be answered irrespective of cost. There is no advisory limit for oral PQs.

The advisory limit continues to be around eight times the average marginal cost for written PQs, which is now £55.

Opencast Mining

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the practice of the Valuation Office in the valuation of land where planning permission for the use of land for opencast extraction has been applied for but not been granted; and if he will make a statement on how those principles have been applied to Pwll Du.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 15 February 1993]:* The ownership of coal passed to the National Coal Board in 1946, and although the British Coal Corporation-Opencast may make a compulsory rights order it is the corporation's policy to purchase land by agreement whenever possible.

The Valuation Office agency provides valuable advice to the corporation on many matters, including the purchase and management of land for opencast extraction.

Because the coal is already owned by the corporation, the granting of a planning permission for opencast extraction does not materially increase the value of the surface owner's interest, but he will normally be aware of the commercial realities of the situation and this may be reflected in the agreement between the parties.

The value of the vendor's interest is assessed by the local district valuer, and he will have full regard to the circumstances of the purchase, to any conditions to be imposed, to the planning position, and to the relative bargaining strengths of the parties concerned.

Manufacturing Output

Mr. Burden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the latest quarterly figures for manufacturing output.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 17 February 1993]:* The index of manufacturing output at 1985 prices, seasonally adjusted, for the fourth quarter of 1992 was 111·2. It was 0·2 per cent. lower than in the previous quarter, but 0·4 per cent. higher than in the fourth quarter of 1991.

Unified Budget

Mr. Watts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he proposes to introduce the first unified Budget; and what statutory changes he proposes to make as a consequence of the move to the new timetable.

Mr. Lamont: The White Paper on budgetary reform published in March 1992—Cm 1867—suggested that the unified Budget should be introduced in early December 1993. In order to allow more time for departments, local authorities and other bodies to translate the programme totals into management budgets the Government are planning on the basis that the Budget will be no later than the last week of November. The precise date will be announced nearer the time. Following the introduction of the new public expenditure procedures, the Government now believe that the annual local authority grant settlement proposals should be announced as soon as possible after the Budget. Discussions on this will take place with the local authority associations shortly. The Government will bring forward in the forthcoming Finance Bill two legislative changes needed as a consequence of the move to a unified Budget. Firstly, there is at present statutory provision for income tax personal allowances, the lower rate limit, the basic rate limit, the capital gains tax exempt amount, the inheritance tax threshold and the earnings cap for pensions to be raised in line with the retail prices index increase in the 12 months to December, unless Parliament decides otherwise. But the December RPI is not published until mid-January, so legislation is necessary to specify an indexation date which is known before the Budget. The Government propose to use the September RPI, published in mid-October, as the base month for statutory indexation from the 1994-95 tax year. The September RPI, is already used for uprating social security benefits. As now, Parliament will be able to override the statutory indexation provisions in the Finance Bill if it wishes. Secondly, the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act currently sets 5 August as the deadline for Royal Assent to the Finance Bill. As the Budget is moving forward by somewhat more than three months, the Government propose to amend this Act to move the deadline for Royal Assent forward by three months as well, to 5 May.

Economic and Finance Council

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the outcome of the latest meeting of the European Community's Economic and Finance Council.

Sir John Cope: The Economic and Finance Council of the European Community met in Brussels on 15 February. I represented the United Kingdom.

Following the conclusions of the Edinburgh European Council that openness in the Community should be increased, ECOFIN held its first open session, which was televised. Discussion focused on the need to promote economic recovery which included taking forward the package of measures to promote growth which had been agreed at the Edinburgh European Council. This initiative followed the announcement of measures to promote recovery in the Chancellor's autumn statement.

The Council later held a short discussion of measures taken by member states to promote recovery and concluded that these should be discussed more thoroughly at the next meeting on 15 March after further examination by the Monetary Commission.

Meanwhile consideration should be given to extending all convergence programmes to cover the period to 1996. (The Maastricht treaty provides for a Council assessment of convergence to take place no later than 31 December 1996.)

ECOFIN also considered two aspects of the future financing review: a progress report from the Danish presidency on negotiations with the European Parliament on a new inter-institutional agreement; and a presentation by the Commission of its legislative proposals to implement the Edinburgh future financing agreement.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

"Dispatches"

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Attorney-General, pursuant to his answer of 1 February, *Official Report*, column 32, what proceedings have now been initiated following the Channel 4 "Dispatches" programme entitled "The Committee."

The Attorney-General: No criminal proceedings have been initiated in Northern Ireland by the Royal Ulster Constabulary. The Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary is preparing a police investigation file for submission to the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland.

During the course of investigation into the matters raised in the programme an order was obtained by the Metropolitan police under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 requiring Channel 4 Television Limited and Box Productions Limited to produce certain documents. The companies declined and the Director of Public Prosecutions for England and Wales brought proceedings for contempt of court before the Divisional Court. Both companies were found to be in contempt and a fine of £75,000 was imposed. The Metropolitan police subsequently carried out a further investigation into the veracity of statements made in an affidavit by Ben Hamilton and filed in the contempt proceedings. Ben Hamilton was charged with perjury on 29 September 1992. Those proceedings were discontinued by the Crown prosecution service on 23 November 1992.

Contracting Out

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Attorney-General if he will provide figures for the reduction in numbers of posts as a result of contracting out since 1979 in his Department and agencies for which he has responsibility.

The Attorney-General: There has been a reduction of six posts in the Departments for which I am responsible as a result of contracting out.

Pride of the Road

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Attorney-General when he expects the Crown prosecution service to be able to announce whether it will take action as a result of the information provided to it by South Yorkshire police in relation to the Pride of the Road bus company.

The Attorney-General: The file submitted by the South Yorkshire police is being considered by the Crown prosecution service in consultation with counsel. It is expected that a decision whether to institute criminal proceedings will be made shortly.

HEALTH

Cardiac Operations

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of cardiac operations performed at hospitals within the Greater London area during the year 1992; and if he will list the hospitals performing this operation.

Mr. Sackville: Reliable estimates are not available for individual procedures at district health authority level, but data from the hospital episodes system suggest that about 28,500 heart operations were performed in Greater London in 1989-90. More recent information is not yet available.

Mental Health

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many people have been received into guardianship under section 7 of the Mental Health Act 1983;

(2) in how many cases patients have failed to comply with the conditions of the guardianship under section 7 of the Mental Health Act 1983.

Mr. Yeo: The table shows the number of cases in which patients were received into guardianship in England under section 7 of the Mental Health Act 1983 in each year from 1984-85. Information on the number of patients failing to comply with the conditions of guardianship is not collected centrally.

Table. Patients received into guardianship under Section 7 of the Mental Health Act 1983.

Year ending 31 March	*Number of cases*
1985	89
1986	88
1987	114
1988	102
1989	130
1990	164
1991	180
[1]1992	223

[1] provisional.

Contraception Pill

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will estimate the number of women taking the oral contraception pill.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not collected centrally. However, the general household survey, conducted by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, indicates that in 1991, the most recent year for which figures are available, an estimated 23 per cent. of women aged 16 to 49 in Great Britain were taking an oral contraceptive pill.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 5 February, *Official Report*, columns *376-77*, to the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo), if she will list the over the counter price for a month's supply of each brand of contraceptive pill; and if she will indicate the take-up of prescriptions for each convenient range of products according to hormone dosage.

Mr. Sackville: The contraceptive pill is not available over the counter. It is a prescription-only medicine. There are three main hormone dosage categories under which oral contraceptives are prescribed. The number of prescriptions issued for each of these categories in England in 1991 is given in the table.

Oral contraceptive precriptions by hormone dose England 1991

	Prescriptions (thousands)
Total for 50 micrograms of oestrogen	290·1
Total for under 50 micrograms of oestrogen	6,526·6
Total for progestrogen only	699·2

Psychiatric Patients

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average discharge rate from hospital for psychiatric patients.

Mr. Yeo: The table shows the estimated number of discharges of psychiatric patients by duration of stay from national health service hospitals in England from 1987-88 to 1989-90. The figures do not represent the number of patients as a person can be discharged more than once during a year.

Discharges by duration of stay 1987-88 to 1989-90—England

Duration of Stay	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*
Persons All durations	181,350	188,560	183,249
Under 1 month	117,960	121,550	118,155
1-3 months	45,250	46,700	45,347
3-12 months	14,250	15,140	15,049
1-2 years	1,590	1,830	1,628
2-3 years	550	550	580
3-5 years	400	540	591
5-10 years	430	670	525
10-15 years	180	320	287
15 years and over	750	1,240	1,086

Note:

The figures are estimates of finished district spells taken from the Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) System. A spell is a continuous stay of a patient in a hospital or hospitals in the district or special health authority. Each spell may be composed of one or more consultant episodes. Finished episodes are not identical to discharges since the latter includes transfers from one hospital to another.

Figures do not sum to the total due to rounding.

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provision is made for emergency care in the case of patients suffering from schizophrenia.

Mr. Yeo: Health authorities, working with local authorities and the independent sector, should provide a comprehensive range of local services including sufficient in-patient provision for those who require emergency admission to hospital.

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will consider the need for further measures to deal with mental illness within the community care programme, with particular reference to schizophrenia.

Mr. Yeo: We are considering whether new powers are needed to ensure that mentally ill people in the community, including those suffering from schizophrenia, receive the care they need, and whether the present powers are being used effectively.

The Department of Health and regional health authorities are monitoring implementation of the care programme approach for people with a severe mental illness which was introduced in April 1991.

Hospital Waste

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate she has made of the cost of updating all waste incinerators in trust hospitals that do not meet the current EC directives on waste incineration;

(2) how many trust hospitals have incinerators that do not meet the up-to-date standards of the EC directives on incineration;

(3) if she will hold talks with the trust authorities on their plans to bring hospital incinerators up to date with current EC directives on incineration; and what progress has been made thus far in that direction.

Mr. Sackville: Trusts and other health authorities are responsible for meeting relevant environmental legislation. The Department has issued strategic guidance alerting trusts to the legislation concerning the disposal of clinical waste and outlining the options for meeting it cost effectively.

All trusts and other health authorities have strategies for complying with current EC directives, implemented in the United Kingdom by the 1990 Environmental

Protection Act, and progress is being monitored. In 1989, at prevailing prices, the cost of achieving the standards which come into force in 1995 was estimated to be £50 million for the national health service as a whole.

Information on incinerators operated by trust hospitals is not available centrally. All trusts have however reported compliance with the interim standards and 26 trusts have reported compliance with the 1995 standards. Plans being developed involve options such as incineration at plants operated by local authorities or private contractors, including jointly financed schemes.

Community Care

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will include representatives of local authority associations in the community care support force.

Mr. Yeo: The community care support force will be finishing its work at the end of March. At this stage, it would not be appropriate to change its membership.

Toxic Substances

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of deaths in the last five years from sniffing toxic substances; and what was the age range of those who died.

Dr. Mawhinney: The most recent figures available for deaths from solvent and volatile substance abuse are those for 1990. Publication of figures for 1991 is expected in March this year. The information is as follows:

Age	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
9	0	0	1	0	0
10	1	0	0	1	0
11	1	0	0	1	0
12	1	0	2	0	4
13	8	6	6	2	4
14	6	15	14	12	16
15	19	11	21	14	21
16	11	21	26	14	28
17	9	12	17	18	26
18	16	9	3	8	12
19	4	6	9	4	7
20-24	13	18	20	21	25
25-34	4	9	10	11	2
35-44	2	3	4	4	2
45-54	1	0	1	0	2
55-64	1	3	1	1	0
65-74	0	1	0	2	0
Over 75	0	0	0	0	0
Total	97	114	135	113	149

Child Care, Lambeth

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether she is now satisfied with the management arrangements for child care cases in Lambeth following the social services inspectorate report of April 1992.

Mr. Yeo: No. Following the social services inspectorate report of April 1992, Lambeth was asked to provide a report in September 1992. Lambeth's report showed that whilst a service improvement plan, including reorganisation of the department, had been developed and some progress made in implementing it, the level of unallocated casework remains unacceptably high. Lambeth has been asked to send a further report by 1 March 1993.

Dental Charges

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans she has to introduce dental charges for pregnant women and nursing mothers who are currently exempt from making a contribution;

(2) what assessment she has made of the way in which pregnant women and nursing mothers benefit from receiving free dental health.

Mr. Sackville: The removal of the exemption from dental charges for pregnant women and nursing mothers was one option raised by Sir Kenneth Bloomfield in his fundamental review of dental remuneration.

The Government are undertaking wide consultation on the report and no decisions of any of the options have yet been made. At present pregnant women and nursing mothers benefit from not paying national health service dental charges, although some will be exempt on other grounds also.

"Making London Better"

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will set out her objectives in establishing the specialty reviews outlined in the document, "Making London Better"; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: The aim of the specialty reviews is to achieve a more sensible distribution of six specialist services, providing a stronger service for patients and an improved academic base whilst avoiding unwarranted duplication.

The reviews will be conducted separately, but in parallel, and are to be completed by the end of May 1993. They will make recommendations for the future organisation of the six specialty services in London. They will also indicate the likely financial impact of their proposals and present their supporting evidence, analyses and judgment. Their reports will then be subject to review by Ministers before formal consultation on any significant proposals and final decisions by the autumn.

The reviews will be co-ordinated by the London implementation group. Each is being led by a distinguished clinician and a senior national health service manager of a purchasing authority, as follows:

CANCER SERVICES

Dr. Christopher Paine – Consultant Radiotherapist, Churchill Hospital, Oxford and President, Royal College of Radiologists.

Mr. Michael Bellamy – Ealing Hammersmith and Hounslow Commissioning Agency

CARDIAC SERVICES

Prof. Geoffrey Smith – Department of Cardiothoracic Surgery, University of Sheffield

Mr. John James – Parkside Health Authority

NEUROSCIENCES

Mr. Thomas Hide – Consultant, South General Hospital, Glasgow

Ms. Victoria Hardman – Bloomsbury and Islington Health Authority

PLASTICS

Mr. Philip Sykes – Consultant, St. Lawrence Hospital, Chepstow

Ms. Mary Whitty – Brent and Harrow Health Authority

RENAL SERVICES

Prof. Netar Mallick – Department of Renal Medicine, Manchester Royal Infirmary

Mr. Peter Coe – Tower Hamlets Health Authority

SPECIALITY CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Prof. Sir David Hull – Department of Child Health, University of Nottingham and President of British Paediatric Association

Mr. Martin Roberts – Wandsworth Health Authority

Gene Therapy

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to be in position to respond to the report of the committee on the ethics of gene therapy.

Mr. Sackville: Following careful consideration of the responses to wide-ranging consultation on the report of the committee on the ethics of gene therapy, the Government accept, in principle, the committee's recommendation.

The committee recommended that gene therapy research directed to the alleviation of genetic disease in individual patients should continue. However, it considered that genetic modification of the germ line, which would affect future generations, should not yet be attempted. The Government accept these recommendations.

The committee also recommended that, initially, gene therapy should be regarded as research and governed by the same exacting requirements which already apply in the United Kingdom to research involving human subjects. We accept this recommendation. The Government also agree with the committee that proposals to conduct gene therapy should be subject to independent peer review and that, if approved, the use of gene therapy in human subjects should be carefully monitored. These are important safeguards for the patient.

We intend setting up a new body, the gene therapy advisory committee. This committee will consider proposals to apply gene therapy to patients. In considering applications, it will work closely with the Medicines Control Agency and the other bodies which already have statutory responsibilities in the field of genetic modification. The gene therapy advisory committee will give particular attention to the ethical issues surrounding this important subject. The committee on the ethics of gene therapy recommended that this new body be non-statutory. The Government believe that this is right, but will, however, keep the need for statutory controls under review. The terms of reference and membership of the gene therapy advisory committee will be announced later.

The chairman, Sir Cecil Clothier, and the members of the committee on the ethics of gene therapy are to be congratulated for the important work they have done in producing their report. The Government are particularly grateful to the committee for the role it is currently undertaking in which it has already considered and approved the first proposal in the United Kingdom to use gene therapy on a patient. The committee has agreed to continue in being until the gene therapy advisory committee is established.

Gina Ditchman

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what investigations were made into the death of Gina Ditchman at Horton hospital; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: Riverside health authority conducted an internal inquiry which was concluded in October 1990. I understand that certain aspects of the case have been raised with the Mental Health Act Commission which is currently considering them.

Female Circumcision

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action has been taken by the Government following the Prohibition of Female Circumcision Act 1985 as to *(a)* education, *(b)* prevention of female circumcision and *(c)* prosecution under the Act; and what level of funding has been allocated to the above since the Act came into force.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) on 14 January 1993 at column *807*.

We have provided funding to FORWARD—the Foundation for Women's Health Research and Development—for several years, and for 1992-93 we have provided grants totalling £30,000.

NHS Performance Indicators

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on her plans to introduce performance indicators for the national health service.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Department of Health publishes a wide range of comparative information about national health service performance and, over the past 10 years, a pack on health services indicators. Copies are available in the Library. The Department continues to develop and improve the ways in which it manages NHS performance.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what records her Department keeps of the value of land, buildings and other assets transferred to national health service trusts; and if she will make a statement;

(2) what arrangements she makes to apply uniform criteria to establish the value of land, buildings and other assets before they are transferred to a national health service trust; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The values of land, buildings and other assets transferred to a national health service trust are determined in order to form the originating capital debt of that trust. These values are audited and provided to the Department for use in the statutory instrument which is laid before the House for each wave of trusts. Thereafter the values are recorded in the annual accounts of the trusts.

Valuations of all property assets—land and buildings—being transferred to NHS trusts are prepared by the Valuation Office agency. This ensures a co-ordinated national approach to the valuation of these assets. The value of other assets transferred such as equipment is taken from the asset register maintained by health authorities in accordance with departmental guidelines.

Pathology Services

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to make pathology services subject to privatisation; and if she will list all instances of such services being privatised in the last two years.

Dr. Mawhinney: It is for the hospitals and other national health service users of pathology services to decide the best means of obtaining services which provide quality and value for money. Information is not held centrally about the arrangements for the provision of pathology services.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Offshore Oil and Gas

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what considerations underlay the decision to allow oil companies to nominate areas that they wished to see offered in the 14th round of offshore licensing.

Mr. Eggar: A major aim of the 14th round of licensing is to encourage activity in little explored areas of the United Kingdom continental shelf. Exploration in little understood areas is risky. It makes sense for those who take the risks to have a say in the choice of acreage to be offered.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what account his Department took of the United Kingdom's international commitments on oil pollution standards and marine conservation in the 14th round of offshore licensing.

Mr. Eggar: The United Kingdom is fully committed to its international obligations relating to oil pollution standards and marine conservation. Special conditions applied to licences reflect this commitment.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will provide publicly available the environmental statements provided by oil companies as part of their licence applications for the 14th round of offshore licensing.

Mr. Eggar: The environmental policy statements from individual companies form part of their licence applications and are commercially confidential.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to improve public scrutiny of the offshore licensing process.

Mr. Eggar: Each licensing round is considered separately. Extensive consultations take place before each offshore round. As onshore licensees are subject to the planning regime, prior consultation is not necessary.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how the changes in regulations on oil and gas field development and production, announced by the Minister for Energy on 22 October 1992, will apply to the environmental safeguards contained in the licensing application process; and whether those changes will apply to the monitoring of oil companies' compliance with the environmental safeguards in their licence conditions.

Mr. Eggar: None of the measures to be introduced to streamline my Department's procedures for regulating oil and gas development and production will involve any change to the arrangements currently applied for safeguarding the environment.

Environmental Technology

Mr. John Evans: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what was the initial three-year budget of his Department's environmental technology innovation scheme in October 1990; and how much has been spent to date;

(2) when he expects to finalise the environmental technology innovation scheme budget for the next financial year.

Mr. Eggar: The initial budget for the environmental technology innovation scheme—ETIS—was £12 million divided equally between my Department and the Department of the Environment. Of the £2·96 million my Department has committed on approved projects £570,935 has been spent to date.

With regard to the budget for the next financial year, allocations under the Department's innovation budget will be made in the light of the priorities for the Department's science and technology expenditure, and the public expenditure outturn figures for 1992-93. For these reasons, the exact timing for a decision on the ETIS budget for the next financial year is not settled at this stage.

Electricity Supply

Mr. McFall: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received from trade and industry expressing concern about the potential postponement of the present franchise to electricity users in the 1Mw to 100Kw bracket; and if he will seek consultation with the British Retail Consortium on this issue.

Mr. Eggar: I have received a number of representations on this issue. These are being considered as part of the coal review.

Oil Transhipment

Ms. Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what environmental impact assessment he has made of the transhipment of oil by BP by pipeline from the Seillean to oil tanks in waters off Scapa Flow; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The transhipment referred to relates to a ship-to-ship transfer of oil within the sheltered waters of Scapa Flow. This was authorised by the Orkney Islands council, as the harbour authority, after consultation with the oil pollution liaison committee on which Scottish National Heritage and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds are represented. The transhipments were only permitted in good weather and with pollution prevention vessels in attendance. Vessels were escorted in and out of Scapa Flow by two tugs. Neither the Department of Transport nor the Department of Trade and Industry requires an environmental impact assessment for these operations.

Opencast Mining

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what guidelines he has issued or intends to issue to British Coal on the acquisition and sale of property by British Coal where planning permission for opencast coal extraction has been applied for but not given.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 15 February 1993]*: I have no proposals for such guidelines. Acquisition or sale of property by British Coal in connection with coal extraction or in connection with proposals for such extraction is an operational matter for the corporation.

Sellafield

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how the radiologically significant materials extracted by the enhanced actinide removal plant at Sellafield, mentioned at page 33 of his Department's annual report 1993, Cm. 2204, will be disposed of.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 16 February 1993]:* The radiologically significant materials, which British Nuclear Fuels plc proposes to remove from Sellafield's sea discharges by use of the site's enhanced actinide removal plant, will be in the form of an intermediate level waste sludge. This will be encapsulated within stainless steel drums for storage and eventual disposal in Nirex's proposed deep underground disposal facility.

European Regional Funding

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what representations he has had about certain regions of the United Kingdom qualifying for objective 1 status in European funding regimes;

(2), pursuant to the oral statement of the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities on 10 February, *Official Report,* column 1009, which regions of the United Kingdom he now considers poor enough to qualify for objective 1 status for European funding; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 17 February 1993]:* The Government have received representations from several hon. Members, local authorities, and others. Qualification for objective 1 does not only depend on gross domestic product. Other factors may be taken into account, such as peripherality.

Concerning the regions that the Government believe should become eligible for objective 1 grants, I refer the hon. Member to the answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe) on 17 February.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he intends to have discussions with the European Commission about redrawing the regional map of Europe with regard to funding criteria for EC structural funds; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 17 February 1993]:* I understand that the European Commission hopes to adopt its proposals for revised structural funds regulations soon. The Council of Ministers will consider the proposals in the late spring or summer.

Decisions on eligibility under the objectives of the funds must await the adoption of the regulations by the Council of Ministers.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 18 February.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 18 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Iraq

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on *(a)* the structure, *(b)* the number and civil service rank of personnel on the staff and *(c)* the timing of the inquiry under Lord Justice Scott.

The Prime Minister: Lord Justice Scott is supported by a team of eight of which the civil service members comprise:

1 Assistant Solicitor (Grade 5)
1 Press Officer (Part Time) (Grade 6)
1 Grade 7
1 Executive Officer
1 Administrative Officer
1 Personal Secretary

The timing and structure of the inquiry is a matter for Lord Justice Scott. He has made it clear that he wishes to report to my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade as soon as possible.

Salman Rushdie

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to the answer of 12 February, by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, *Official Report,* column *841-42,* what plans he has to meet Mr. Salman Rushdie; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, met Mr. Rushdie on 4 February. He underlined our full support for Mr. Rushdie's fundamental rights. The fatwa issued by Ayatollah Khomeini and reaffirmed by senior figures in Iran is a serious violation of international law. The continuing failure of the Iranian authorities to repudiate this incitement to murder inevitably prevents the establishment of full and friendly relations with Iran.

Terrorism

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister in what circumstances British citizens living in the United Kingdom are asked to contribute to the cost of police security when their lives are threatened by terrorists.

The Prime Minister: It is for the chief officer of police to decide whether it is appropriate to provide police officers to protect individuals. The individuals concerned would not be asked to contribute to the cost of these officers.

Housing Corporation

Mr. Battle: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had concerning the future of the Housing Corporation; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I regularly discuss with my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment the delivery of the Government's housing policy, in which the Housing Corporation continues to play an important part.

Chemical Warfare

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards the export of materials and equipment which could be or is thought to be suitable for making chemical weapons; what monitoring takes place; what assessment is made of end-user certificates in such circumstances; and if he will lay before Parliament regulations for the export of such items.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 12 February 1993]:* The 54 chemical weapon precursor chemicals and the dual use chemical plant and equipment identified as of proliferation concern are specified in and controlled under the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1992. In addition, other, unlisted items, though normally of no proliferation concern, do require a licence if the exporter knows or suspects that they are intended or likely to be used in connection with weapons of mass destruction. All export licence applications are carefully considered: information on destinations and end users is always taken into account. Compliance by exporters with these controls is monitored by the compliance unit of the Department of Trade and Industry.

SCOTLAND

Public Appointments

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of his appointees to public bodies are women; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 17 February 1993]:* Figures in "Public Bodies"—published on 29 January 1993; copy available in the Library—show that at 1 September 1992, 36 per cent. of those appointed to public bodies under the auspices of the Scottish Office were women. Of those appointments directly controlled by the Secretary of State —that is, leaving aside those members nominated or appointed by other organisations—40 per cent. were held by women. The Government aim to increase the number of public appointments held by women, while continuing to make all appointments on the basis of aptitude and merit.

WALES

Certificate of Education

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he held with educational bodies and schools in Wales over his proposal to withdraw the certificate of education.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The decision to phase out the certificate of education was based on advice received from the School Examinations and Assessment Council (SEAC) on the national curriculum statutory arrangements for GCSE and other assessments for 16-year-old pupils at end of key stage 4. SEAC advised that the certificate of education would not meet the national curriculum requirements. The statutory annual consultation with LEAs and examining groups on the list of approved qualifications for use in schools will take place later this month.

Disabled Employees

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of firms in Wales employing 20 or more employees have *(a)* employed a 3 per cent. quota of registered disabled people and *(b)* been issued bulk exemption permits under the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944, for each year from 1979 to the present.

Mr. David Hunt: The information requested, where available, is given in the following table. The data cover employers with headquarters in Wales and those with establishments only in Wales.

	Percentage of employers with 20 or more workers who employed at least 3 per cent. registered disabled people on 1 June	*Percentage of employers with 20 or more workers issued with bulk permits during the 12 months to 1 June*[1]
1979	45·1	36·7
1980	43·9	38·0
1981	43·2	38·5
1982	45·6	39·4
1983	34·1	28·7
1984	44·8	42·2
1985	n/a	n/a
1986	32·9	45·6
1987	33·1	43·3
1988	29·3	40·0
1989	26·8	39·9
1990	26·0	38·1
1991	26·9	39·4

Source: Employment Service

[1] The issue of a bulk permit does not exempt the employer from their duties and obligations under the 1944 Act. Bulk permits are issued in accordance with the Act. They enable an employer who is below quota to engage a specified number of people who are not registered as disabled, during a period of up to 6 months, and remain within the law. Employers who are below quota, and who have not been issued with permits, are not necessarily breaking the law.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of senior administrative positions in each of the health authorities of Wales are held by women; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is given in the following table. The figures are based on staff on senior manager pay scales (general managers, senior managers and managers) in the administrative and clerical staff group.

Percentage of staff as at 30 September 1992 on senior manager pay scales who were women

	Health authority/ trust	*Family health services authority*
Clwyd	34·4	40·0
East Dyfed/Dyfed	31·0	50·0
Gwent	42·9	42·9
Gwynedd	34·6	42·9
Mid Glamorgan	31·9	30·8
Pembrokeshire	33·3	[1]—
Powys	48·4	25·0
South Glamorgan	37·3	14·3
West Glamorgan	38·1	20·0
Common Services Authority	29·1	[2]—

[1] Dyfed FHSA covers East Dyfed and Pembrokeshire.

[2] There is no FHSA.

NHS (Wales) has joined the Opportunity 2000 campaign promoted by Business in the Community which aims to improve the quality and quantity of women in the work force. Targets for improving the balance of women in NHS management will be published during 1993.

Alzheimer's Disease

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 4 February, *Official Report*, column *341*, what proposals he has to provide assistance comparable to that given by the independent living fund to those of pensionable age with Alzheimer's and other similar conditions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Under the community care arrangements which will operate from 1 April 1993, it will be for local authorities to assess the needs of those requiring care and make appropriate arrangements in conjunction with other agencies, the individuals concerned and their families. The development of services for people with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia is the responsibility of joint county planning teams established under the mental illness strategy.

Further Education Colleges (Equipment)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he will take to replace out-of-date practical equipment in further education colleges; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The Further Education Funding Council for Wales has commissioned a survey of further education colleges' equipment needs. The information obtained from the survey has been taken into account by the council in deciding what part of its funding for capital expenditure it should allocate for equipment. The council has identified resources of £1·5 million for allocation to the colleges for equipment purchases in the financial year 1993-94.

Community Education

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what initiatives he proposes to increase participation in community education in each of the local education authorities in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The provisions of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 divide the responsibility for providing further education, including community education, between the Further Education Funding Council for Wales (FEFCW) and the local education authorities. From 1 April 1993 the FEFCW will be responsible for ensuring that there is adequate provision of the types of course listed in schedule 2 of the Act; and the local education authorities will continue to have a duty to provide other types of courses—mainly leisure and recreational courses. The local education authorities have retained the resources for non-schedule 2 courses and have full discretion to decide for themselves what provision they make in their own areas.

National Vocational Qualifications

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he proposes to narrow the gap between vocational and academic studies consequent upon the introduction of national vocational qualifications.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Accreditations from the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) now cover over 80 per cent. of the work force and all occupational groups at NVQ levels 1 to 4. The NCVQ is also developing a more broadly-based vocational qualification, the general national vocational qualification (GNVQ). A number of schools and colleges are piloting GNVQs during this academic year. GNVQs are being designed to provide a vocational qualification representing an achievement which is equivalent to two 'A' levels. Current NCVQ plans are that 14 GNVQs should be generally available by September 1995, when they should have equal status with 'A' levels.

General Practitioners

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many general practitioners there were in each county and in total in Wales in each year since 1979.

Mr. David Hunt: The information is given in the following table.

Unrestricted General Medical Practitioners[1]

	Clwyd	*Dyfed*	*Gwent*	*Gwynedd*	*Mid Glamorgan*	*Powys*	*South Glamorgan*	*West Glamorgan*	*Wales*
1979	164	166	198	130	240	69	203	169	1,339
1980	172	169	201	133	253	69	203	172	1,372
1981	179	172	206	132	260	69	203	176	1,397
1982	191	180	212	134	264	67	208	175	1,431
1983	194	182	222	137	271	70	211	178	1,465
1984	197	188	226	139	274	72	216	180	1,492
1985	200	194	237	139	276	72	219	186	1,523
1986	211	197	236	139	280	76	222	188	1,549
1987	214	205	240	143	291	75	225	194	1,587
1988	214	206	241	147	295	76	226	194	1,599
1989	221	214	243	148	299	79	229	198	1,631
1990	224	212	243	152	296	79	234	195	1,635
1991	223	216	239	153	301	79	233	203	1,647
1992	223	222	236	152	301	78	237	204	1,653

[1] As at 1 October except for 1992 which is at 1 April (latest available information).

Hospital Beds

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many hospital beds there were in each specialty in each county and in the whole of Wales in each year since 1979.

Mr. David Hunt: Information on the number of beds (average daily available) in each health authority of Wales by specialty for the calendar years 1979 to 1987 and the financial years 1984-85 to 1990-91 has been published on an annual basis in "Hospital Bed Use Statistics" copies of which are in the Library of the House.

Information for 1991-92 is given in the following table.

Average daily available beds
Year ending 31 March 1992. Provisional

	Clwyd	*East Dyfed*	*Gwent*	*Gwynedd*	*Mid Glamorgan*	*Pembrokeshire*	*Powys*	*South Glamorgan*	*West Glamorgan*	*Wales*
General surgery	206·5	178·7	260·7	153·8	289·9	71·3	—	252·0	211·8	1,624·6
Urology	45·9	—	39·1	—	23·1	—	—	56·8	46·5	211·3
Traumatic and orthopaedic surgery	135·2	113·3	151·8	74·9	268·5	39·5	—	217·4	171·2	1,171·7
Ear, nose and throat	53·4	31·6	44·2	17·6	56·6	—	—	45·3	40·7	289·4
Ophthalmology	36·0	27·0	34·0	25·1	51·6	0·4	—	19·7	28·0	221·8
Oral surgery	15·7	0·1	14·4	5·4	19·2	—	—	11·9	14·2	80·9
Neurosurgery	—	—	—	—	0·3	—	—	39·9	46·3	86·5
Plastic surgery	—	—	90·1	—	—	—	—	—	—	90·1
Burns surgery	—	—	35·0	—	—	—	—	—	—	35·0
Cardiac surgery	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	27·3	[illegible]	27·3
Thoracic surgery	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	20·1	—	20·1
Paediatric surgery	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	23·0	—	23·0
Anaesthetics	4·2	0·8	—	1·8	3·0	1·5	—	4·9	0·5	16·6
General medicine	219·0	164·7	294·9	164·7	387·0	58·1	15·0	255·6	248·7	1,807·7
Haematology (clinical)	10·7	2·4	9·9	12·4	—	2·3	—	31·0	12·6	81·2
Clinical phsyiology	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1·6	—	1·6
Rehabilitation	38·7	—	—	—	38·9	—	—	18·5	9·5	105·6
Palliative medicine	0·8	—	2·0	4·0	—	—	—	—	20·5	27·3
Cardiology	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	55·1	—	55·1
Dermatology	13·1	7·9	17·6	6·0	7·6	—	—	18·8	22·1	93·1
Thoracic medicine	24·0	—	—	—	—	—	—	85·5	—	109·6
Infectious diseases	—	2·1	1·0	—	—	—	—	—	—	3·1
Genito-urinary medicine	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2·0	2·0
Nephrology	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	15·9	15·9
Nuclear medicine	—	—	—	—	0·3	—	—	—	—	0·3
Spinal injuries	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	32·5	—	32·5
Other neurology	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	32·2	35·5	67·7
Rheumatology	7·2	—	11·8	—	37·5	—	—	15·1	15·4	87·1
Paediatrics	81·5	37·4	91·4	55·3	115·6	24·7	—	133·8	113·5	653·2
Paediatric neurology	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3·2	—	3·2
Geriatric medicine	471·4	361·2	566·1	354·9	805·1	114·9	195·4	438·9	441·8	3,749·5
Obstetrics	100·5	48·0	126·8	61·0	189·5	31·5	—	136·5	128·5	822·3
Gynaecology	70·7	41·3	98·4	35·2	135·5	20·4	—	79·0	106·5	587·1
GP maternity	15·5	—	19·0	14·3	3·8	8·4	33·3	—	—	94·2
GP other	307·8	61·6	128·2	93·3	170·7	43·4	185·1	34·7	—	1,024·8
Mental handicap	43·8	28·0	207·3	224·8	352·0	21·5	159·0	317·5	59·0	1,412·8
Mental illness	276·3	257·5	268·2	46·4	417·4	—	159·0	350·0	217·0	1,991·7
Child and adolescent psychiatry	18·0	—	28·0	—	—	—	—	10·5	—	56·5
Forensic psychiatry	—	—	—	—	1·8	—	—	15·3	—	17·2
Old age psychiatry	94·2	137·2	338·9	75·4	449·8	—	101·3	229·0	235·8	1,661·5
Radiotherapy	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	97·7	45·2	143·0
Radiology	—	—	—	—	0·1	—	—	—	—	0·1
Chemical pathology	—	0·1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0·1
Accident and emergency	13·7	6·0	10·0	—	1·2	4·8	—	—	—	35·7
Total	2,303·7	1,506·9	2,888·7	1,426·2	3,825·7	442·7	848·0	3,110·2	2,288·4	18,640·5

Labour Statistics

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the figure for male unemployment in Newport, Gwent at the latest available date.

Mr. David Hunt: In January 1993 there were 8,009 male unemployed claimants in the Newport travel-to-work area, and 6,360 men unemployed in the borough of Newport.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Tribunals

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the current time lag in the hearing of appeals by the independent tribunal service.

Mr. Burt: In 1991, the last year for which complete figures are available, the average appeals clearance time from lodgment to the date of hearing were:

	Weeks
Social Security Appeals Tribunals:	24
Medical Appeals Tribunals:	35·2

Absent Fathers

Ms. Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish the operational guidelines for DSS officials to use when assessing whether, under regulations relating to the Child Support Act 1991, a mother or her children would face harm or undue distress if she were required to disclose details of an absent father.

Mr. Burt: Yes. The guidelines will be published before the launch of the agency on 5 April 1993.

Care Homes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total spending during each year since 1979-80 on income support and supplementary benefit payments towards the cost of residential or nursing care, including estimates for the current financial year; and if he will set out the percentage change since 1979-80 deflated by the change in numbers of (i) people of pensionable age and (ii) those over 75 years of age.

Mr. Burt: Such information as is available is in the table.

Income support expenditure
Residential care and nursing homes

Year	*Annual equivalent expenditure £ million*
December 1979	10
December 1980	18
December 1981	23
December 1982	39
December 1983	104
December 1984	200
December 1985	348
February 1986	459
May 1987	671
May 1988	878
May 1989	1,105
May 1990	1,270
May 1991	1,872
May 1992	2,460

Source: Quarterly Statistical Enquiries.

Reliable data on an age basis is not available.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of the likely total expenditure on income support payments towards the costs of care in residential or nursing homes during the current financial year.

Mr. Burt: The latest estimate given in the departmental report for 1992-93 is £2,530 million.

Carers

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the proportion of the total social security budget which will be spent on the invalid care allowance and the carer premium in 1992-93.

Mr. Scott: Our present estimate is 0·5 per cent.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy that take-up campaign information for carers' benefits should be available in *(a)* the Welsh language, *(b)* languages of ethnic minority communities within the United Kingdom and *(c)* Braille.

Mr. Scott: The publicity of carers' benefits is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Dafydd Wigley, dated 17 February 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to the points raised in your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security regarding the availability of publicity information on carer's benefits in *(a)* the Welsh language, *(b)* languages of the ethnic minority communities within the United Kingdom and *(c)* in Braille.

The Benefits Agency currently provides publicity information on the main benefit for carers, Invalid Care Allowance (ICA), in eleven ethnic languages—Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, Somali, Turkish, Urdu and Vietnamese. This information is also available in the Welsh language and in Braille.

Although there are no plans at present for the main carers leaflet FB31 "Caring for someone?" to be translated into the other languages listed above, there will be an April 1993 edition in Welsh. The leaflet is also being considered for translation into Braille from April 1993 when a new edition of the leaflet is published.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy of this letter will appear in the *Official Report*. A copy will also be placed in the Library.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Farmers

9. **Mr. Peter Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will estimate the numbers of full and part-time farmers.

Mr. Hanley: In the June 1992 agricultural census in Northern Ireland 22,215 farmers, partners and directors were identified as full-time and 12,309 as part-time.

Security Forces (Manpower)

10. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on current manpower levels for the security forces in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Mates: At 31 December 1992 there were 13,071 police, and 18,741 members of the armed forces operating in their support, in Northern Ireland. These manpower levels are kept under constant review.

Widgery Tribunal

11. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will order a re-examination of the findings of the Widgery tribunal.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: No. I have nothing to add to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) on 21 January at col. *483*.

Aldergrove Airport

12. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the Government's proposals for privatising Aldergrove airport.

Mr. Atkins: On 20 November 1991, my predecessor announced the Government's plans to sell Northern Ireland Airports Limited, the publicly owned company which operates Belfast international airport. Legislation is in hand to give effect to privatisation and a draft order will be published in May of this year. The timetable envisages the order being made early in 1994 with the sale of the company taking place later that year.

Remand Prisoners

13. **Mr. A. Cecil Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the average detention period being served by remand prisoners in Crumlin Road prison.

Mr. Mates: Figures are not available in the form sought. However the Government are concerned about the length of time some prisoners spend on remand and have introduced a number of measures to deal with the problem, including the target time limits scheme announced by my right hon. and learned Friend on 10 June 1992.

Homelessness

14. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action he proposes to alleviate homelessness in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Atkins: The Housing Executive has statutory responsibility for dealing with homelessness, and arranges both temporary and permanent accommodation throughout Northern Ireland. Its housing selection scheme gives top priority particularly to families accepted as homeless. In addition, the Executive and other local bodies provide extensive advice to those who are homeless, or are threatened with homelessness. I am satisfied that these arrangements are appropriate in dealing with homelessness in Northern Ireland.

Quangos

15. **Mr. Clifford Forsythe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many quasi-autonomous non-governmental bodies existed in Northern Ireland *(a)* in 1991, *(b)* in 1992 and *(c)* at present.

Mr. Mates: In 1991 and 1992 there were 121 non-departmental public bodies in Northern Ireland and this figure remains unchanged.

Inter-party Discussions

16. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the present status of the inter-party discussions on the future of Northern Ireland.

Political Initiatives

25. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what new political initiatives he has in respect of Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: When the talks ended in November last year, all the participants agreed that further dialogue was both necessary and desirable. Accordingly, every effort is being made to create conditions under which further talks can take place at an early date. To this end, contacts are being maintained with all the participants at various levels.

EC Funding

17. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has made to the European Commission regarding funding of projects in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Mates: My right hon. and learned Friend and ministerial colleagues are in contact with the Commission as and when the interests of Northern Ireland require it. I myself shall be meeting Commissioner Millan next week to discuss support from the Community's structural funds for Northern Ireland during the next round of funding.

Rented Housing

18. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the number of houses made available for rent in Northern Ireland for each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Atkins: The number of houses made available for rent in Northern Ireland in each of the last 10 years by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and by registered housing associations is as follows:

13,304 houses in 1982-83; 13,972 in 1983-84; 13,466 in 1984-85; 13,486 in 1985-86; 12,701 in 1986-87; 11,971 in 1987-88; 12,158 in 1988-89; 11,559 in 1989-90; 14,180 in 1990-91 and 14,269 in 1991-92.

The figures comprise new build completions and relets for both the Housing Executive and registered housing associations except in the case of associations where relet figures are not available prior to 1990-91.

Figures relating to the private rented sector are not available.

Northern Ireland Railways

19. **Mr. Adley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the future of Northern Ireland Railways.

Mr. Atkins: The Government have demonstrated their commitment to the future of railways in Northern Ireland through schemes for a cross-harbour rail link in Belfast, the accelerated upgrading of the Belfast to Dublin railway and the provision of a new railway station at Great Victoria street, Belfast.

In addition we are currently examining the consultant's report about the scope for introducing a private element into the management and operation of Northern Ireland Railways.

Labour Statistics

20. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has received about the level of unemployment in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: I receive representations from time to time from a variety of interested organisations and individuals.

The Government's economic development strategy for Northern Ireland aims to help industry become more competitive so that it can achieve soundly based growth and provide more good quality jobs. A wide range of assistance is available to this end. Figures released today show that the level of seasonally adjusted unemployment in Northern Ireland remained unchanged (at 107,000) in January and has declined by an average of 200 over the past three months.

Security

21. **Mr. Sykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people were charged with terrorist murders in Northern Ireland in 1992.

Mr. Mates: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend).

23. **Mr. Molyneaux:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Mates: I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the reply given earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend).

Small Firms

22. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he next plans to meet representatives of the small firms sector to discuss lifting burdens on business.

Mr. Atkins: I am in regular contact with the business community which enables me to gain its views on all matters affecting the competitiveness of Northern Ireland companies. I will be raising the specific issue of the burden of regulations with key business people over the next few months.

Education

24. **Mr. Enright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has received on proposed changes in education.

Mr. Hanley: Representations have been made by the education and library boards, school boards of governers, teachers and their representatives and some parents. I have also met a number of groups on reforms-related matters. They have covered a wide range of issues related to the reforms, but have centered mainly on the pressures on teachers and schools resulting from the curriculum and assessment changes and I have taken measures where necessary to ease the pressures.

Health and Personal Social Services

26. **Mr. McGrady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the implementation of the Government's regional strategy document for Northern Ireland health and personal social services for 1992 to 1997; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: Following the publication in November 1991 of the 1992-1997 regional strategy each board produced an area strategy which endorsed the priorities and targets it contained. Since then the Eastern and Southern boards have undertaken major reviews of the acute hospital services required by their population. They are currently consulting widely on their proposals for the future of these important services before making final decisions.

The annual management plan, issued by the HPSS management executive, sets a range of interim objectives and targets based on those in the regional strategy. The boards' purchasing prospectuses in turn reflect the content of the management plan and specify the level of services that boards wish to purchase in pursuit of strategic goals.

In addition to those targets which boards can act on immediately, there are a number of objectives and targets in the regional strategy where collaborative work would be of value. The regional strategy advisory group, under the chairmanship of the HPSS chief executive, has been established to take forward work in these areas.

The regional strategy also recognises the important role that other government Departments have to play in improving the health and social well-being of the population. An inter-departmental group on health issues has been established under the chairmanship of the permanent secretary of the Department of Health and Social Services.

Anglo-Irish Agreement

27. **Mr. Richards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the effect on security co-operation with the Republic of Ireland of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Mr. Mates: Since the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, there have been significant enhancements in cross border security co-operation, and the Government will continue to work closely with the Government of the Republic to achieve further improvements. Both Governments recognise the importance of keeping existing measures under review and making further progress whenever possible.

Unemployment

28. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures he proposes to take to reduce unemployment in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Atkins: Reducing unemployment in Northern Ireland depends on the achievement of higher levels of economic growth and on Northern Ireland industry becoming more internationally competitive. The main features of the Government's strategy to achieve this include identifying and removing obstacles to growth; encouraging inward investment; building up management and work force skills; developing an enterprise culture and supporting innovation and research and development. Help is available in each of these areas for activities which will improve business performance.

Miscarriages of Justice

29. **Mr. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will consider setting up an independent body in Northern Ireland to consider cases of miscarriages of justice.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The Royal Commission on Criminal Justice is currently examining the arrangements in England and Wales for considering and investigating alleged miscarriages of justice when appeal rights have been exhausted. When the Royal Commission's recommendations are made known I shall give careful consideration to what application they may have in the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland.

Constitutional Discussions

30. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent discussions he has had with representatives of the Government of the Republic of Ireland about constitutional matters; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North East (Mr. Barnes).

Disabled Employees

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of employees in his Department are registered disabled.

Mr. Mates: There are no registered disabled staff in the small cadre of home civil servants employed in the Northern Ireland Office.

On 13 January 1993, 1·6 per cent. of the Northern Ireland civil service (NICS) were registered disabled. In addition, 60 registered disabled people were working in the NICS under the sheltered placement scheme.

Contracting Out

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide figures for the reduction in numbers of posts as a result of contracting out since 1979 in his Department and agencies for which he has responsibility.

Mr. Mates: Including the Northern Ireland Departments, 575 full-time and 434 part-time posts have been contracted out.

English Teaching

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the teaching of English in the schools of the Province.

Mr. Hanley: The teaching of English in schools in Northern Ireland is now based on the programmes of study for English which reflect the best practice in our classrooms. These give appropriate prominence to the teaching of grammar, spelling and writing and promote from the earliest years reading for pleasure and information from a wide variety of texts. The Northern Ireland Curriculum Council has set in place arrangements to monitor the introduction of the new programmes of study and these will be reviewed and updated as necessary in the light of the council's findings.

Fair Employment Act

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the certificates that have been issued by him under section 42 of the Fair Employment Act 1976 in the past 10 years, indicating the person or body the certificate related to and whether the certificate was issued on the ground of *(a)* national security, *(b)* public safety or *(c)* public order.

Mr. Atkins: In the past 10 years 18 section 42 certificates have been signed by or on behalf of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Seven cases involved either the Northern Ireland Office or Northern Ireland Departments while the other 11 involved public bodies in Northern Ireland.

Information on the ground on which each certificate was issued is not available in the form requested.

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons have received advice from the Fair Employment Commission under section 29(1) of the Fair Employment Act 1976.

Mr. Atkins: A total of 2,041 from 1 January 1990 until 31 January 1993.

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons have been refused assistance under section 29(2) of the Fair Employment Act 1976 by the Fair Employment Commission, showing in each case the perceived religious affiliation of those refused and the grounds on which assistance was refused.

Mr. Atkins: During the period 1 January 1990 until 31 January 1993 assistance or further assistance under section 29(2) has been refusesd to 47 persons, of whom 33 were Roman Catholic and 14 were Protestant. Assistance was refused where (i) the investigation of the complaint had revealed no sustainable case, (ii) assistance to pursue the complaint would have conflicted with the commission's statutory functions, (iii) the complainant failed to co-operate or keep in contact with the commission or (iv) the complainant had approached the commission at such an advanced stage that the giving of assistance was impracticable. It is not appropriate to state the grounds on which such refusal was based in individual instances.

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons have received assistance from the Fair Employment Commission under section 29(2) of the Fair Employment Act 1976.

Mr. Atkins: A total of 768 from 1 January 1990 until 31 January 1993.

Mr. Seamus McElwaine

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the terrorist activities of Seamus McElwaine and the circumstances of his death.

Mr. Mates *[holding answer 1 February 1993]:* The circumstances surrounding the death of Seamus McElwaine in an encounter with the security forces on 26 April 1986 near Rosslea, County Fermanagh, were investigated by the police. The Director of Public Prosecutions considered the police investigation report, and directed no prosectuion of any of the soldiers involved. Following the inquest held on 11-12 January 1993 the director has asked for a further report from the police in light of the inquest jury's findings. It would, therefore, be inappropriate for me to comment further.

EMPLOYMENT

TECs

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the budget for each of the training and enterprise councils in 1992-93; and what the budget will be for each TEC for 1993-94.

Mr. McLoughlin: Details of TEC budgets for 1992-93 are given in the tables. The £2·1 billion planned expenditure for programmes operated by TECs and LECs is over £100 million more than was spent in 1991-92.

The information for TEC budgets for 1993-94 is not yet available. We are currently in negotiations with TECs on targets and funding for 1993-94.

TEC budgets 1992-93

£ million

	Total	*YT and credits*	*WRFE*	*Compacts*	*EBPs*	*TPS*	*Careers partners*	*Careers libraries*	*Employ training ex. allows*	*HTNT*	*Employ action ex. allows*	*Business enterprise support*	*LIF*	*National devel project*	*Research*	*Youth devel project*	*TEC MGMT fee*
Essex	32·95	16·02	2·87	0·00	0·03	0·07	0·03	0·12	7·79	0·25	2·03	2·69	0·98	0·06	0·00	0·01	2·54
Hampshire	32·06	17·54	3·49	0·04	0·03	0·07	0·03	0·17	5·37	0·34	0·93	3·12	0·88	0·05	0·00	0·00	2·07
Heart of England	10·86	5·70	0·88	0·04	0·03	0·03	0·03	0·07	1·74	0·05	0·36	1·20	0·61	0·12	0·00	0·00	1·32
Hertfordshire	23·02	13·19	1·87	0·00	0·03	0·05	0·00	0·13	3·06	0·40	0·56	3·00	0·35	0·38	0·00	0·00	1·79
Isle of Wight	3·66	1·86	0·30	0·00	0·03	0·01	0·00	0·02	0·55	0·00	0·26	0·49	0·06	0·06	0·00	0·02	0·60
Kent	33·08	18·00	2·84	0·00	0·03	0·07	0·02	0·18	5·27	0·55	1·90	2·75	1·27	0·18	0·00	0·02	2·05
Milton Keynes/ North Bucks	7·19	3·99	0·39	0·00	0·03	0·01	0·00	0·02	1·23	0·00	0·35	0·76	0·35	0·06	0·00	0·00	0·85
Surrey	12·38	4·40	1·84	0·00	0·03	0·05	0·03	0·12	1·50	0·53	0·33	1·85	0·78	0·92	0·00	0·00	1·45
Sussex	25·10	11·26	2·26	0·02	0·06	0·06	0·04	0·21	5·05	0·26	0·96	3·98	0·93	0·01	0·00	0·00	2·06
Thames Valley Enterprise	18·93	9·23	2·70	0·03	0·05	0·06	0·00	0·13	2·09	0·30	0·89	2·40	0·90	0·15	0·00	0·00	2·28
South East Total	199·23	101·19	19·44	0·13	0·35	0·48	0·18	1·17	33·65	2·68	8·57	22·24	7·11	1·99	0·00	0·05	17·01
AZTEC	10·55	3·62	1·36	0·10	0·02	0·02	0·00	0·07	1·65	0·85	0·87	1·46	0·34	0·19	0·00	0·00	1·18
CENTEC	21·48	6·54	1·35	0·10	0·02	0·03	0·04	0·07	6·59	0·39	1·44	4·18	0·70	0·03	0·00	0·00	2·76
CILNTEC	20·46	7·25	1·37	0·20	0·01	0·01	0·04	0·04	5·93	0·16	1·33	2·82	1·11	0·19	0·00	0·00	2·16
LETEC	32·66	12·54	3·07	0·15	0·05	0·05	0·08	0·12	9·80	0·52	2·70	2·75	0·71	0·12	0·00	0·00	3·24
North London	16·94	4·14	1·89	0·10	0·03	0·03	0·00	0·08	4·99	0·86	1·35	2·56	0·58	0·32	0·01	0·00	1·98
North West London	8·74	2·46	1·66	0·06	0·01	0·02	0·00	0·04	2·83	0·00	0·00	1·34	0·28	0·01	0·03	0·00	1·29
SOLOTEC	18·15	9·09	1·84	0·02	0·03	0·03	0·00	0·10	3·30	0·10	0·82	1·98	0·58	0·26	0·00	0·00	1·97
South Thames	30·18	9·15	2·82	0·20	0·03	0·04	0·04	0·10	9·13	1·14	2·63	3·36	1·17	0·37	0·00	0·00	2·74
West London	15·39	6·56	2·17	0·00	0·08	0·03	0·04	0·08	2·52	0·86	0·00	1·92	0·85	0·18	0·10	0·00	1·88
London Total	174·55	61·35	17·35	0·93	0·28	0·26	0·24	0·70	46·74	4·88	11·14	22·37	6·32	1·67	0·14	0·00	19·20
Avon	26·35	11·81	1·65	0·10	0·03	0·04	0·04	0·11	6·12	0·63	1·25	3·60	0·70	0·27	0·00	0·00	2·49
Devon/Cornwall	48·61	26·31	3·40	0·10	0·05	0·06	0·04	0·18	9·00	0·17	2·07	5·44	1·62	0·17	0·00	0·00	3·86
Dorset	15·15	7·30	1·19	0·02	0·02	0·03	0·04	0·08	2·33	0·58	0·67	2·10	0·49	0·30	0·00	0·00	1·38
Gloucestershire	12·71	6·58	1·00	0·03	0·02	0·03	0·01	0·07	2·00	0·10	0·44	1·80	0·39	0·24	0·00	0·00	1·21
Somerset	12·57	6·39	1·19	0·00	0·02	0·02	0·02	0·05	2·10	0·21	0·50	1·80	0·20	0·07	0·00	0·00	1·18
Wiltshire	13·45	6·76	1·29	0·00	0·02	0·03	0·02	0·07	2·13	0·12	0·43	1·90	0·45	0·23	0·00	0·00	1·21
South West Total	128·84	65·15	9·72	0·25	0·16	0·21	0·17	0·56	23·68	1·81	5·36	16·64	3·85	1·28	0·00	0·00	11·33
Birmingham	46·97	20·64	2·38	0·10	0·02	0·05	0·04	0·12	15·61	0·87	2·12	3·91	0·59	0·48	0·00	0·04	2·80
Central England	10·65	5·11	0·95	0·05	0·02	0·02	0·02	0·05	1·82	0·07	0·89	1·36	0·29	0·00	0·00	0·00	1·06
Coventry/Warwickshire	23·50	11·86	1·76	0·10	0·04	0·04	0·04	0·11	4·95	0·36	1·10	2·65	0·33	0·15	0·01	0·00	1·88
Dudley	10·71	5·20	0·76	0·10	0·02	0·01	0·04	0·04	2·51	0·12	0·48	0·97	0·26	0·17	0·00	0·03	1·01
HAWTEC	10·83	5·47	0·80	0·00	0·02	0·02	0·02	0·07	1·84	0·08	0·49	1·53	0·34	0·15	0·00	0·00	0·98
Sandwell	10·91	5·46	0·64	0·00	0·02	0·02	0·00	0·04	2·63	0·10	0·60	1·01	0·30	0·08	0·01	0·00	1·08
Shropshire	13·53	7·66	0·86	0·10	0·02	0·02	0·02	0·08	2·41	0·08	0·46	1·43	0·28	0·11	0·00	0·00	1·15
Staffordshire	33·39	20·57	2·02	0·00	0·02	0·05	0·03	0·14	5·38	0·38	0·95	3·17	0·62	0·06	0·00	0·00	2·21
Walsall	9·05	4·32	0·52	0·10	0·02	0·01	0·00	0·03	2·31	0·00	0·50	0·87	0·26	0·11	0·00	0·00	0·94
Wolverhampton	11·03	5·24	0·61	0·10	0·02	0·02	0·00	0·03	2·50	0·26	0·60	1·00	0·49	0·16	0·00	0·00	1·09
West Midlands Total	180·57	91·53	11·30	0·65	0·22	0·26	0·21	0·71	41·96	2·32	8·19	17·90	3·76	1·47	0·02	0·07	14·20
Bedfordshire	10·77	5·30	1·10	0·00	0·03	0·03	0·03	0·08	1·51	0·66	0·56	1·11	0·36	0·00	0·00	0·00	0·95
CAMBSTEC	5·59	2·64	0·63	0·03	0·02	0·02	0·00	0·06	0·64	0·05	0·33	0·88	0·23	0·03	0·00	0·03	0·78
North Derbyshire	9·66	5·09	0·73	0·00	0·02	0·02	0·02	0·05	2·21	0·09	0·00	1·11	0·26	0·06	0·00	0·00	0·92
South Derbyshire	17·08	8·63	1·16	0·10	0·02	0·03	0·02	0·08	3·89	0·14	0·57	1·75	0·58	0·11	0·00	0·00	1·25
Leicestershire	24·39	13·34	1·57	0·10	0·03	0·04	0·03	0·14	4·02	0·38	0·73	2·90	0·79	0·32	0·00	0·00	1·82
Lincolnshire	19·20	10·19	1·22	0·00	0·02	0·02	0·03	0·08	3·71	0·15	1·41	1·95	0·28	0·10	0·00	0·04	1·50
Norfolk/Waveney	20·96	10·73	1·65	0·00	0·03	0·04	0·03	0·11	4·82	0·00	0·75	2·16	0·64	0·00	0·00	0·00	1·61
Northamptonshire	12·53	6·75	1·17	0·00	0·03	0·03	0·00	0·10	1·69	0·09	0·54	1·60	0·53	0·00	0·00	0·00	1·23
Greater Nottinghamshire	19·60	9·66	1·40	0·02	0·02	0·03	0·04	0·89	4·11	0·32	0·92	1·80	0·34	0·03	0·00	0·00	1·38
North Nottinghamshire	16·01	7·37	0·76	0·00	0·02	0·02	0·04	0·07	5·39	0·00	0·45	1·46	0·32	0·11	0·00	0·00	1·11
Greater Peterborough	8·38	4·50	0·68	0·05	0·01	0·01	0·00	0·04	1·77	0·00	0·45	0·60	0·27	0·00	0·00	0·00	0·92
Suffolk	14·34	9·53	0·75	0·05	0·03	0·03	0·03	0·08	1·66	0·00	0·45	1·36	0·37	0·00	0·00	0·00	1·20
East Midlands Total	178·51	93·73	12·82	0·35	0·28	0·32	0·27	1·78	35·42	1·88	7·16	18·68	4·97	0·76	0·00	0·07	14·67
Barnsley/Doncaster	23·38	12·90	0·90	0·20	0·03	0·03	0·04	0·10	5·50	0·70	0·90	1·50	0·50	0·08	0·00	0·00	1·70
Bradford and District	19·25	10·60	0·80	0·10	0·02	0·03	0·00	0·10	4·20	0·10	0·70	1·80	0·50	0·30	0·00	0·00	1·50
Calderdale/Kirklees	19·89	9·70	1·30	0·10	0·03	0·03	0·03	0·10	5·00	0·20	0·80	2·00	0·40	0·20	0·00	0·00	1·50
Humberside	35·07	17·90	1·60	0·10	0·02	0·05	0·00	0·10	8·50	1·00	1·40	3·20	1·00	0·20	0·00	0·00	2·70
Leeds	19·34	8·80	1·30	0·00	0·02	0·02	0·00	0·10	5·20	0·70	0·00	2·30	0·70	0·20	0·00	0·00	2·00
North Yorkshire	16·16	8·00	1·50	0·00	0·02	0·02	0·02	0·10	3·20	0·10	0·30	2·20	0·60	0·10	0·00	0·00	1·40
Rotherham	11·44	5·60	0·50	0·10	0·02	0·02	0·00	0·10	2·70	0·40	0·40	1·10	0·40	0·10	0·00	0·00	1·10
Sheffield	21·28	9·50	1·40	0·10	0·02	0·03	0·03	0·10	6·20	0·80	0·00	2·20	0·70	0·20	0·00	0·00	2·10
Wakefield	11·24	5·30	0·60	0·00	0·02	0·02	0·00	0·10	3·00	0·20	0·50	1·20	0·20	0·10	0·00	0·00	1·30

	Total	*YT and credits*	*WRFE*	*Compacts*	*EBPs*	*TPS*	*Careers partners*	*Careers libraries*	*Employ training ex. allows*	*HTNT*	*Employ action ex. allows*	*Business enterprise support*	*LIF*	*National devel project*	*Research*	*Youth devel project*	*TEC MGMT fee*
Yorkshire and Humberside Total	177·05	88·30	9·90	0·70	0·20	0·25	0·12	0·90	43·50	4·20	5·00	17·50	5·00	1·48	0·00	0·00	15·30
Bolton/Bury	13·40	6·88	1·03	0·10	0·02	0·02	0·03	0·05	2·12	0·21	0·71	1·53	0·27	0·45	0·00	0·00	0·97
Manchester	35·82	16·41	2·59	0·20	0·04	0·06	0·05	0·13	8·71	0·85	1·68	4·32	0·45	0·34	0·00	0·00	3·50
METROTEC	10·45	5·31	0·73	0·10	0·01	0·02	0·03	0·03	2·18	0·20	0·43	1·15	0·25	0·01	0·00	0·00	0·84
Oldham	8·43	4·83	0·41	0·10	0·01	0·01	0·03	0·02	1·54	0·07	0·29	0·78	0·27	0·06	0·00	0·00	0·76
Rochdale	8·13	3·77	0·53	0·10	0·01	0·01	0·03	0·02	2·13	0·00	0·45	0·74	0·27	0·06	0·00	0·00	0·74
South and East Cheshire	12·02	6·48	0·68	0·02	0·01	0·01	0·02	0·03	1·92	0·06	0·70	1·36	0·27	0·45	0·01	0·00	0·81
Stockport	9·51	4·73	0·67	0·02	0·01	0·02	0·04	0·04	1·59	0·13	0·23	1·52	0·34	0·17	0·00	0·00	0·96
North West (GM) Total	97·77	48·41	6·63	0·64	0·12	0·15	0·21	0·33	20·20	1·52	4·49	11·40	2·12	1·54	0·01	0·00	8·59
CEWTEC	19·31	9·46	0·99	0·10	0·02	0·03	0·00	0·06	4·98	0·40	0·52	2·40	0·27	0·08	0·00	0·00	1·65
Cumbria	16·24	9·65	0·77	0·02	0·02	0·02	0·03	0·07	2·39	0·30	0·66	1·60	0·30	0·41	0·00	0·00	1·44
ELTEC	17·52	9·31	1·61	0·02	0·02	0·02	0·02	0·07	3·45	0·00	0·46	1·89	0·30	0·33	0·02	0·00	1·28
LAWTEC	26·30	12·79	2·39	0·10	0·03	0·04	0·02	0·10	4·89	1·26	1·19	2·76	0·44	0·26	0·03	0·00	2·05
Merseyside	47·40	22·75	2·21	0·30	0·04	0·05	0·00	0·11	13·19	0·51	3·03	4·30	0·41	0·50	0·00	0·00	3·60
NORMID	13·30	7·17	0·96	0·10	0·02	0·02	0·02	0·05	2·71	0·00	0·34	1·45	0·72	0·19	0·00	0·00	1·27
QUALITEC	9·05	5·07	0·42	0·10	0·01	0·01	0·03	0·02	1·95	0·06	0·41	0·62	0·27	0·08	0·00	0·00	0·78
North West (W) Total	129·81	76·20	9·35	0·74	0·16	0·19	0·12	0·48	33·56	2·53	6·61	15·02	2·26	1·85	0·05	0·00	12·07
Durham	27·55	12·99	1·05	0·05	0·02	0·03	0·03	0·09	8·45	0·36	0·49	2·48	1·33	0·12	0·00	0·06	2·54
Northumberland	13·93	7·75	0·41	0·00	0·01	0·01	0·02	0·05	2·89	0·00	0·68	1·30	0·35	0·46	0·00	0·00	1·35
Teeside	30·65	15·66	1·02	0·10	0·02	0·03	0·00	0·09	9·18	0·33	1·29	2·38	0·44	0·11	0·00	0·00	2·83
Tyneside	37·37	17·04	1·48	0·40	0·04	0·05	0·06	0·11	10·71	0·79	1·64	3·49	1·00	0·43	0·00	0·13	3·08
Wearside	16·89	7·35	0·73	0·10	0·01	0·01	0·01	0·05	5·17	0·65	0·82	1·29	0·52	0·18	0·00	0·00	1·58
Northern Total	126·39	60·79	4·69	0·65	0·10	0·13	0·12	0·39	36·40	2·13	4·92	10·94	3·64	1·30	0·00	0·19	11·38

Industrial Tribunals

Ms. Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many cases were brought before industrial tribunals in each year since 1979 under *(a)* the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978, provisions relating to (1) unfair dismissal, (2) redundancy pay, (3) contract of employment, (4) trade union activities and (5) other provisions, *(b)* the Equal Pay Act 1970, *(c)* the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, *(d)* the Race Relations Act 1976, *(e)* the Employment Act 1980, *(f)* the Employment Act 1988 and *(g)* the Wages Act 1986 and *(h)* the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981.

Mr. McLoughlin: The following tables show the information available on applications in Great Britain. Before 1 April 1985 the information was collected in calendar years. Since then it has been collected in financial years. The industrial tribunals do not currently have the jurisdiction to hear contract of employment claims.

Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978

	Unfair dismissal	*Redundancy pay*	*Trade union activities*	*EPCA others*
1991-92	40,403	8,505	775	2,043
1990-91	25,525	4,575	849	1,563
1989-90	19,846	3,203	470	1,627
1988-89	19,336	2,431	387	1,636
1987-88	19,911	2,674	550	1,692
1986-87	25,298	3,236	5,213	1,733
1985-86	25,718	3,732	917	1,736
[1]1985	7,186	865	183	426
1984	30,326	3,685	N/a	3,526
1983	31,541	3,778	N/a	2,213
1982	34,960	3,898	N/a	2,601
1981	37,398	3,713	N/a	2,514
1980	33,585	4,303	N/a	2,206
1979	35,255	2,366	N/a	2,255

[1] January—March.

	EqPA	*SDA*	*RRA*	*EA80*	*EA88*	*WA*	*TUPE*
1991-92	887	2,684	1,375	1	11	9,691	17
1990-91	612	1,936	1,178	10	15	6,237	32
1989-90	1,195	1,029	1,084	19	212	5,416	20
1988-89	583	903	1,025	11	—	2,628	14
1987-88	1,823	679	762	8	—	1,782	7
1986-87	614	612	681	12	—	34	6
1985-86	1,708	430	649	15	—	—	7
[1]1985	76	96	182	6	—	—	—
1984	350	376	2,950	20	—	—	n/a
1983	1,258	353	540	n/a	—	—	n/a
1982	788	406	550	n/a	—	—	n/a
1981	92	296	525	n/a	—	—	n/a
1980	81	486	474	n/a	—	—	n/a
1979	191	277	622	n/a	—	—	n/a

[1] January to March.

Note: jurisdiction codes are as follows:

UD—unfiar dismissal,
RP—redundancy payment,
TU Activities—trade union activities,
EPCA Others—other provisions of the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978,

EqPA—Equal Pay Act 1970,
SDA—Sex Discrimination Act 1975,
RRA—Race Relations Act 1976,
EA80—Employment Act 1980,
EA88—Employment Act 1988,
WA—Wages Act 1986,
TUPE—Transfer of Undertakings Regulations (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981.

n/a denotes that the information is not available.

Wages Councils

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of firms inspected by wages councils in 1990-91 were prosecuted for illegal rates of pay.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In 1990-91, the time and wage records of 33,032 employers' establishments were inspected by wages inspectors. The great majority were found to be complying with the law. Of the firms prosecuted, four were prosecuted for failing to pay not less than the statutory minimum remuneration required by wages orders.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) on 4 November, *Official Report*, columns *298-99*, which of the studies listed she assesses as showing a positive link between the existence of statutory minimum pay rates and the loss of or failure to create jobs.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The main studies in the United Kingdom which provide supporting evidence are as follows:

—Her Majesty's Treasury, (1985). "The relationship between employment and wages". London: HMSO.

—Wells, W. (1983). "The relative pay and employment of young people", Department of Employment research paper No. 42.

—Bazen, S. (1990). "On the employment effects of introducing a National Minimum Wage in the UK", British Journal of Industrial Relations, 1990.

—Dennison, S. R. and Forrest, D. (1984). "Low pay or no pay; a review of the theory and practice of minimum wage laws" Institute of Economic Affairs, Hobart Paper No. 101.

—Gregg, P. (1992). "National minimum wage", in the National Institute Economic Review, February 1992.

—Minford, P. (1989). "The effects in the UK of EEC wage proposals in the social charter", in the Liverpool Quarterly Economic Bulletin, December 1989.

—UBS Phillips and Drew (1991). Economic Briefing, June 1991.

—Kaufman, R. (1989): "The effects on statutory minimum rates of pay on employment in Great Britain", Economic Journal, December 1989.

—Morgan, P. Paterson, D. and Barrie, R. (1986). "Wage floors in the clothing industry 1950-81", Department of Employment research paper No. 52.

—Neuburger, H. (1984). "From the dole queue to the sweatshop", London: Low Pay Unit.

There are also other studies in the United Kingdom which contain some supporting evidence, though the results are less clear cut. They include:

—Canning, D. and Tarling, R. (1985). "A report on the Department of Employment's study 'Wages floors in the clothing industry 1950-1981'", Department of Applied Economics, Cambridge, 1985.

—Craig, C. and Wilkinson, F. (1986). "Pay and employment in four retail trades", Department of Employment research paper No. 51.

—Lund, P. Morris, T. Temple, J. Watson, J. (1982). "Wages and employment in agriculture 1960-1980", GES working paper No. 52.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many constituencies in the United Kingdom have higher registered unemployment at the present time than in April 1979.

Mr. McLoughlin: Unemployment data for parliamentary constituencies are available from June 1983 only, and on the unadjusted basis, and can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library.

Benefit Statistics

Mrs. Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are in receipt of unemployment benefit while working or studying for more than 24 hours per week in the constituency of Paisley, North.

Mr. McLoughlin: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mrs. Irene Adams, dated 18 February 1993:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to write to you direct to respond to your Parliamentary Question to her about the number of people in receipt of unemployment benefit while working or studying for more than 24 hours per week in the constituency of Paisley North. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

Unfortunately, I am unable to provide the information you have requested as data about the number of people who are in receipt of unemployment benefit while working or studying for more than 24 hours per week is not collated or published.

I am sorry I cannot be of help on this occasion.

As decided by the Administration Committee of the House of Commons, Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary Questions will now be published in the Official Report. I will also place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 19 February 1993

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid

Mr. Olner: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assumptions were made in the public expenditure survey figures published on 12 November 1992 for the average cost of criminal legal aid bills in the magistrates courts to be paid in 1993-94.

Mr. John M. Taylor: It is estimated that the average cost of criminal legal aid bills in the magistrates courts in 1993-94 would be £484 if the current rates and levels of fees were maintained.

Mr. Olner: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will provide a detailed breakdown of savings to be achieved from his proposed changes to legal aid eligibility.

Mr. John M. Taylor: It is estimated that the measures announced by the Lord Chancellor on 12 November 1992 will reduce legal aid expenditure by £43 million in 1993-94, £110 million in 1994-95, and £173 million in 1995-96. It is not possible to provide separate figures for all the individual proposals, since most of them are interdependent and can only be costed together.

Mr. Olner: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the estimate for the average cost of criminal legal aid bills in the magistrates courts paid in 1992-93.

Mr. John M. Taylor: On the latest information, the average cost of a criminal legal aid bill in the magistrates courts in 1992-93 is estimated to be £459.

Mr. Olner: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what was the cost to legal aid in each case prosecuted by the Metropolitan police fraud investigation group in which the legal bills were determined after 1 April 1992;

(2) what was the cost to legal aid for each case prosecuted by the Serious Fraud Office in which the legal aid bills were paid after 1 April 1992.

Mr. John M. Taylor It is not possible to identify individual cases prosecuted by the Metropolitan police fraud investigation group and the Serious Fraud Office from information held centrally by my Department. It is therefore not possible to identify the total amount paid from legal aid from 1 April 1992 in cases being brought by the Metropolitan police fraud investigation group or Serious Fraud Office.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will state for each magistrates court in England and Wales what percentage of applications for criminal legal aid was refused on merit in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Information on the grant of criminal legal aid in magistrates courts for 1991, which is the latest year for which figures are available, was published on 4 August 1992. Copies are available in the Library. The figures do not distinguish between refusals on grounds of merits and on means.

Mr. Olner: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the effect on costs to the court system of changes in the numbers of litigants in person appearing before the civil and criminal courts resulting from the proposed changes in arrangements in legal aid elegibility.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Very little effect is expected on criminal legal aid as a result of the eligibility changes. So far as civil legal aid is concerned, the Department does not envisage that there will be any significant increase in the number of unrepresented litigants.

Mr. Olner: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will publish the advice tendered to the Lord Chancellor by his advisory committee on legal aid about the proposed changes to the arrangements for legal aid eligibility.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The legal aid advisory committee has already made public its advice to the Lord Chancellor on the proposed eligibility changes and the Lord Chancellor's response to its advice. I have placed copies of the correspondence in the Library.

Mr. Olner: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what was the number of grants of criminal legal aid for magistrates courts in *(a)* 1991 and *(b)* 1992;

(2) how many legal aid orders were granted for each magistrates court for which information is available *(a)* between October and December 1991 and *(b)* between October and December 1992.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The number of grants of criminal legal aid for magistrates courts in 1991, as published in the Lord Chancellor's Department "Judicial Statistics" (1991 edition, table 10·2), was 514,000. The figure for 1992 is not yet available, but is estimated to be 513,000.

The number of legal aid orders granted for each magistrates' court for which information is available, from 355 courts, between October and December 1991 was as follows:

	Number
Bristol	**1,363**
Long Ashton	**57**
Weston-Super-Mare	**184**
North Avon	**490**
Bath and Wandyke	**291**
Ampthill	**24**
Bedford	**265**
Biggleswade	**46**
Forest	**151**
Slough	**215**
Windsor	**95**
West Berkshire	**245**
Reading and Sonning	**726**
Burnham	**85**
Aylesbury	**173**
Buckingham	**18**
Wycombe	**182**
Chiltern	**69**
Chester	**624**

	Number
Ellesmere Port and Neston	0
Halton	310
Warrington	506
Hartlepool	308
Langbaurgh	124
Teesside	1,373
East Penwith	62
East Powder	128
Pydar	33
Bodmin	0
South East Cornwall	0
Truro and South Power	78
Falmouth and Kerrier	64
Dunheved and Stratton	89
Carlisle	356
Keswick	309
North Lonsdale	0
Whitehaven	0
Wigton	22
West Allerdale	0
Barrow with Bootle	180
South Lakes	14
Kendal and Lonsdale	43
Appleby	1
Penrith and Alston	26
Norwich	893
Diss	0
Wymondham	0
Great Yarmouth	279
Cromer	48
Thetford	213
North Walsham	38
Chesterfield	420
Glossop	74
High Peak	102
Ilkeston	374
Alfreton and Belper	137
Derby and South Derbyshire	916
West Derbyshire	82
Norwich	0
Axminster	0
Cullompter	0
Exeter	533
Exmouth	0
Honiton	0
Kingsbridge	18
Okehampton	50
Plymouth	632
Plympton	17
Tavistock	0
Teignbridge	157
Tiverton	0
Torbay	310
Totnes	28
Wonford	0
Bournemouth	624
Bridport	34
Christchurch	70
Dorchester	16
Poole	315
Sherborne	16
Wareham	72
Weymouth and Portland	216
Wimborne	83
Blandford and Sturminster	25
Shaftesbury	25
Chester-le-Street	122
Darlington	190
Derwentside	171
Durham	165
Easington	279
Sedgefield	278
Battle and Rye	46
Bexhill	65
Brighton	556
Crowborough	44
Eastbourne	259
Hailsham	47
Hastings	294
Lewes	116
Basildon	296
Brentwood	102
Dunmow	33
Freshwell and South Hinckford	49
Harlow	170
Harwich	74
Saffron Walden	37
Tendring	171
Thurrock	241
Halstead and Hedingham	19
Rochford and Southend	839
Maldon and Witham	101
Cheltenham	391
Tewkesbury	31
Gloucester	433
South Gloucestershire	188
North Cotswold	35
Forest of Dean	92
Bolton	846
Bury	426
Manchester	1,740
Oldham	541
Middleton and Heywood	154
Rochdale	553
Eccles	161
Salford	510
Stockport	731
Trafford	422
Leigh	242
Wigan	375
Havant	344
Odiham (Aldershot)	248
Portsmouth	782
Southampton	717
Alton and Petersfield	100
Havering	394
Bromsgrove	108
Redditch	201
Mid-Worcestershire	189
Worcester-City	213
Docorum	150
South Mimms	0
Watford	339
Barton-upon-Humber	6
Brigg	11
Epworth and Goole	77
Kingston-upon-Hull	1,083
Middle Holderness	4
Scunthorpe	326
South Holderness	7
Grimsby and Cleethorpes	599
Canterbury and St. Augustine	177
Dartford	118
Gravesham	0
Maidstone	164
Margate	132
Medway	520
Ramsgate	106
Sevenoaks	78
Tonbridge and Malling	137
Tunbridge Wells and Cranbrook	139
Faversham and Sittingbourne	225
Blackpool	527
Burnley	289
Lancaster	241
Ormskirk	226
Preston	458
Rossendale	161
South Ribble	222
Hyndburn	215
Ashy-de-la-Zouch	58
Leicester (City)	657
Market Bosworth	102
Caistor	6
Gainsborough	126

	Number
Elloes	**104**
Wolds	**57**
Lincoln District	**385**
Sleaford	**36**
Market Rasen	**11**
Spilsby and Skegness	**294**
Knowsley	**515**
Liverpool	**2,604**
St. Helens	**564**
North Sefton	**451**
South Sefton	**68**
Corby	**164**
Daventry	**50**
Kettering	**179**
Northampton	**434**
Towcester	**42**
Wellingborough	**206**
Morpeth Ward	**96**
Wansbeck	**192**
Tynedale	**100**
Coquetdale	**74**
Berwick upon Tweed	**42**
Scarborough	**174**
Selby	**109**
Staincliffe	**74**
York	**341**
Northallerton	**106**
Easingwold	**34**
Richmond	**66**
Ryedale	**47**
East Retford	**73**
Worksop	**181**
Mansfield	**550**
Newark and Southwell	**187**
Nottingham	**1,670**
Guildhall	**277**
Bow Street MC	**661**
Clerkenwell MC	**734**
Marlborough Street MC	**542**
Marylebone MC	**653**
Old Street MC	**399**
South Western MC	**851**
Thames MC	**552**
Tower Bridge MC	**656**
West London MC (Southcombe S)	**492**
Woolwich MC	**410**
Camberwell Green MC	**1,147**
Walton Street MC (West London)	**8**
Horseferry Road MC	**759**
Highbury Corner MC	**1,129**
Bicester	**62**
Oxford	**382**
Abingdon	**88**
Woodstock	**20**
North Oxford and Chipping Norton	**124**
Witney	**47**
Sedgemoor	**206**
Taunton Deane	**162**
West Somerset	**25**
Mendip	**114**
East Oxfordshire	**49**
Didcot and Wantage	**52**
Stratford MC (Newham)	**682**
Barnet	**161**
Bromley	**552**
Bexley	**343**
Croydon	**713**
Sutton	**393**
Ealing MC	**870**
Hampstead MC	**52**
Edmonton/Tottenham (Enfield)	**601**
Harrow MC	**303**
Willesden MC	**651**
Uxbridge	**559**
Richmond upon Thames	**266**
Barnsley	**601**
Doncaster	**563**
Sheffield	**2,282**
Burton-upon-Trent	**246**
Cheadle	**121**
Eccleshall	**0**
Leek	**0**
Lichfield	**119**
Newcastle-under-Lyme	**276**
Pirehill North	**0**
Stafford	**260**
Stoke-on-Trent	**888**
Stone	**0**
Tamworth	**131**
Uttoxeter	**0**
Kingston-upon-Thames	**418**
Barking	**299**
Beccles	**318**
Felixstowe	**45**
Mildenhall (Lackford)	**51**
Lowestoft	**0**
Newmarket	**31**
Risbridge	**56**
Sudbury and Cosford	**61**
Woodbridge	**19**
Ipswich	**423**
Saxmundham	**0**
St. Edmundsbury	**116**
Stow	**51**
Dorking	**104**
Epsom	**103**
Guildford	**314**
Staines and Sunbury	**153**
Gateshead	**516**
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	**650**
North Tyneside	**489**
South Tyneside	**487**
Houghton-le-Spring	**180**
Sunderland	**704**
Rugby	**142**
South Warwickshire	**91**
Mid-Warwickshire	**201**
Birmingham	**2,563**
Sutton Coldfield	**325**
Coventry	**1,203**
Dudley	**533**
Halesowen	**81**
Stourbridge	**88**
Warley	**390**
West Bromwich	**311**
Solihull	**584**
Aldridge and Brownhills	**188**
Wolverhampton	**631**
Horsham	**102**
Mid Sussex	**169**
Steyning	**302**
Worthing	**0**
Bradford	**1,043**
Keighley	**315**
Brighouse	**44**
Todmorden	**43**
Calder	**434**
Huddersfield	**486**
Leeds	**1,874**
Morley	**0**
Pudsey and Otley	**0**
Skyrack and Wetherby	**0**
Pontefract	**330**
Wakefield	**361**
Batley and Dewsbury	**328**
Salisbury	**203**
West Wiltshire	**193**
Berwyn	**37**
Colwyn	**98**
Dyffryn Clwyd	**46**
Rhuddlan	**222**
Wrexham Maelor	**256**
Llanelli	**229**

	Number
Ceredigion Ganol	35
Gogledd Ceredigion	65
De Ceredigion	21
Dinefwr	85
Bedwellty	255
Newport	389
East Gwent	235
Bangor	0
Eifionydd	0
North Anglesey	0
Pwllheli	0
South Anglesey	128
Caernarfon and Gwyrfai	228
Cynon Valley	293
Lower Rhymney Valley	190
Merthyr Tydfil	347
Miskin	663
Upper Rhymney Valley	26
Drayton	60
Oswestry	70
Shrewsbury	240
Machynlleth	99
Welshpool	0
Vale of Glamorgan	253
Newtown	0
Port Talbot	146
Lliw Valley	139
Swansea	675
Total	96,863

The number of legal aid orders granted for each magistrates court for which information is available, from 219 courts, between October and December 1992 was as follows:—

	Number
Bristol	1,279
Bath and Wandyke	253
Woodspring	214
Ampthill	26
Bedford	195
Biggleswade	45
West Berkshire	202
Reading and Sonning	642
Burnham	75
Aylesbury	186
Buckingham	27
Chiltern	68
Huntingdonshire	248
Halton	294
Warrington	422
Hartlepool	302
Langbaurgh	107
Teesside	1,363
East Penwith	82
Truro and South Powder	47
Falmouth and Kerrier	53
Carlisle	243
Whitehaven	220
Wigton	16
South Lakes	17
Kendal and Lonsdale	72
Appleby	3
Penrith and Alston	40
Chesterfield	582
Glossop	47
High Peak	84
West Derbyshire	78
Central Norfolk	0
Norwich	688
South Norfolk	163
Plymouth	558
Teignbridge	110
Torbay	205
Bournemouth	695
Bridport	34
Christchurch	62
Dorchester	31
Poole	236
Sherborne	9
Wareham	40
Weymouth and Portland	162
Wimborne	55
Blandford and Sturminster	52
Shaftesbury	18
Chester-le-Street	91
Darlington	259
Durham	216
Easington	297
Sedgefield	289
Teesdale and Wear Valley	257
Brighton	361
Crowborough	45
Eastbourne	177
Hailsham	51
Hove	85
Lewes	93
Basildon	192
Brentwood	54
Thurrock	198
Rochford and Southend	822
Cheltenham	411
Tewkesbury	31
South Gloucestershire	150
North Cotswold	37
Forest of Dean	90
Manchester	1,409
Oldham	678
Rochdale	343
Salford	400
Leigh	150
Wigan	254
Odiham (Aldershot)	210
Portsmouth	779
Alton and Petersfield	108
Dacorum	138
Watford	275
South and Middle Holderness	7
Scunthorpe Brigg and Barton Division	257
Epworth and Goole	80
Grimsby and Cleethorpes	433
Maidstone	229
Margate	82
Ramsgate	74
Tunbridge Wells and Cranbrook	130
Faversham and Sittingbourne	162
Burnley	344
Lancaster	153
Ormskirk	142
Preston	289
Hyndburn	218
Ashby-de-la-Zouch	64
Leicester	658
Market Bosworth	106
Market Harborough and Lutter	28
Caistor	9
Gainsborough	122
Wolds	60
Lincoln District	345
Market Rasen	7
Spilsdy and Skegness	227
Knowsley	312
Liverpool	2,464
St. Helens	454
North Sefton	396
South Sefton	240
Daventry	66

	Number
Kettering	161
Northampton	359
Towcester	36
Wellingborough	163
Morpeth Ward	87
Berwick upon Tweed	59
Scarborough	162
Selby	43
Staincliffe	72
York	210
Northallerton	124
Easingwold	37
Richmond	49
Ryedale	36
East Retford	65
Worksop	154
Mansfield	523
Newark and Southwell	140
Nottingham	1,654
Bow Street MC	493
Clerkenwell MC	525
Marylebone MC	380
Old Street MC	500
South Western MC	772
Thames MC	572
Tower Bridge MC	547
West London MC (Southcombe-S)	367
Woolwich MC	380
Camberwell Green MC	849
Walton Street MC (West London)	9
Horseferry Road MC	481
Henley	61
Oxford	271
Abingdon	89
Witney	42
Sedgemoor	130
Mendip	113
Didcot and Wantage	63
Stratford MC (Newham)	473
West Ham MC	0
Bromley	380
Bexley	186
Croydon	726
Sutton	229
Ealing MC	631
Hampstead MC	84
Harrow MC	253
Uxbridge	352
Richmond upon Thames	274
Barnsley	674
Doncaster	544
Sheffield	1,828
Mid-Staffordshire	265
Staffordshire Moorlands	107
Newcastle-under-Lyme and Pirehill	224
Barking	223
Mildenhall (Lackford)	43
Newmarket	32
Risbridge	28
Sudbury and Cosford	59
St. Edmundsbury	75
Stow	21
Dorking	99
Epsom	95
Esher and Walton	78
Guildford	201
Staines and Sunbury	120
Gateshead	543
North Tyneside	432
Birmingham	1,899
Sutton Coldfield	336
Coventry	871
Dudley	411
Halesowen	76
Stourbridge	72
Warley	296
West Bromwich	194
Solihull	475
Horsham	65
Bradford	994
Keighley	250
Brighouse	38
Todmorden	32
Calder	337
Huddersfield	448
Pontefract	250
Wakefield	347
Batley and Dewsbury	292
Salisbury	671
West Wiltshire	178
Berwyn	17
Rhuddlan	189
Wrexham Maelor	207
Gogledd Preseli	16
South Pembrokeshire	101
Bedwellty	221
East Gwent	203
Caernarfon and Gwyrfai	203
Cynon Valley	159
Lower Rhymney Valley	204
Merthyr Tydfil	270
Miskin	663
Newcastle and Ogmore	311
Upper Rhymney Valley	28
Oswestry	58
Shrewsbury	201
Lliw Valley	0
Swansea	790
TOTAL	60,188

Mr. Olner: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is his Department's estimate of the number of *(a)* contributory civil legal aid certificates and *(b)* non-contributory civil legal aid certificates to be issued in 1993-94 if (i) the financial conditions remain unchanged and (ii) the Lord Chancellor's proposals announced on 12 November are introduced.

Mr. John M. Taylor: It is estimated that in 1993-94 283,000 civil legal aid certificates will be issued of which 198,000 will be non-contributory and 85,000 contributory. If eligibility conditions had not been changed, it is estimated that 410,000 certificates would have been issued in 1993-94 of which about 330,000 would have been non-contributory and 80,000 contributory.

Women Judges

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* Lords of Appeal, *(b)* heads of division, *(c)* High Court, for each of its three divisions, *(d)* Crown court, *(e)* circuit and *(f)* district judges and stipendiry magistrates there are in total; and how many in each category are women.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The total number and the number of women in these categories as at 1 February 1993 were as follows:

	Men	*Women*	*Total*
Lords of Appeal in Ordinary	10	0	10
Lords Justices of Appeal	27	1	28
Heads of divisions (excluding the Lord Chancellor)	4	0	4

	Men	Women	Total
High court judges	79	4	83
of whom: Chancery Division	13	0	13
Family Division	13	2	15
Queen's Bench Division	53	2	55
Circuit judges	463	24	487
District judges	250	19	269
Metropolitan stipendiary magistrates	41	7	48
Provincial stipendiary magistrates	28	2	30

Circuit judges sit in both county courts and the crown court.

Tribunals

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what action he intends to take to ensure that more people from ethnic minority communities in the London borough of Waltham Forest are appointed to all tribunals under the independent tribunal service; and what is the present composition of all tribunals serving Waltham Forest.

Mr. John M. Taylor: To encourage more ethnic minority practitioners to come forward for consideration, the Lord Chancellor has made widely available to ethnic minority practitioners and representative groups the booklet which sets out the requirements for each appointment and describes the judicial appointments system generally.

The Lord Chancellor's policy is to appoint to judicial office those best qualified, regardless of sex, ethnic origin, political affiliation or religion and appointments must be justified on merit. The Lord Chancellor appoints only the legal chairmen of the tribunals under the independent tribunal service.

Information held on the ethnic origin of 18 members of the social security appeal tribunal in Walthamstow, which serves Waltham Forest, shows that three out of the 18 are from ethnic minorities.

Figures are not kept separately for that area for the other tribunals under the service. For the whole South Eastern region, one out of 105 members of the medical appeal tribunals/vaccine damage tribunals and 66 out of 454 members of the disability appeal tribunals are from the ethnic minorities.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Royal Family (Publicity)

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what, for the latest available year, was the cost to his Department of expenditure in support of the royal family in respect of publicity services.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answers given on 11 December 1992, *Official Report*, column *801*, and 14 January 1993, *Official Report*, columns *767-78*. The cost of work undertaken for the royal household by the Central Office of Information in 1991-92 for press facilities totalled £318,260, excluding VAT.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Recycling

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what proportion of waste from the Houses of Parliament is currently recycled; and what plans he has to improve that proportion.

Mr. Ray Powell: It is not possible to say precisely what proportion of total waste from the Houses of Parliament, which includes kitchen refuse, is recycled, but all paper and glass is collected by a contractor and recycled. Arrangements have been made during the past year for metal cans to be collected and sorted off site so that they, too, can be recycled. The Parliamentary Works Department also retains reusable timber and metal from building projects. Proposals are currently being sought for the collection and recycling of plastics, although it is too early to say whether any of these will prove viable.

Stationery

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what arrangements are in hand to secure the supply of stationery to hon. and right hon. Members following the receivership of one of the suppliers.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: This is a matter for the Serjeant at Arms.

EMPLOYMENT

Training Expenditure

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what has been the expenditure on participants in *(a)* employment action and *(b)* employment training in each year of operation;

(2) what has been the expenditure on providers in *(a)* employment action and *(b)* employment training in each year of operation;

(3) what has been the total expenditure, including administrative costs, on *(a)* employment action and *(b)* employment training, in each year of operation.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information is not available in the form requested. The Department contracts with training and enterprise councils (TECs) to provide agreed numbers of training weeks for employment action and employment training and outputs for employment training at agreed unit prices.

Total expenditure on both programmes, excluding administrative costs, in each year of operation is shown in the following table. The Department does not record separate administrative costs on a programme basis.

Expenditure on employment training and employment action
Great Britain

£ million

Year	Employment training	Employment action
1988-89	425	—
1989-90	1,107	—
1990-91	1,076	—
1991-92	842	16
1992-93[1]	807	178

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[1] Figures for 1992-93 show planned provision.

Tourism

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps her Department has taken to implement the recommendations of "Tourism in the United Kingdom: Realising the Potential" as it applies to her Department's responsibilities; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: A healthy tourism sector is vital to the United Kingdom economy. The Employment Department, TECs, industry training organisations and the National Council for Vocational Qualifications are working together to ensure that individuals have the necessary skills to support the industry's needs.

National vocational qualifications and Scottish vocational qualifications are now available for most occupations in the tourism and leisure sector. Following the introduction of general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) last year 56 centres are now offering the GNVQ in tourism and leisure with 19 per cent. of all candidates undertaking the Leisure and Tourism option. A tourism and leisure consortium was formed in April 1992 with representatives from a wide range of organisations and this group is considering industrywide approaches to qualifications in the sector and how their implementation might best be achieved.

Voluntary Sector

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people have been employed in the voluntary sector in the United Kingdom in each year since 1979.

Mr. McLoughlin: Neither the Employment Department nor the Home Office, which is generally responsible for liaison with the voluntary sector, records data on the number of waged people employed in voluntary organisations.

Construction Industry Training Board

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when she will reach a decision regarding the future of the construction industry training board; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: I hope to make an announcement shortly.

Wages

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many companies in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland as a whole have been found to be paying below minimum rates set by wages councils in each of the past seven years; and what is the amount of money calculated to be owed to employees in each of these years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 17 February 1993]:* Separate statistics for Strathclyde are not available. The information for Scotland is provided in the table:

Part 2 of Wages Act 1986: Wages inspectorate statistics Scotland

Year	*Number of establishments underpaying*	*Amount of arrears assessed (£)*
1985	849	238,422
1986	656	187,914
1987	323	86,872
1988	509	128,514
1989	547	166,578
1990	619	175,993
1991	737	184,001

PRIME MINISTER

Cayman Islands

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Prime Minister what are the statutory and administrative links between the Bank of England and the monetary authority for the Cayman Islands.

The Prime Minister: There are no statutory links. Administratively, the Cayman Islands has since 1962 invited one of the Bank of England's London-based staff to serve as a member of its board of commissioners of currency. The Cayman Islands inspectorate of banks and trust companies has also since 1978 engaged a succession of International Monetary Fund secondees who all have been employees of the Bank. Some training has also been given.

Publicity

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 2 June 1992 to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), *Official Report,* column *390,* what is the Cabinet Office's *(a)* current outturn estimate for publicity expenditure for 1992-93 and *(b)* budgeted publicity expenditure for 1993-94.

The Prime Minister: The current estimate for press and public relations expenditure by the Cabinet Office for 1992-93 is £366,000. In addition, it is expected that expenditure on publicity and public information associated with the citizens charter in 1992-93 will be some £700,000. Budgets for 1993-94 have not yet been finalised.

Unincorporated Bodies (Accounts)

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Prime Minister if he will bring forward proposals to require unincorporated bodies to produce audited accounts; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The Charities Act 1992 requires the accounts of unincorporated registered charities with an income of over £100,000 per annum to be audited. I have no plans for extending to unincorporated bodies generally the Companies Act requirement to prepare audited accounts.

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Prime Minister what steps he proposes to take to ensure that all bodies in the United Kingdom, with turnover over £5 million, produce full audited accounts.

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to take such steps.

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Prime Minister what steps he has taken to ensure that all external funds received by unincorporated bodies in the United Kingdom from abroad are fully taxed; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The Inland Revenue takes all reasonable steps to ensure that, where appropriate, funds received from abroad by unincorporated bodies are properly taxed.

Political Parties (Finance)

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what steps he will take to investigate the origin of overseas funds paid to United Kingdom political parties; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will introduce legislation to require all political parties to account for *(a)* all donations over £500 and *(b)* donations received from abroad;

(3) if he will introduce legislation to require political parties to disclose to the public the full extent of overseas donations received; and if he will make a statement;

(4) if he will introduce legislation to require all political parties in the United Kingdom to produce full audited accounts; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to take any such steps.

Disabled Employees

Miss Lestor: To ask the Prime Minister what percentage of employees in his Office are registered disabled.

The Prime Minister: None. For recruitment purposes, my office is part of the Cabinet Office. The percentage of registered disabled persons employed by the Cabinet Office is 1·1 per cent. The Cabinet Office is an equal opportunities employer and seeks to encourage the employment of people with disabilities.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Land Mines

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contact he has had with the United States Government regarding the United States moratorium on the export of land mines.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has had no discussions with the United States Government on this issue.

Mr. Faisal Mahmood

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will arrange for instructions to be sent to the post in Karachi concerning the entry clearance application made by Mr. Faisal Mahmood, born on 23 August 1969, to join his wife in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Mr. Faisal Mahmood was refused entry clearance on 31 December 1992 by the deputy high commission in Karachi as the entry clearance officer was not satisfied, as he is required to be under the immigration rules, that the primary purpose of the marriage was not to gain entry to the United Kingdom. Notice of the refusal was sent to Mr. Mahmood at the address given on his visa application form.

Royal Family

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what, for the latest available year, was the cost to his Department of expenditure on support of the royal family in respect of *(a)* the marshal of the diplomatic service and *(b)* overseas visits at the request of Government Departments.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave to him on 1 February, *Official Report*, column *31*. The cost to the Foreign Office was £67,000 in 1991-92.

The cost to the Foreign Office of royal visits overseas at the request of Government Departments in 1991-92 was £620,000.

Mr. Mordechai Vanunu

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what recent representations he has received regarding the case of Mordechai Vanunu: and if he will make a statement;

(2) what representations Her Majesty's Government have made to the Israeli Government regarding the case of Mordechai Vanunu; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We continue to receive some expressions of public concern. We have raised humanitarian aspects of this case privately with the Israelis, but we have no formal locus.

EC Social Protocol

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his statement of 15 February, *Official Report*, columns 27-28, why he considers it desirable for the social protocol to be incorporated into domestic law, other than for reasons of completeness and tidiness.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The social protocol is an annex to the treaty of Rome, and is therefore an integral part of that treaty. It has been the United Kingdom's consistent legislative practice to incorporate all amendments to the Community treaties into domestic law. This avoids unnecessary complexity in the implementation of our Community obligations.

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his statement of 15 February, *Official Report*, columns 27-28, why he decided to seek legal advice from the Law Officer on the impact of amendment No. 27 to the European Communities (Amendment) Bill.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The decision to consult the Law Officers on the impact of amendment No. 27 was taken in the light of discussion in the House of Commons and elsewhere which highlighted the importance of this question.

Maastricht Treaty

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those parts of the treaty which can be deleted from the European Communities (Amendment) Bill without inhibiting the Government's *(a)* prerogative powers of ratification and *(b)* intention to ratify the treaty.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The potential effect of amending the Bill in any way will be considered in the Committee stage, as is the standard practice.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Industrial Diseases

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will place in the Library the evidence submitted by Professor Morgan of the University of Ontario to the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council inquiry into bronchitis and emphysema.

Mr. Scott: A number of organisations and individuals, including Professor Morgan, submitted written evidence to the council which informed its report, "Chronic Bronchitis and Emphysema" [Cm. 2091]. The council, which is an independent body, often receives unpublished information which it treats in confidence. This is, therefore, a matter for the council and for the individual organisations and persons concerned.

War Pensions

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what communication he has made to the central advisory committee on war pensions in regard to arrears that may be payable to those awarded a war pension as a result of schizophrenia; if he will publish the text; and what response he has had from the committee.

Miss Widdecombe: A letter on the subject was sent to all members of the central advisory committee on war pensions on 25 November 1992; a copy of the letter has been placed in the Library. The committee undertook to publicise the matter.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what reply is being sent by the war pensions directorate to the letter sent to it on 10 November 1992 by the legal director of MIND in regard to war pension entitlements; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The particular case referred to in the letter is being reviewed. A full reply to the legal director of MIND is being sent today.

DEFENCE

TA55

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has as to the time taken between the start of construction of the TA55 facility at Los Alamos and its being declared operational.

Mr. Aitken: This is a matter for the United States authorities.

Trident

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, column *898*, whether the bus being purchased from the United States for the United Kingdom Trident system will be the Mark IV, the Mark V bus, or a combination of the two.

Mr. Aitken: It will be the Mark IV bus.

Armed Forces (Sexual Offences)

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will introduce the proposed legislation to repeal the relevant provisions of the Sexual Offences Act relating to the armed forces.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The necessary amendment to section 1(5) of the Sexual Offences Act 1967 to decriminalise homosexual acts illegal under service law but legal in civilian law will be introduced as soon as the legislative programme allows.

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel have been discharged for inappropriate sexual conduct since 1 January 1991; and of those how many were *(a)* women, *(b)* men and *(c)* discharged for homosexual conduct.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In 1991, the latest year for which figures are available, 25 male personnel were dismissed from the services following conviction for sexual offences of a non-homosexual nature and eight for sexual offences of a homosexual nature. No female personnel were convicted of sexual offences in 1991. Between 1 January 1991 and 15 February 1993, 58 male personnel and 46 female personnel were administratively discharged for being homosexual or engaging in homosexual activities. Information is not held centrally in respect of personnel administratively discharged following sexual misconduct of any other nature and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Services Training

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current average cost per person of basic training for a member of *(a)* the Army, *(b)* the Navy and *(c)* the RAF.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The average cost per person of basic training for members of each of the armed services is as follows:

	Officers £	*Other ranks* £
Royal Navy	19,375	6,531
Army	25,696	5,080
Royal Air Force	14,190	1,898

The figures for the Navy and Army are for 1991-92, but the latest figures available for the RAF are for 1990-91. All figures exclude trainee and pay and allowances.

Royal Family

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost to his Department of expenditure in support of the royal family in respect of *(a)* the royal yacht, *(b)* the Queen's flight, *(c)* royal flights in civil aircraft and *(d)* equerries, for the latest available year.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Expenditure in support of the royal family borne by the Ministry of Defence in 1991-92 was as follows:

	£000
(a) Royal yacht	12,458
(b) Queen's flight	7,080
(c) Royal flights in civil aircraft	732
(d) Equerries	135

Royal Marines Deaths (Norway)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the naphtha-fuelled stove used by the two Royal Marines from 45 Commando who died while on a training exercise in southern Norway was service issue; if preliminary investigations have shown the stove to be faulty; and what plans there are to withdraw similar stoves from armed forces use.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The naphtha-fuelled stove is service issue and its use is subject to the standing instructions for winter deployments by 3 Commando Brigade. The stove in question is now held by the Norwegian authorities as part of their investigations. There are no plans to withdraw similar stoves.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prison Department

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what effect the applicability of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 has had on *(a)* the time taken to implement the privatisation of, and *(b)* the amount of compensation to be paid to the private contractor awarded the contract for, the transport and supplies department of the prison service.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The warehousing and distribution function of the supply and transport department was market-tested in 1991 and approval given to contract out the function from 1 April 1993. No contract has yet been signed. The implications of recent legal advice that the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations are applicable to the contracting out of this function are being considered.

Prisoners

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison inmates serving a life sentence were over the age of *(a)* 60, *(b)* 70 and *(c)* 80 years in prisons in (i) England and Wales, (ii) Scotland and (iii) Northern Ireland on 1 February.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The latest available information is for 30 June 1992 when there were 128 life sentence prisoners aged 60 or more in prison service establishments in England and Wales, of whom 16 were aged 70 or more and one of these was aged over 80. Prison inmates in Scotland and Northern Ireland are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, respectively.

Breach of the Peace

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the application of bail and appeal procedures to breach of the peace.

Mr. Jack: A person ordered to enter into a recognizance to keep the peace may appeal to the crown court under section 1 of the Magistrates' Court (Appeals from Binding-over Orders) Act 1956. Alternatively, he or she may appeal on a point of law by way of case-stated from either a magistrates court or the Crown court, to the High Court. If the person is in custody for refusing to be bound over, the magistrates court or the Crown court, as the case may be, may grant bail pending appeal under section 113 of the Magistrates' Courts Act 1980 or section 81 of the Supreme Court Act, or in either case, the High Court may do so.

Probation Service

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff were employed by the probation service in England and Wales, by grade in *(a)* 1981 and *(b)* 1991 and 1992.

Mr. Jack: The number of staff employed by probation committees in England and Wales, by grade and in post on 31 December 1981 and 30 September 1992, was as follows:

	31 December 1981	*31 December 1991*	*30 September 1992*
Chief probation officer	55	55	55
Deputy chief probation officer	181	24	23
Assistant chief probation officer	—	210	229
Senior probation officer	964	1,163	1,193
Main-grade probation officer	4,453	5,702	5,922
Ancillary	[1]990	1,864	1,851
Others	[1]5,897	5,314	5,396

[1] These figures include 990 part-time ancillary staff and 2,823 part-time other staff and so no direct comparison is possible with the 1991 and 1992 figures which are for full-time equivalent staff.

Lynfield Mount Hospital, Bradford

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the West Yorkshire police as to *(a)* how many complaints were made to the police in each of the last five years, to date, concerning patients at Lynfield Mount hospital and *(b)* in how many cases (i) inquiries were made and (ii) charges were laid; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: No. Operational matters are for the chief officer of the force concerned. I understand, however, that information is not held in a form which would identify such individuals.

Security Service

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make arrangements for hon. Members other than members of the Home Affairs Committee to meet the director of the Security Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: It is open to the director general of the Security Service to make such arrangements for meetings on an informal and private basis as she may wish. Hon. Members will however understand the Government's position on accountability of the service as set out in my letter of 13 November 1992 to the Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will conduct a study of the way in which parliamentary accountability exists for their security services in other EC countries.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I am aware that other countries have approached the issue of the accountability of their security services in a different way from that reflected for the United Kingdom in the Security Service Act 1989. However, given the different constitutional, legal and administrative systems in place in other countries I do not consider that a study of the kind proposed would be of any particular value.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the civil service grade of the director of the Security Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The post of director general of the Security Service is the equivalent of that of a grade 1A in the civil service.

Greenwich Police

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last received a communication from the chairman or secretary of the Greenwich police/community consultative group; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The chairman and secretary of the Greenwich police/community consultative group wrote to my right hon. and learned Friend on 27 January. My right hon. and noble Friend Lord Ferrers will be replying shortly.

Prison Education

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department from what date it is now his intention that new contracts for prison education should come into force; who will bear the cost of the delay in commencing the contracts for prison education for the period from 1 April until the actual commencement date; what provision will be made to the cost of compensation and redundancy for staff made redundant during that period; what advice he has given on the contractual position regarding prison education under the Protection of Employment (Transfer of Undertakings) Regulations 1981, during that period; if he will vary the arrangements for the tendering process for prison education that is now under way; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 18 February 1992]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) on 11 February, *Official Report*, column *1098*. The present suppliers were not prepared to extend the existing arrangements beyond 31 March in respect of 16 prison establishments. To secure the continuation of education in these prisons it was necessary to let contracts from 1 April. Where agreement to continue the existing arrangements was achieved, reimbursement of actual costs plus 5 per cent. in respect of administrative costs will be made by the Home Office as before until the new contracts are let and become effective. The Home Office considers that any costs resulting from redundancy remain, as previously, to be resolved between the employers and employees. As to the application of "TUPE" and the EEC Acquired Rights Directive 77/87, I would refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Stretford on 8 December 1992, *Official Report*, column *555*. Subject to the outcome of the judicial review, I do not propose any other variations to the arrangements for the tendering process already announced.

Bruche Police Training College

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much his Department owes to Planned Maintenance Ltd. for maintenance work at the Bruche police training college, Warrington; for how long each invoice has been outstanding; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 18 February 1993]:* I will write to my hon. Friend.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Haddock

Mr. Austin Mitchell To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what efforts he is making to restrict the landing of North sea haddock to avoid early closure of the fishery;

(2) if he will ensure that the organisations responsible for the management of quotas act to reduce the present glut of haddock.

Mr. Curry: We are concerned that the early closure of the North sea haddock fishery should be avoided. With the increase in the total allowable catch for this fishery, we warned the industry, including product organisations, that it must act reasonably if it is to avoid disrupting the market and any repeat of the early closures which occurred in 1992. Discussions are taking place with the producer organisations about ways of improving quotas management and we shall be monitoring the situation very closely.

It is not for the Government to arrange the day-to-day catches of the industry. That is precisely what the producer organisations ought to be doing. If they are not able to do so, they should be addressing their management weaknesses and seeking effective and self-interested discipline for their members.

MV Braer

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what monitoring activity is being undertaken in United Kingdom coastal waters following on from the grounding of the MV Braer on 5 January; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 1 February 1993]:* I have been asked to reply.

On the basis of sampling already undertaken in the sea around Shetland, there is no requirement for monitoring United Kingdom waters outside Shetland.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Relocation

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what European regulations govern industries relocating within the European Community in receipt of European grants; and what domestic regulations govern such industries in respect of United Kingdom national grants.

Mr. Sainsbury: There are no European Community or domestic regulations governing industries relocating within the Community, whether or not they are in receipt of Community or national funds. Relocation is a commercial decision for the company involved. The European Commission does, however, enforce maximum levels of grant available in different regions of the Community.

There are restrictions on the movement of firms which have received assistance in the United Kingdom. The contractual terms and conditions of regional selective assistance, for example, allow grant to be clawed back from firms which close down a project or reduce the scale of investment and/or jobs involved, within a stated period. This varies, but is normally within three years of completion of payment grant.

Plutonium

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade for what reason his Department's annual report on plutonium production and stockpile figures gives data only up to31 March 1992; and what steps he is taking to publish more up-to-date figures in his next report.

Mr. Eggar: The annual plutonium figures give data on a financial year basis. Figures in respect of 1992-93 will be published as soon as they have been compiled, and I have asked my officials to see if the information can be put together more quickly.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much of the plutonium listed in section 2 *(d)* (ii) and (iii) in his press notice P/93/51 of 4 February, the annual production and stockpile figures, has been notified for withdrawal from safeguards under article 14 Provisions of the 1978 Tripartite Safeguards treaty between the United Kingdom, Euratom and the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Mr. Eggar: None.

Small Loans Guarantee Scheme

Dr. Liam Fox: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures the banks are taking to support the Government's small loans guarantee scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: The main high street banks fully support the changes to the small loans guarantee scheme, already announced to enhance its cost-effectiveness and are ensuring that appropriate information, training and systems are in place for its start on 1 April 1993.

Clean Energy Strategy

Mr. Haselhurst: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he will publish the programme and future strategy for the United Kingdom clean energy fuel cell advisory group; and if he will make a statement

Mr. Eggar: I expect to publish a strategy for my Department's advanced fuel cell research and development programme, prepared in consultation with the fuel cell advisory panel, in the summer.

Owners Abroad (Takeover)

Sir George Gardiner: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received about the bid for Owners Abroad by Airtours.

Mr. Heseltine: I have received a number of representations concerning this bid. These have been seen by the Director General of Fair Trading so that he can take them into account in his advice to me.

Colliery Reserves

Dr. David Clark: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will introduce legislation to require British Coal to provide information about colliery reserves to the relevant trade unions.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 16 February 1993]:* I have no plans to do so.

Regional Development Fund

Mr. Milburn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 2 February, *Official Report*, column *143*, regarding the regional development fund, if he will give the figures for each financial year from 1984-85 *(a)* at current prices and *(b)* at 1984 prices.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 16 February 1993]:* Since the European Community's financial years are calendar years, it is not possible to give a precise figure.

Industrial Research

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on his work on methods of promoting research in industry, pending the next round of inward investment.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 17 February 1993]:* The Government seek to encourage companies to invest more in research and development by creating the right climate, for example, by reducing the tax burden on business. The main rate of corporation tax, at 33 per cent., is now the lowest in any G7 or EC country. In addition, the Government provide over £200 million per annum to United Kingdom companies through a variety of schemes designed to stimulate expenditure on research and development, for example, the LINK and advanced technology programmes and, specifically to help smaller companies, SMART and SPUR.

Companies investing in the United Kingdom are fully eligible to participate in these schemes, providing subsequent exploitation benefits the United Kingdom.

Telephone Metering

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to introduce legislation to regulate telephone metering in England and Wales.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 17 February 1993]:* My Department has lead reponsibility for telecommunications matters. The licences of all public telecommunications operators in the United Kingdom require the operators to have their telephone meters independently approved under section 24 of the Telecommunications Act 1984 and to ensure that their bills to customers are accurate. The Director General of Telecommunications has powers to independently verify that operators are complying with these requirements, and if necessary, to take enforcement action against an operator who is not in compliance with the requirements.

Offshore Oil

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many blocks were initially nominated by oil companies for offer under the 14th round of offshore licensing; and how many of these blocks the Government finally decided should not be issued after consultation with the statutory and non-statutory bodies.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 18 February 1993]:* Some 700 blocks were nominated for inclusion in the round; a total of 484 were offered. Of the remaining 200 or so the majority were not offered as a result of consultation, although in some cases the nomination was not maintained.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Printed Matter (Subsidy)

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the range of Government subsidies, including postal, which currently apply to newspapers, books and magazines in each EC member state.

Mr. Brooke: The British publishing industry receives no direct subsidies from Government. Value added tax is, however, zero rated on the income from sales of newspapers, books and periodicals. In addition, the Post Office operates a long-standing concession under which registered newspapers are given first-class service at second-class postage rates; and special facilities are available to those posting large numbers of newspapers and magazines under the Post Office's Postream service. Information relating to the position in other EC member states could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Art Collections

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what additional measures he is considering to increase public access to the royal art collection.

Mr. Brooke: I am responsible for public access to the historic royal palaces, namely the Banqueting house Whitehall, Hampton Court palace, Kensington palace, Kew palace and the Tower of London, where items from the royal collection are on display. These palaces, which contain about a third of the paintings in the royal collection, receive more than 2 million visitors per year. Important schemes to improve and increase the display of the collection in those palaces, such as the opening of the state apartments at Hampton Court palace, have recently been completed and further schemes are in hand. In addition, Osborne house, for which I am responsible and which receives some 185,000 visitors per year, also contains items from the royal collection.

Public access to items from the royal collection displayed in the occupied royal palaces, namely, Windsor castle, Buckingham palace, St. James's palace and elsewhere, is a matter for the royal household.

English Heritage

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations he has received from the Council for British Archaeology in January relating to his plans for the future of English Heritage; what reply he has sent; if he will publish the representations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: I understand that the only representations by the Council for British Archaeology in January about English Heritage's forward strategy were, in fact, made to the National Heritage Select Committee. Representations to my Department by the council were made in November last year and it would be for the council to decide whether to publish its comments and my reply.

I have absorbed the anxieties expressed by a number of organisations and individuals about the proposals in the strategy and hope that the responses from my Department and English Heritage have helped to reassure them that the proposals will ensure greater, not lesser, protection for the built heritage. The benefits of the strategy, in terms of a clearer focusing of priorities, are already apparent. Despite constraints on funding, English Heritage expects to be able to spend £6 million more next year on restoration of properties in its care and on grants to owners of historic buildings.

WALES

Deprived Areas

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of the population of each local authority area in Wales live in officially recognised deprived wards; and if he will publish the equivalent figures for each year since 1989.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The list of wards recognised as deprived for urban programme purposes was published in Welsh Office circular No. 25/91. The latest population figures for these wards were published in the census 1991. Ward population figures are not available for 1989, 1990 and 1992. Copies of these publications are available in the Library of the House.

Cancer Treatment

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received on behalf of cancer sufferers in Gwynedd with regard to the possibility of networking the radiotherapy treatment available at Clatterbridge, to Ysbyty Gwynedd and to Ysbyty Clwyd.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Representations have been received from the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) and from a number of clinicians and representative organisations in Gwynedd about a networked radiotherapy treatment arrangement between the Clatterbridge Centre for Oncology NHS trust and Ysbyty Gwynedd and Ysbyty Clwyd. These are being considered in connection with proposals to improve cancer treatment services in north Wales.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what provisions he plans to make to ensure that cancer patients in Gwynedd can have access to cancer screening and radiotherapy treatment in Bangor; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend announced in March last year that patients would best be served by establishing a dedicated cancer treatment centre with radiotherapy facilities in north Wales. An investment appraisal of location, need, content, cost and management arrangements was commissioned. My right hon. Friend is currently considering that report and hopes to make an announcement in the near future.

Playing Fields

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many designated playing fields have been lost to development in each local authority area in Wales during each of the last three years.

Mr. David Hunt: This information is not held centrally. I will be considering with the Sports Council for Wales whether the register of playing fields presently being compiled in England should be extended to Wales.

M4 Link

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the companies which tendered for the M4 link in Wales to the second Severn crossing.

Mr. David Hunt: The firms invited to tender for the M4 second Severn crossing approach roads project were, in alphabetical order:

1. Christiani and Neilsen/Alfred McAlpine Construction Joint Venture
2. Costain Building and Civil Engineering Ltd.
3. Laing GTM
4. Norwest Holst Civil Engineering Limited
5. E. Nuttall Limited
6. Trafalgar House.

Wind Power

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement regarding applications for wind turbine power stations in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Applications for planning permission for wind turbines should be considered in the light of the planning policy guidance note on "Renewable Energy" which was published on 3 February by the Welsh Office and the Department of the Environment.

Social Housing

Mr. Alex Carlisle: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many council houses have been renovated in Wales in each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is available only from 1984 onwards. This is given in the following table:

Local Authority Dwellings Renovated

	Number
1984	12,690
1985	14,608
1986	22,875
1987	24,503
1988	30,804
1989	32,812
1990	24,605
1991	25,707

Source: Welsh Office local authority returns.

Mr. Alex Carlisle: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many homes were in social use in Wales in each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information has been published in table 1.3 of Welsh Housing Statistics No. 12, 1992, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Cancer

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will supply details of the incidence by sex and crude age-specific rate by sex of *(a)* cancer of the bone, *(b)* leukaemia, *(c)* maligant neoplasm of the female breast and *(d)* malignant neoplasm of the stomach in (i) Wales in total and (ii) each district health authority area in each year since 1986;

(2) if he will supply details of the incidence according to sex and five-year age category of cancer of the bone for *(a)* Wales in total and *(b)* each district health authority area for each year since 1971.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on the incidence and incidence rate for specific cancers is presented in the Welsh Office publications "Cancer Registration in Wales, 1974-84" and "Cancer Registration in Wales, 1984-86". Copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

1974 is the earliest year for which reliable data are available. Data relating to years up to 1988 will be published later this year.

As the number of specific cancers in a given district health authority, age group and year can be very small, annual incidence rates at the level requested presented in isolation would be very difficult to interpret and could be misleading. Consequently the published figures cover incidence rates by health authority and age-specific rates for Wales over a three-year or five-year period.

Hospital Staff

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many hospital nurses and hospital doctors there were in each county and in total in Wales in each year since 1979.

Mr. David Hunt: Information on hospital medical staff is given in the following table:

Information on nursing staff is available only on the total staff in post for all nursing and midwifery staff. Breakdowns of these staff into occupation category are not considered reliable. The available information is given in the following table.

Nursing and Midwifery Staff in Post as at 30 September (whole-time equivalents)

	Clwyd	East Dyfed	Gwent	Gwynedd	Mid Glamorgan	Pembrokeshire	Powys	South Glamorgan	West Glamorgan	²Total
1979	2,991	2,350	3,663	1,710	4,438	¹..	963	4,211	2,705	23,031
1980	3,231	2,478	3,964	1,809	4,604	¹..	1,041	4,387	2,852	24,366
1981	3,427	2,507	4,061	1,918	4,834	¹..	1,014	4,523	3,078	25,362
1982	3,503	1,966	4,141	1,890	4,918	631	1,092	4,607	3,161	25,909
1983	3,498	2,042	4,221	1,862	4,904	615	1,149	4,490	3,200	25,981
1984	3,528	2,106	4,312	1,946	5,032	640	1,121	4,565	3,198	26,448
1985	3,618	2,081	4,351	2,092	5,127	661	1,127	4,640	3,317	27,014
1986	3,671	2,170	4,354	2,031	5,160	676	1,104	4,596	3,425	27,187
1987	3,673	2,194	4,337	2,088	5,413	679	1,125	4,752	3,503	27,764
1988	3,687	2,156	4,310	2,100	5,435	706	1,154	4,902	3,468	27,918
1989	3,635	2,151	4,412	2,113	5,392	743	1,144	4,946	3,495	28,031
1990	3,580	2,253	4,378	2,142	5,403	733	1,112	4,937	3,545	28,083
1991³	3,566	2,226	4,290	2,085	5,412	742	1,134	4,875	3,560	27,890
1992⁴	3,517	2,190	4,103	2,067	5,461	742	1,078	4,833	3,519	27,510

[1] .. Figures included with East Dyfed.

[2] Excludes staff who are employed by WHCSA as they are not hospital nurses.

[3] Staff working for the Blood Transfusion Service were transferred to the Common Services Authority with effect from 1 April 1991.

[4] The implementation of the Project 2000 nursing education reforms in 1992 has led to the reclassification of some student nurses as students. Precise estimates of this effect are not readily available centrally but overall in 1992 about 1,000 nurses have been reclassified. Those in the student intake prior to 30 September 1992 have been excluded from the 1992 count. Due to the use of local payscales the figures for 1992 may slightly underestimate the true position as these staff can not be placed in a particular staff group. This particularly applies to Pembrokeshire NHS Trust who have, therefore, supplied the figure for 1992.

Hospital Medical Staff in Post as at 30 September (whole-time equivlalents)[1]

	Clwyd	East Dyfed	Gwent	Gwynedd	Mid Glamorgan	Pembrokeshire	Powys	South Glamorgan	West Glamorgan	Wales
1979	197	177	248	99	287	³..	15	522	241	1,786
1980	197	184	255	107	311	..	16	505	251	1,825
1981	222	193	259	113	309	..	15	537	256	1,904
1982	221	146	270	117	315	48	16	555	257	1,944
1983	235	153	272	120	316	56	16	568	260	1,997
1984	228	160	277	130	325	55	17	561	266	2,019
1985	241	162	276	129	328	62	18	577	279	2,073
1986	238	166	280	131	329	58	15	579	268	2,062
1987	228	165	297	134	336	56	15	567	284	2,082
1988	236	171	299	136	348	62	15	587	280	2,133
1989	255	176	308	140	351	66	17	588	304	2,205
1990	265	193	316	144	357	70	20	617	304	2,286
1991²	271	193	331	147	358	72	16	627	312	2,326

[1] Excluding locums, hospital practitioners and clinical assistants.

[2] Provisional.

[3] Figures are included with East Dyfed.

Drugs Projects

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received regarding the continuation of the Drugaid Cardiff and the Vale drugs project after 31 July; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I have received one representation, direct from Drugaid, regarding the continuation of its Cardiff and Vale project after 31 July 1993. Continued funding beyond 31 July 1993 is, in the first place, a matter for South Glamorgan county social services department and South Glamorgan health authority.

Rail Services

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has had from Brian Scott, manager of great western division of InterCity, in relation to the viability of his track and service purchase-provider split proposals.

Sir Wyn Roberts: None.

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many persons he interviewed for the post of chairman of the Welsh Development Agency, prior to the placing of the job advertisement on 27 January; and how many applications he has received so far.

Mr. David Hunt: As yet I have not interviewed any applicants; 77 applications have been received.

Cardiff De-watering Study

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has received the interim report of the Cardiff pilot dewatering study; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend has received the report and copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

These preliminary results are encouraging and indicate that a system of dewatering wells could be a feasible method of controlling groundwater levels after the Cardiff Bay barrage is built.

A final report is expected in the next few weeks. My right hon. Friend will want to give that report careful consideration before deciding whether to ask Cardiff Bay development corporation to proceed with a full dewatering system.

ENVIRONMENT

Contracting Out

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide figures for the reduction in numbers of posts as a result of contracting out since 1979 in his Department and agencies for which he has responsibility.

Mr. Howard: This information is not available except at disproportionate cost.

Statutory Instruments

Ms. Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many statutory instruments were laid before Parliament by his Department in each of the years 1980 to 1992.

Mr. Howard: The number of statutory instruments laid before Parliament by my Department in each of the years 1980 to 1992 was as follows:

	Number
1980	93
1981	106
1982	66
1983	85
1984	68
1985	81
1986	98
1987	86
1988	102
1989	160
1990	159
1991	149
1992	181

London Boroughs (Audited Accounts)

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many London boroughs have gone for more than six years without producing unqualified and completed audited accounts; and if he will list them.

Mr. Robin Squire: Information on whether accounts have been qualified is not held centrally by the Audit Commission for years prior to 1989-90. For each of the years 1989-90 to 1991-92 the following London boroughs have either not produced their accounts, have had no audit opinion on their accounts or have had their accounts qualified:

Brent
Camden
Greenwich
Hackney
Hammersmith and Fulham
Haringey
Hillingdon
Islington
Lambeth
Lewisham
Newham
Richmond upon Thames
Southwark
Tower Hamlets
Westminster

Audits are still in progress in some cases.

Packaging Council

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many inquiries have been received by the Packaging Council from the general public; and if the Council will issue a report.

Mr. Maclean: I understand that the Packaging Standards Council, formerly the Packaging Council, has received 12 inquiries about the social, functional and environmental aspects of packaging in its first six months, as well as numerous requests for information. The council intends to publish its first report later this month.

The Hermitage, Swindon

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about his decision to preserve the Hermitage in Swindon.

Mr. Baldry: On 9 October 1992 Thamesdown borough council applied to my right hon. and learned Friend for consent to demolish the Hermitage, an unlisted building in the Swindon old town conservation area. The borough council was advised on 18 January 1993 that my right hon. and learned Friend was minded to refuse consent since he did not consider that, on the evidence available, demolition would either preserve or enhance the conservation area. However, the borough council was offered the opportunity of being heard at a public local inquiry; it has still to respond formally to this offer.

Management Information

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish results from his Department's management information system for Ministers.

Mr. Howard: I will be taking decisions on my Department's priorities and the disposition of its resources next month and expect to publish in late May or early June the MINIS 14 returns which will reflect those decisions.

Pollution Control

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment in respect of floating incinerators moored off United Kingdom shores or in ports and rivers, what is the present position regarding pollution control; what is the present legal requirement to obtain planning permission; what are the opportunities for the community to have their views taken into account in respect of a proposed development; what proposals he has to change the law on planning permission and pollution control; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Incineration of waste material at sea is controlled internationally by the Oslo convention, to which the United Kingdom is a party. In 1987 a North sea ministerial conference agreed that all marine incineration should be phased out by 31 December 1994, and in March 1990 the Government announced that no more United Kingdom waste would be licensed for marine incineration after the end of that year.

The pollution controls established under part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 extend to prescribed processes which might take place on water, including United Kingdom territorial waters, and the release of prescribed substances into such waters. The provision of permanent moorings for a vessel generally involves a material change of use of land, for which planning permission is required.

Advertisement and notification of applications is required under both the planning and pollution control systems to give local people and organisations an opportunity to express their views; and relevant views must be taken into account in the determination of a planning application or an application for authorisation under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

I am satisfied that these arrangements are adequate to ensure appropriate regulation of any floating incinerator moored off United Kingdom shores or in ports and rivers.

Electricity Companies

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with the Director General of Electricity Supply since November 1992 on the inclusion of energy efficiency investment as part of the normal business costs of regional electricity companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Amendments to the price controls are a matter for the Director General of Electricity Supply. The director general's announcement in November that he would take energy efficiency into account in a similar way to other business costs when reviewing the price control is to be welcomed.

Energy Saving Trust

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects the Energy Saving Trust to commence its work.

Mr. Maclean: The Energy Saving Trust is an independent body and its operation is a matter for its chairman and board of directors. I understand that the chairman will be writing to the hon. Member.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects OFGAS to approve the initial pilot schemes which are to be supported by the Government's Energy Saving Trust; what they will be; by whom they will be operated; and when they will be launched.

Mr. Maclean: This is a matter between British Gas, which has proposed three pilot schemes designed to encourage the efficient use of gas, and OFGAS, which has been asked to authorise the expenditure.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to make a financial contribution towards the work of the new Energy Saving Trust; and what this will cover.

Mr. Maclean: My Department has already made a considerable contribution in kind, in the form of staff effort and time, towards the establishment of the trust. It has also provided the trust with a member of staff on secondment for two years.

The Energy Efficiency Office is also assisting the trust with the development and funding of a proposed pilot scheme of local information centres which will provide domestic and small business consumers with independent advice on energy efficiency. Planned expenditure on this scheme by the EEO is £1·8 million in 1993-94 and £2 million in each of 1994-95 and 1995-96.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to publish a report prepared by the Building Research Establishment concerning the effectiveness of the home energy efficiency scheme.

Mr. Maclean: The building research energy conservation support unit (BRECSU) has carried out an interim evaluation of the home energy efficiency scheme (HEES) on behalf of the Energy Efficiency Office. The data for that evaluation have come principally from interview surveys and energy audits. BRECSU is currently refining the data using fuel bill information. I hope to make the final report available to interested parties and to place copies in the Library of the House within the next three months.

Heathrow Airport (Fifth Terminal)

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will call in the planning application for a fifth terminal at Heathrow airport submitted by BAA plc on 17 February.

Mr. Baldry: Yes.

United Kingdom Ecolabelling Board

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will publish a management statement for the United Kingdom Ecolabelling Board.

Mr. Maclean: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment has today issued a management statement for the United Kingdom Ecolabelling Board.

Flats Over Shops

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment who will receive grant aid under the flats over shops initiative for 1993-94; and at what levels.

Sir George Young: I have placed in the Library a list of 132 local authorities in England to receive flats over shops allocations totalling £10 million for 1993-94.

Hire Car Licences

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment in how many cases local authority decisions not to issue a hackney carriage or private hire vehicle driver's licence have been *(a)* overturned by magistrates courts and *(b)* the subject of further appeal.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is not recorded centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Dangerous Vessels

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many ships have been apprehended by harbour masters for violations in entering and leaving port under the Dangerous Vessels (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 in each of the past five years.

Mr. Atkins: None.

Assessment Centres

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to establish assessment centres for business and industrial training in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. J. S. Crozier. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from J. Crozier to Mr. Eddie McGrady, dated 18 February 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency I have been asked by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans we have to establish assessment centres for business and industrial training in Northern Ireland.

The establishment of Assessment Centres is a matter for employers to work out with Awarding Bodies (which are responsible for approving arrangements for the assessment of national vocational qualifications (NVQs).

Some employer bodies have well advanced plans for the development of NVQs in their sectors including the provision of Assessment Centres. The Training and Employment Agency (Northern Ireland) (T&EA) takes a close interest in such developments, but is not involved in the running of the Centres.

Quangos

Mr. Sproat: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list all those non-departmental public bodies for which his Department is responsible which have the power to compel individuals, firms, companies or other institutions to carry out their instructions at the expense of the individuals, firms, companies or other institutions, and also to charge fees for the cost to the non-departmental public bodies of assessing the work which needed to be done.

Mr. Mates *[holding answer 16 February 1993]:* The non-departmental bodies in Northern Ireland which fall into this category are:

The area health and social services boards
The Northern Ireland Housing Executive
The Fire Authority for Northern Ireland

TRANSPORT

Oil Transhipment

Mr. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will bring forward proposals for permission to be necessary for the transhipment of oil.

Mr. Norris: My Department is consulting on draft regulations under section 35 of the Merchant Shipping Act 1988 covering the transfer of oil between ships in United Kingdom waters.

A27

Sir Terence Higgins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport by what authority he has placed contracts for ground investigation works on the Worthing to Lancing section of the A27, including tunnels under Salvington and Lancing Ring, before a public inquiry has recommended that route; what was the advertised figure for the cost of the works and what is his current estimate; what the maximum loss to public funds is estimated to be if a different route is eventually chosen and on what vote this would fall; and what procedures were followed for the authorisation of the contracts and the advertising.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Authority to undertake surveys of land in connection with a highway authority's functions is given by section 289 of the Highways Act 1980. The award of a ground investigation contract for the A27 Worthing-Lancing scheme to Exploration Associates Ltd. was announced on 24 July 1991. The 20-week contract was let in accordance with my Department's normal procedures to provide information on soil conditions required for design and assessment work prior to the publication of draft orders. The investigation included the collection of information on the blue and red routes for comparison with the preferred route. The value of the accepted tender was £149,992. The final outturn cost is not yet known. The cost of the contract is being met from the roads vote.

TransPennine Routes

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 12 February, *Official Report*, column *866*, if the consultants responsible for the TransPennine study strategy report were made aware, at the time they were commissioned, that the Government were considering extending the M65 westwards from Blackburn to the M6.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Yes.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the cost of the TransPennine study strategy report.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The whole study, including roadside interviews and data collection, cost about £900,000.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many transport consultancy organisations tendered for the TransPennine study strategy commissioned by his Department.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Four.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the TransPennine study strategy report was commissioned; when it was due to report; when it reported; and if he will make a statement on the delay in publication.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 3 July 1992 at column *726*. The study was commissioned in January 1990 and expected to be completed in spring 1991. The scope of the work was extended and the study completed in spring 1992. The strategy report was published in September 1992.

The study was wide ranging and addressed complex issues. Our consideration of the consultants' findings took longer than expected.

A1

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 8 February, *Official Report*, columns *670-71*, what is his estimate of the extra length of journey it would take if the proposed route of the new A1 went to the east of Knottingley.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: About three quarters of a mile.

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 8 February, *Official Report*, columns *670-71*, what is the estimated annual cost of the new A1 bypassing Knottingley; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The present prediction of the annual cost in operational terms of the proposed A1 motorway between Redhouse and Hook Moor is £80 million. The similar cost of a route to the east of Knottingley would be £100 million.

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the public inquiry to take place on the new A1 proposals for Ferrybridge in West Yorkshire.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: A public inquiry would be held following the publication of draft orders. The timing of an inquiry depends upon the weight and nature of objections to the orders, but typically would be in two to three years from now.

Road Haulage

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to seek to amend the Transport Act 1968 to allow licensing authorities to accept a wide range of representations on behalf of a community's residents regarding any plans by road hauliers for new or expanded operations within that community.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: County and district councils, which are locally elected representative bodies, have a statutory right of objection to a licensing authority in respect of applications for, or major variations to, goods vehicle operator licences. In addition, owners or occupiers of property in the vicinity of an operating centre involved in such an application have a right of representation to the licensing authority on the grounds of adverse environmental effect on their property.

Reviews of the goods vehicle operator licensing provisions in 1986 and 1989 concluded that, in addition, parish/community councils should have a right of representation, on general environmental grounds, but that the provisions otherwise strike a fair balance between the interests of people affected by operating centres and those of the road haulage industry. I am satisfied that this remains the case.

Royal Family

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what, for the latest available year, was the cost to his Department of expenditure in support of the royal family in respect of *(a)* official travel by train including maintenance of the royal train and *(b)* the royal train renewal programme.

Mr. Freeman: In 1991-92 expenditure on *(a)* was £2·440 million and on *(b)* £0·126 million.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Alcohol Imports

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what is his latest estimate of the levels of receipts from duty on beer lost to the Exchequer arising from duty-paid imports of beer from elsewhere in the single market;

(2) what is his latest estimate of the level of duty-paid imports of beer from elsewhere in the EC as a percentage of the take-home beer market.

Sir John Cope: The revenue loss arising from personal importations of duty-paid beer is difficult to estimate as it depends upon the quantity of beer that would otherwise have been purchased in the United Kingdom. The Brewers Society's latest statistics suggest that since 1 January 1993 personal imports of duty-paid beer account for 9·4 per cent. of the take-home trade compared with 8·4 per cent. a year ago. Take home sales represent one fifth of the United Kingdom beer market. Customs are studying the figures in consultation with the Brewers Society.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what rate of VAT is levied on *(a)* newspapers, *(b)* paid-for magazines, *(c)* free magazines and *(d)* books in each EC member state.

Sir John Cope: The information available for each EC member state for VAT levied on the sales of newspapers, paid-for magazines and books is set out in the tables. I am not aware of any circumstances under which VAT is levied on free magazines in these countries, but sale of advertising space would normally be taxable.

VAT rates on magazines, newspapers and books in EC member states

Percentages

Country	*Magazines*	*Newspapers*	*Books*
Belgium	6	6	6
Denmark	0	0	25
France	2·1	2·1	5·5
Germany	7	7	7
Greece	4	4	4
Ireland	10	10	0
Italy	[1]4	4	4
Luxembourg	12	12	12
Netherlands	6	6	6
Portugal	5	5	[2]5, 30
Spain	3	3	3
United Kingdom	0	0	0

[1] A rate of 12 per cent. has been introduced in Italy. We do not currently have any information about its coverage, and so the rate shown is that applied before its introduction.

[2] Portugal applies a higher rate of books of an obscene or pornographic nature.

Source: VAT in Europe (International Bureau of Fiscal Documentation) according to information available as at 1 January 1993.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the VAT collected on advertisements in *(a)* newspapers, *(b)* paid-for magazines and *(c)* free magazines.

Sir John Cope: Detail about the receipts from VAT on specific items of expenditure is not collected on VAT returns. An estimate of the total revenue yield from advertisements in newspapers, journals and periodicals was made in 1985 when the zero-rating was withdrawn. The equivalent figure now is about £100 million.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of imposing VAT on bus fares.

Sir John Cope: Table D1 of the statistical supplement to the 1992 autumn statement shows the estimated cost of zero-rating domestic passenger transport in 1992-93 is £1,100 million. This estimate makes no allowance for the behavioural response to applying the standard rate of VAT to this category, so the actual yield would probably be less. Bus fares account for around 44 per cent. of the total.

Civil Servants

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many central London-based administrative civil servants of assistant principal rank and above have been made redundant, or warned of redundancy, in the past 18 months.

Mr. Portillo: During the period 1 April 1991 to 1 October 1992, 62 central London-based administrative civil servants of administration trainee (AT) grade and above were made redundant. The AT grade is equivalent to assistant principal which ceased to exist in 1971.

These figures relate to the home civil service and are the latest available. Figures covering the period 1 July 1992 to 1 October 1992 are provisional.

Central London has been defined as covering the inner London weighting area, that is, within a five-mile radius of Charing Cross.

No records are available of numbers warned for redundancy.

Firearms

Mr. James Hill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many anti-smuggling checks have been made to prevent firearms and other weapons from being illegally imported from EC member states through British ports and airports since 1 January.

Sir John Cope: Customs perform a range of checks at United Kingdom ports and airports to enforce all prohibitions and restrictions. Customs records to not provide a separate account of the number of checks specifically targeted on firearms and other weapons.

Manufacturing Output

Ms. Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has about the level of *(a)* industrial production and *(b)* manufacturing output in (i) October, (ii) November and (iii) December 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: Indices of industrial production and manufacturing output may be found on the CSO databank which can be accessed by the House of Commons Library. Information is currently available for months up to December 1992.

Intrastat Classification

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the practice of Customs and Excise governing the distribution of the Intrastat classification nomenclature; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Cope: A free copy of the Intrastat classification nomenclature has been distributed to traders whose trade during 1991-92 exceeded the Intrastat threshold and who are therefore required to submit monthly supplementary statistical declarations. It assists them in identifying the codes required to complete the statistical declarations accurately.

Additional copies may be obtained at a charge of £7 each, inclusive of delivery.

To date, approximately 33,000 free copies have been issued, and orders received for a further 3,700. The Customs and Excise single market liaison officers also answer classification queries.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the cost of distributing the Intrastat classification nomenclature for the latest year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Cope: This is the first year of distribution of the Intrastat classification nomenclature and the total printing and distribution cost so far is approximately £225,000.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to send only the relevant parts of the Intrastat classification nomenclature to appropriate firms; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Cope: No. In order to supply only the relevant parts of the Intrastat classification nomenclature it would have been necessary to ascertain, for each of the 33,000 traders involved, which parts of it would cover their trading activities. This could have been achieved only by asking traders to supply the necessary information. This would have created an unnecessary burden on traders. This course was therefore rejected.

Central Statistical Office

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the arrangements for the release of statistics by the Central Statistical Office.

Mr. Lamont: When the Central Statistical Office (CSO) was launched as an agency a little over a year ago I made clear the Government's commitment to the arrangements adopted to ensure the integrity and validity of United Kingdom official statistics and to sustain public confidence in them. I have now agreed some improved practices for the release of CSO statistics which demonstrates that commitment.

The improved practices, and their effect, are as follows:

(i) all statistics will be published as early as possible, with many being released much more quickly than currently—improving decision-making and enhancing openness;

(ii) data will be available to all users at the same time, but Ministers, and where appropriate the Governor of the Bank of England, and some officials (on a strict need-to-know basis) will receive copies of key statistical releases 1½ days in advance—promoting transparency; and

(iii) the CSO will be entirely responsible for the contents of its press releases, subject to advance consultation with me on changes in format—demonstrating the integrity of the statistics.

The CSO is publishing today a document setting out its release practices in detail, and copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

These changes emphasise my determination to promote openness and transparency in the Government's economic decision making, enhance the reputation of Government statistics, and promote public confidence in their integrity.

HEALTH

Elderly People (Home Care)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will establish provisions for home help care for discharged elderly patients that include continuing daily visits to people known to be at risk, irrespective of charging policies;

(2) if she will establish a review and evaluation policy for home help organisers or care managers responsible for those elderly discharged from hospital who have had their home help discontinued or severely reduced;

(3) if she will lay down guidelines for assessment, when an eldery person is to be discharged into the care of another elderly person, of the health and social care needs of the household, couple or group, in addition to that of the patient;

(4) if she will lay down guidelines on basic minimal standards of service for elderly patients discharged into community care.

(5) if she will conduct regular review assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of the services being received by elderly patients who have been discharged into community care.

Mr. Yeo: Provision of home care services to elderly people discharged from hospital is the responsibility of local authorities. They are best placed to determine individual needs and how they can best be met. Detailed guidance has been issued to authorities about the assessment process, including the need for periodic reviews of needs. The way in which local authorities carry out their responsibilities is monitored by the social services inspectorate, which also advises authorities on good practice. Examples of relevant good practice material include:

Publication	*HMSO number*
Care Management and Assessment:	
Managers' Guide	HMSO ISBN 0-11 321 464 2
Practitioners' Guide	HMSO ISBN 0-11 321 463 4
Inspecting Home Care Services, A Guide to the SSI method	HMSO ISBN 0-11 321 325 5

Copies are available in the Library.

NHS Staff

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 17 December, *Official Report*, columns *421-22*, regarding NHS staff if she will provide comparable figures for 30 September 1992.

Mr. Sackville: The information requested is currently being processed, and will be available later this year.

Drug Prescribing

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consultations she had with the Royal College of General Practitioners prior to her announcement of the extension of the limited list to further therapeutic categories.

Dr. Mawhinney: No such consultations took place as the changes do not affect the basic structure of the selected list scheme which has been in operation since 1985.

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she intends to publish her proposals regarding the limited cost of drugs to be used in the NHS.

Dr. Mawhinney: The timing of the publication of proposals for removing particular drugs in the new categories from national health service prescription will depend on when we receive advice from the advisory committee on NHS drugs.

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what savings to the NHS medicines bill were achieved in each of the therapeutic categories covered by the limited list of 1985 *(a)* in the first year and *(b)* in each year since 1985;

(2) what savings in the NHS medicines bill she expects to achieve by the extension of the limited list to further therapeutic categories in the years 1993-94 and 1994-95.

Dr. Mawhinney: It is estimated that the selected list scheme saved £75 million on the drugs bill in 1985-86. The estimated savings in each of the seven therapeutic groups were:

	£ million
Coughs and cold remedies	22
Analgesics for mild to moderate pain	19
Indigestion remedies	8

	£ million
Vitamins	7·5
Laxatives	2
Tonics	1
Benzodiazepine sedatives and tranquillisers	15·5

It is not possible to make meaningful estimates for subsequent years, but we have every reason to believe that the scheme has resulted in continuing downward pressure on the drugs bill. We cannot predict what savings will be made as a result of the recently announced extension to the scheme. This will depend on the recommendations of the independent advisory committee on national health service drugs.

Cancer

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to publish updated cancer incidence statistics; what assessment she has made of the causes of delays in publication; and what proposals she has to improve the speed of publication.

Mr. Sackville: The national cancer registration scheme was reviewed recently by a working group of the registrar general's medical advisory committee. The 17 recommendations in its report[1] covered funding, improvements to notification, managerial control, access, confidentiality, and training. All the recommendations have been acted upon. The Department has established a steering committee, chaired by the deputy chief medical officer, to oversee the system. The Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) is currently redeveloping its computer system, as are several of the regional cancer registries, with the aim of improving the timeliness—without sacrificing the high ascertainment and quality—of the information. Following wide consultation, a minimum data set for cancer registration should be introduced by 1 July 1993 at the latest; the supply of the information to the regional cancer registries and onwards to OPCS will be mandatory. The annual reference volume for 1987, which will be published in mid-March, will contain a revised and expanded commentary on the results; it will also include estimates of cancer registrations for 1988 to 1991 inclusive.

[1] Review of the national cancer registration system. OPCS Series MB1 No. 17. HMSO, 1990. A copy is available in the Library.

"Day In—day Out"

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration her Department has given to the recommendations on respite care of the Royal College of Nursing and the Spastics Society in the report entitled "Day In—Day Out", a copy of which has been sent to her; what action she will be taking in response to the recommendations; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: Improved respite care services and support for carers are key objectives of our community care reforms. The reforms will give authorities increased incentives to provide respite care, particularly as the residential allowance will be payable to people in respite as well as long-term care. Our preparations have stressed improved health and social services collaboration which lie at the heart of many of the recommendations in the report.

Secure Accommodation

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what representations she has received about a proposal to establish a secure unit at Lynfield Mount hospital in Bradford; in what circumstances she would be asked to decide whether the unit be established; and if she will make a statement;

(2) what information has been received from Bradford community health trust about a proposal to establish a secure unit at Lynfield Mount hospital in Bradford; who would fund such a unit; and what is the estimated cost; and what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the consultative document issued by the trust and Bradford health authority concerning this unit with respect to enabling the public to form a judgment.

Mr. Yeo: My Department has provisionally approved a proposal submitted by the Yorkshire regional health authority to establish a 22-place secure ward at Lynfield Mount hospital. The estimated capital cost of £329,000 has been made available to the trust as part of its external finance limit. Any new building will require planning permission from the local authority and the application would be available for public scrutiny under the planning procedures. The hon. Member may wish to raise any questions about the consultative document in the first instance with Bradford health authority.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what powers are available to refer persons suffering from mental illness to secure accommodation; and how far these powers vary according to whether the person is *(a)* a voluntary patient and *(b)* a sectioned patient;

(2) if she will list the secure units located in Yorkshire to which people suffering from mental illness are referred; who has powers to refer persons to such units; which such persons or bodies have the power to refer in cases where the medical management of a secure unit may believe such referral is medically inappropriate; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: Yorkshire regional health authority has available within its boundary 44 medium secure places at Newton Lodge, Wakefield; 28 interim medium secure places at De La Pole hospital, Hull; 16 interim medium secure places at High Royds hospital, Ilkley, and 14 places in a locked facility at Storthes Hall, Huddersfield.

Patients may be referred to such units from a variety of sources. Patients in medium secure units will usually be detained under the Mental Health Act 1983, although it is possible for a unit to accept a patient who is not detained.

Section 2 of the Mental Health Act 1983 allows a person to be detained for up to 28 days for assessment. Section 3 of the Act provides for detention for treatment for a mental disorder. The application for admission for assessment or treatment under these sections must be made either by an approved social worker or the nearest relative and supported by the written recommendation of two registered medical practitioners.

A court may make a hospital order under section 37 of the Act and may impose restrictions on discharge under section 41. Courts may also remand a suspected offender to hospital for assessment (section 35) or medical treatment (section 36), or make an interim hospital order (section 38) so that a person's response to treatment can be assessed before the court makes a final decision. In all these cases, the court's decision would be based on the recommendation of two medical practitioners, one of whom must be approved by the Secretary of State under section 12 of the Act.

If a person is serving a sentence of imprisonment and is considered to need treatment in hospital, the Home Secretary may, on the recommendation of two medical practitioners, direct transfer to hospital under section 47 of the Act. Section 48 provides similarly for the transfer of remand and certain other prisoners. The Home Secretary may also, if he thinks fit, direct that a transferred prisoner be subject to restrictions on discharge under section 49 of the Act.

"Sectioned" is a colloquial term for patients who are compulsorily admitted to hospital under the Act. Voluntary patients, unlike those who are detained, are free to leave hospital as they choose.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for health how much Bradford health authority has spent in each of the past five years, to date, in referring patients to secure units *(a)* within Yorkshire and *(b)* in other places; and what difficulty the authority has experienced in finding suitable places.

Mr. Yeo: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals have been received from Bradford health authority for the establishment of a secure unit at Westwood hospital in Bradford.

Mr. Yeo: I am aware of proposals to close Westwood hospital and transfer the majority of its residents to places in the community. I understand that the proposals include the provision of a newly converted building on the hospital site for the few remaining residents. I am not aware of any proposals to establish a secure unit on the site.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions have been held with Yorkshire regional health authority about the number of secure unit places for those suffering from mental illness in Yorkshire.

Mr. Yeo: The Department has held periodic discussions with Yorkshire regional health authority on its future plans for psychiatric provision in the region and related issues. In addition, all regions were required last year to produce an assessment of need for secure services for their populations. A further assessment of needs is being conducted this year.

Adoption

Mr. Booth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what powers she has to prevent a British child from being taken out of the United Kingdom by a local authority social services department for adoption by a family in Canada.

Mr. Yeo: Depending on the circumstances, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has power to issue directions under section 7A of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 in respect of local authority adoption functions. This power would be used only exceptionally and not normally in respect of an individual case. It is not our function to review local authority practice in relation to individual cases nor to act as an appellate body. However, if my hon. Friend has concerns about a particular case he may wish to contact me directly with the details.

Community Care

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance she has issued regarding assessments for community care needs being undertaken by social workers employed by voluntary organisations *(a)* where the organisation concerned is a direct provider of care and *(b)* where the organisation concerned is not a direct provider of care; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: The guidance we have issued has made clear that voluntary organisations, whether direct care providers or not, may have a role in providing expert advice in assessments. It may also be appropriate in some cases for social services authorities to make arrangements with such organisations to carry out assessments of people with specialist needs on their behalf. In all cases overall responsibility for decisions about service provision remains with the social services authority.

In-patient Admissions

Ms. Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total number of in-patient admissions to hospitals in each of the Thames region health authorities in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Sackville: The available information is given in the table.

Total number of ordinary admissions and day cases to hospitals in the Thames regional health authorities—1982 to 1991-92

	North West Thames	*North East Thames*	*South East Thames*	*South West Thames*
ORDINARY ADMISSIONS				
Discharges and deaths				
1982	394,415	512,655	461,394	315,210
1983	408,474	526,398	477,283	329,334
1984	415,559	534,760	487,772	338,587
1985	418,753	541,080	501,557	344,430
1986	419,008	530,372	495,246	347,089
1987-88	421,582	527,585	504,666	351,932
1988-89	416,153	521,291	487,815	344,259
Finished consultant episodes[1]				
1988-89	462,539	588,983	546,047	394,860
1989-90	473,930	606,278	541,962	387,551
1990-91	451,470	601,136	542,829	384,618
1991-92	463,146	622,399	562,614	411,081

	North West Thames	*North East Thames*	*South East Thames*	*South West Thames*
DAY CASE ADMISSIONS				
Discharges and deaths				
1982	43,330	48,744	49,717	32,836
1983	49,494	51,725	59,983	33,676
1984	58,558	57,850	72,702	39,613
1985	63,170	67,472	66,323	45,395
1986	67,766	70,304	71,323	56,449
1987-88	50,091	51,924	48,855	53,391
1988-89	69,414	60,489	70,906	48,677
Finished consultant episodes[1]				
1989-90	77,887	82,543	84,113	66,736
1990-91	84,733	94,143	86,421	72,982
1991-92	113,568	124,234	110,454	89,497

[1] Including well babies.

SCOTLAND

Ambulance Service

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what changes there have been to plans by the Scottish ambulance service to expand and develop the Haddington ambulance station; and how the numbers of vehicles and staff deployed at Haddington have changed.

Mr. Stewart: The service provided from the Haddington station was expanded over the last two years to take account of the change at Roodlands hospital and there are no plans to further develop this station. The number of staff was increased from 22 to 44, but two have since been transferred to Musselburgh which also provides cover to East Lothian.

Until January 1993, there were five accident and emergency vehicles available for use at Haddington during weekday day shifts, but as demand did not require five crewed vehicles there are now four vehicles.

It should be noted that the numbers of vehicles used can vary at the time of day according to demand and that there has been a significant improvement in response times to emergency calls with the introduction of the techniques of deploying vehicles to key points adjacent to population centres where demand is known to be high instead of requiring all vehicles to return to station.

Women's Aid

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what his Department's contribution to Scottish women's aid was in each of the last three years; and what it will be in 1993-94.

Mr. Lang: Approved funding under section 10 of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 has been £72,000, £84,911 and £86,642 in the years 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93 respectively. Provision of £87,942 has been approved for 1993-94.

Approved funding under section 9 has been £26,000, £25,000 and £26,130 in the years 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93 respectively. The provision for 1993-94 has not yet been decided.

Doctors (Treatment Prescribing)

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps are being taken to ensure that the financial arrangements associated with the health service reforms do not in practice lead to restraints in doctors' freedom to prescribe treatment according to their clinical judgment.

Mr. Stewart: The new financial arrangements are designed to improve the efficiency of the health service. They will not reduce doctors' freedom to prescribe treatment according to their clinical judgment.

Community Charge Leaflets

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what advice he issues to community charge registration officers and other relevant regional officials concerning the issuing of community charge registration forms and related explanatory leaflets in ethnic minority languages; what such leaflets are issued in respect of the Gaelic language; whether he has any plans to alter existing provisions with the introduction of the council tax; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 1 February 1993]:* The form and content of community charge registration inquiry forms and the related explanatory notes are prescribed in The Community Charges (Registration) (Scotland) (No. 2) Regulations 1988 (S.I. 1988 No. 1539 (s. 152)). Whether and what supplementary guidance is issued by community charge registration officers or levying authorities is a matter for those officers and authorities.

In administering the council tax, there will be greater variety in the precise information that assessors and levying authorities need to collect in individual cases. They will therefore have discretion as to the details they seek and the manner in which they seek them. Questions relating to the production of forms and explanatory notes should therefore be addressed to individual regional and islands councils as regards their own areas.

The Scottish Office is producing a series of general information leaflets concerning the introduction of the council tax. The principal leaflet, "The Council Tax—A guide to the new tax for local government in Scotland", has been translated into Punjabi, Urdu, Hindi and Cantonese and these translations have been distributed to regional and islands councils for them to use as required. It is for individual levying authorities to consider what additional guidance they wish to provide to meet local or operational requirements. This might include guidance in Gaelic.

Ferries

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to establish sea ferry links between Scotland and EC member states; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 18 February 1993]:* My right hon. Friend has no such plans, although Scottish Enterprise has commissioned consultants to estimate the financial, economic and environmental impacts of developing new east coast port facilities, in response to potential market interest. Any decision on the establishment of a service, and on the choice of departure port, would, however, be a matter ultimately for the ferry operator.

A8 (Upgrading)

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland by what date he expects the A8 between Baillieston and Newhouse to be upgraded to motorway standard.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 18 February 1993]:* The report, Roads, Traffic and Safety, published by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland in March last year outlined our plans for upgrading this section of the A8. In the light of developments in north Lanarkshire and the recommendations of the Lanarkshire working party for early upgrading, a complete reappraisal of the design was urgently commissioned from Strathclyde regional council and consulting engineers leading to proposals for a new off-line M8 and retention of the existing A8 as a high-quality collector/distributor road. These proposals are now being taken forward in three phases. While the timetable is ambitious, the upgrading has already been identified as one of the schemes on which we expect construction to be able to start in 1994-95 and for which financial provision has been made.

Shetland Oil Spill

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details of all interim compensation payments to date made to salmon farmers affected by the Shetland oil spill; and if compensation will be available to supply industries to the Shetland salmon farming sectors who have suffered loss of income as a result of the Shetland oil spill.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 26 January 1993]:* On the basis of the established principle that the polluter pays, responsibility for compensation rests with the international oil pollution compensation fund and the MV Braer's own insurers. Decisions on compensation payments will be a matter for those two parties in light of the international conventions under which they operate. In addition, however, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland made an initial payment of £1 million to Shetland Islands council for the special bridging fund which he announced on 11 January.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the preliminary assessment of the impact of the Braer disaster on the inter-tidal and benthic communities of Shetland and on the sea-bed biomass.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 15 February 1993]:* Sediment samples form part of our comprehensive programme for monitoring the marine environment around Shetland. The analysis of the results will take time. When available they will assist our assessment of the extent and scale of impact on the benthic communities and the sea-bed biomass.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library copies of the first reports from divers inspecting the sub-tidal impacts of the Braer spill.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 15 February 1993]:* Adverse conditions have limited the extent of divers' inspection of the sea bed. Oral reports by amateur divers undertaking dives in the area have suggested that, in selected areas such as the Bay of Spiggie, few or no benthic species appeared to have survived; in others such as East Voe of Scalloway there was no evidence of mortality. Arrangements for the marine nature conservation review team of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee to undertake diving inspections around Shetland are currently being made.

Water

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the sites proposed to him for classification as sensitive areas under the EC directive on urban waste water treatment, including the proposing body, by reason of *(a)* eutrophication and *(b)* inland water with a nitrate concentration greater than 50 mg/l.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 15 February 1993]:* The urban waste water treatment directive requires member states to identify sensitive areas, in accordance with criteria set out in the directive, by 31 December 1993. The river purification authorities are jointly compiling a list of "candidate" sensitive areas in Scotland which they will submit to the Scottish Office Environment Department for consideration. Similar exercises are being carried out in the remainder of the United Kingdom. An announcement of the areas to be formally identified as sensitive will be made before the directive's deadline.

Energy

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details of the state aid to the energy sector within Scotland as notified to the European Commission.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 15 February 1993]:* A Debt Extinguishment Order was laid before Parliament on 9 March 1990, extinguishing £1,368 million of debt in Scottish Nuclear Ltd. The company was also provided with financial assurances by the Government, to enable it to meet its liabilities from the resources it inherited, under schedule 12 of the Electricity Act 1989. This schedule 12 agreement, for a total of £716 million, was announced on 4 April 1990 by means of a written answer.

The amount of debt in Scottish Power and Scottish Hydro-Electric written off in net terms by the Government amounted to £418 million.

The above matters were notified to the European Commission.

Tied Housing

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to introduce legislation in Scotland *(a)* to facilitate the improvement of the physical condition of tied housing, *(b)* to clarify farmers' repossession of tied housing and to prevent avoidance of using legal action to remove tenants in tied houses and *(c)* to improve local authorities' ability to meet the housing requirements of farm and estate workers who previously lived in tied housing; and what representations and discussions he has had in regard to these matters.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 16 February 1993]:* Improvement of the condition of tied houses is the responsibility of the owner in each case, and grant may be available. The owner can obtain possession of the tied house only by recourse to a court order when a tenancy under an employment contract is ended. If a tied tenant is evicted, he can apply to his housing authority, which in assessing the household's needs would take account of the code of guidance on homelessness issued in April 1991 by the Scottish Office.

I have received very few representations on this matter apart from those of the hon. Member.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations and discussions he has had with regard to introducing legislation in Scotland to grant security of tenure to estate and farm workers living in tied houses; what plans he has to introduce such legislation; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 16 February 1993]:* I have received very few representations. Housing provision in these cases is linked to the individual employment contract and any security of tenure would have to be included in such contracts by agreement between the employer and employee. I have no plans to amend existing legislation.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he has taken to publicise the alternative housing options open to those estate and farm workers living in tied housing when they retire or are made redundant.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 16 February 1993]:* Exploration of the available housing options is a matter for the individuals concerned. If necessary, they can seek advice from the local housing authority.

Council Housing

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current stock of council houses in rural areas in each of the local authorities in Scotland; and what was the stock in each year since 1979.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 16 February 1993]:* The information requested is not available.

Court Procedures

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 2 February, c. *177*, when he hopes to complete his consideration of proposals to save police time in court and of the problem of counter-notices.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 17 February 1993]:* Consideration of the use of police time at court is only part of a continuing and wider consideration of the operation of current procedures for criminal trials. The Government are determined to maintain, and where possible, improve the high standard of the criminal justice system in Scotland. A number of initiatives has already been taken, including the provision of police witness statements to defence solicitors, which has reduced the demands on police time in the preparation for trial. A review of court programming conducted by Sheriff Principal Nicholson and Sheriff Cox to establish measures for improving court efficiency and providing the best possible service to court users is nearing completion. We are reviewing the scope for changes to the laws of procedure and evidence to secure further improvements. A standing committee on criminal procedure chaired by Lord MacLean has been reviewing the operation of the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1975. Proposals arising from these reviews will be brought forward for consultation later in the year.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he proposes to take to reduce the amount of police time and resources caused by unnecessary attendance at court for the purpose of giving evidence; and what financial assessment he has made of the cost at the time and resources involved.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 17 February 1993]:* Several steps are being taken. The provision of police witness statements to defence solicitors has already saved police time in the pre-trial period. A review of court programming conducted by Sheriff Principal Nicholson to establish measures for improving efficiency and provide the best possible service for all court users is nearing completion. We are reviewing the scope for changes to the laws of evidence and procedure to secure further improvements. A Standing Committee on Criminal Procedure chaired by Lord MacLean has been reviewing the operation of the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1975. Proposals arising from these reviews will be brought forward for public consultation later in the year.

The Scottish Office has not undertaken a separate assessment of the costs of police attendance at court. The recent report by the Commission for Local Authority Accounts in Scotland on police waiting time at court included an estimate that the cost of police discharging their statutory duty to attend court to give evidence is some £7·8 million per year.

Prison Officers

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many prison officers are employed in prisons within which the prisoners are of the opposite sex.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 17 February 1993]:* This month there are approximately 70 female officers in uniformed grades in male prison establishments and 24 male uniformed staff at the women's prison in Cornton Vale.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many prison officers now wear name badges; and when the staff in all the prisons will be required to wear name badges.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 17 February 1993]:* Staff in all Scottish prisons are required to wear name badges and are now doing so. Particular exceptions can however be made where wearing name badges would jeopardise staff safety.

Council Tax

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the number of disabled persons in each council tax band B to H inclusive who are likely to be eligible for a disabled person's discount; what is the estimated cost of this discount for each band B to H; what it is in total for the whole country; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 17 February 1993]:* No such estimates have been made by my Department.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the number of council tax payers eligible for a second home discount in each band in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland as a whole; what is the estimated cost of the discount for each band and in total; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 17 February 1993]:* There are no council tax provisions requiring the identification of properties used as second homes. Such properties will be among those regarded as being empty or no one's sole or main residence for the purposes of determining entitlement to exemption or discount.

The table shows for Strathclyde, and for Scotland as a whole, the estimated number of dwellings which are exempt or subject to discount because they are empty or are no one's sole or main residence. These estimates were made following consultation with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities for the purposes of distributing aggregate external finance (AEF) for 1993-94.

Local authorities will be required, later this year, to supply information on the numbers of bills subject to discount and of exempt properties by category. This information will be used in deciding whether a redetermination of the distribution of AEF for 1993-94 will be necessary, and in distributing AEF for 1994-95.

Number of dwellings

Scotland	*Strathclyde*
101,350	36,230

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the council tax disability reduction scheme applies to *(a)* residential care homes belonging to housing associations, *(b)* those owned by churches and other non-profit making voluntary associations, *(c)* privately owned and managed residential care homes and *(d)* such dwellings owned and managed by local authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 18 February 1993]:* The Council Tax (Reductions for Disabilities) (Scotland) Regulations 1992 provide that reductions are available in respect of all dwellings, regardless of ownership, which meet the criteria prescribed, which include a requirement that they are the sole or main residence of a person who is substantially and permanently disabled. The Council Tax (Dwellings and Part Residential Subjects) (Scotland) Regulations 1992 provide, however, that except for parts constituting staff accommodation residential care homes in Scotland will not be treated as dwellings for council tax purposes.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the number of disabled persons living in houses valued in council tax band A who would be eligible for a discount if their houses were valued in any other band; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 17 February 1993]:* No such estimate has been made. Since dwellings in band A already attract the minimum bill, they are not attracting a higher bill than they would otherwise have done because of the presence of facilities to meet the needs of disabled persons.

Police Restructuring

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consultations he has held or proposes to hold with the police authorities regarding the proposals to restructure police forces and police authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 17 February 1993]:* The consultation paper on the structure of local government in Scotland, which was issued in October 1992 and sent to all local authorities, invited views on whether changes might be made in the structure and number of police forces and authorities. I do not yet have proposals to put forward on these matters; when I do, there will be an opportunity for police authorities to comment on them.

Legal Aid

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will bring forward proposals to provide that, where a claimant suffering from asbestosis or related ailments is in receipt of legal aid but dies before his case is heard, that assistance will be given to this next-of-kin so that the case can proceed through the courts; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 17 February 1993]:* My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State at the Scottish Office, who has ministerial responsibility for legal aid matters, will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Prisons

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for scotland how many persons detained in Her Majesty's prisons sought leave to take a case to the European Commission of Human Rights in each of the past five years; which of those applications led to changes in the standing orders of prisons or in any other prison regulations; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 17 February 1993]:* Persons detained in penal establishments in Scotland do not require to obtain the Secretary of State's consent to lodge an application with the European Commission of Human Rights and accordingly information on the number of applications made is not held centrally.

However, I can confirm that in the last five years one such application led to changes in the Scottish prison service standing orders. As a result of implementation of revised procedures following a judgment delivered by the European Court of Human Rights in March 1992, correspondence between prisoners and their legal advisers now normally passes unopened.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will ensure that in each prison there is an adequate number of leaflets concerning the right of a prisoner to make application to the European Commission of Human Rights; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 17 February 1993]:* Yes. They will be made available in every prison library.

Housing Association Grant

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland to what extent discretion is exercised in the determination of the amount of housing association grant available in each district council area; and what performance criteria are used in the exercise.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 17 February 1993]:* My right hon. Friend approves Scottish Homes' total expenditure programme each year. It is for Scottish Homes to decide on the allocation of funds to specific areas and projects. In determining the amount of housing association grant made available to specific areas and consequently to individual housing associations, Scottish Homes will take into account a range of factors. These include detailed background to projects in respect of associations' aims and objectives; ensuring value for money and the effective use of public resources; target client groups and any partnership arrangements, for example with local authorities, the details of which will normally be included in business plans and programme agreements with individual associations.

In-vitro Fertilisation

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the availability of in-vitro fertilisation services within the national health service in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 17 February 1993]:* In-vitro fertilisation services are not available within the national health service in Scotland. However, there are four centres attached to the teaching hospitals in Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow which offer these services. The arrangements vary in each centre as do the funding regimes.

Unemployment

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland have been unemployed for (i) more than six months, (ii) more than 12 months and (iii) more than two years.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 17 February 1993]:* The table shows information relating to the numbers of unemployed in Inverclyde, Strathclyde and Scotland, by duration of unemployment, and relates to October 1992:

Numbers unemployed by duration of unemployment

	More than six months	*More than 12 months*	*More than two years*
Inverclyde	2,857	1,952	999
Strathclyde	72,092	48,554	24,442
Scotland	125,082	81,019	39,482

Police Stations

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by region the locations of *(a)* full-time manned and *(b)* part-time manned police stations.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 17 February 1993]:* Police officers are on call throughout Scotland 24 hours a day irrespective of the opening hours of particular police stations. In the circumstances forces do not, as a general rule, categorise stations in the manner specified by the hon. Member. The information sought is not, therefore, available in the form requested.

Census

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what procedure was used by the General Registrar's Office to determine geographical distribution of those missed by the census.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 17 February 1993]:* It is estimated that a total of 89,000 people resident in Scotland, or 1·7 per cent. of the population, were not enumerated in the 1991 census. Census figures are not themselves adjusted. However, the estimated under-enumeration has been taken into account in producing the Registrar General's provisional population estimates for Scotland for mid-1991.

The geographical distribution of this under-enumeration was based on comparisons with various administrative sources, most important of which were birth registrations and the national health service central register. In general, the evidence pointed to larger shortfalls in the cities and other urban areas than in rural areas. In preparing the provisional estimates, a relatively simple weighting system was used to take this into account.

Nursing Homes

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many privately owned and managed nursing homes were registered in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland as a whole in each of the past five years.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 18 February 1993]:* The information on private nursing homes[1] is as follows:

Year (at 31 March)	*Strathclyde*[2]	*Scotland*
1988	98	215
1989	125	270
1990	141	316
1991	156	355
1992	176	388

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[1] Establishments registered by Health Boards under the Nursing Homes Registration (Scotland) Act 1938 (as amended).

[2] Area covered by Health Boards for Argyll and Clyde, Ayrshire and Arran, Lanarkshire and Greater Glasgow.

Adoption

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from voluntary associations, other interested groups and individuals concerning the adoption of babies born to Muslim women in Bosnia who have been raped; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 18 February 1993]:* None, apart from a few inquiries from individual members of the public.

Student Accommodation

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations and discussions he has had about reversing the decision of Scottish Homes to withdraw funding from student housing.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 18 February 1993]:* None. Scottish Homes has not made a decision to withdraw funding from student housing.

Murders

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the number of murders committed in each police force area in each of the past six years; how many of these led to convictions in the High Court; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 18 February 1993]:* The table below gives the number of victims in murder cases, and the number of persons convicted of murder in the High Court in these cases for each police force area. The latest available information is for 1991.

Police-force area	*Number of murder victims*	*Persons accused convicted in high court*	*Persons accused no conviction*[1]
1986			
Northern	1	1	—
Grampian	2	1	1
Tayside	1	1	—
Fife	1	1	—
Lothian and Borders	8	6	1
Central	—	—	—
Strathclyde	34	24	21
Dumfries and Galloway	1	1	—
Total	48	35	23
1987			
Northern	2	1	1
Grampian	1	1	—
Tayside	1	1	—
Fife	1	—	1
Lothian and Borders	6	4	2
Central	3	5	—
Strathclyde	32	21	30
Dumfries and Galloway	2	2	2
Total	48	35	36
1988			
Northern	—	—	—
Grampian	2	2	—
Tayside	1	1	—
Fife	2	3	—
Lothian and Borders	5	5	4
Central	1	—	1
Strathclyde	23	18	7
Dumfries and Galloway[2]	1	1	1
Total	35	30	13
1989			
Northern	3	1	2
Grampian	1	1	—
Tayside	4	4	2
Fife	—	—	—
Lothian and Borders	3	3	—
Central	—	—	—
Strathclyde	29	21	19
Dumfries and Galloway	1	1	—
Total	41	31	23
1990			
Northern	2	1	1
Grampian	1	1	—
Tayside	3	1	2
Fife	1	1	—
Lothian and Borders	8	6	3
Central	1	1	—
Strathclyde	21	12	15
Dumfries and Galloway	—	—	—
Total	37	23	21
1991			
Northern	1	—	1
Grampian	2	2	—
Tayside	4	1	2
Fife	3	2	—
Lothian and Borders	12	12	7
Central	1	—	1
Strathclyde	32	10	23
Dumfries and Galloway	1	1	1
Total	56	28	35

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[1] No conviction includes; no proceedings, proceedings dropped, death of suspect, aquitted, and case pending.

[2] The 270 victims of the Lockerbie disaster are excluded from this figure.

Police (Sexual Harassment)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many complaints concerning allegations of sexual harassment by male police officers have been made by women police officers in each police force in each of the past six years; how many of these led to disciplinary proceedings against the alleged perpetrators; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 18 February 1993]:* On the basis of records held by individual police forces the information asked for is as follows:

Number of Complaints

	1987	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
Central	—	1	—	—	—	—
Dumfries and Galloway	—	—	—	—	—	—
Fife	—	—	—	—	—	1
Grampian	1	—	1	—	—	—
Lothian and Borders	—	—	—	—	—	1
Northern	—	—	—	1	—	—
Strathclyde	—	—	—	—	1	—
Tayside	—	—	1	—	—	—

Disciplinary proceedings were initiated in all but one of these cases.

GP Fund Holders

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total income currently derived from general practitioner fund holders in each health board area.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 17 February 1993]:* Allocations made to GP fund holders are not income to the GPs, but funds which they administer to secure treatment for their patients.

GP Referrals

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will take steps to ensure that no general practitioners are required to cease non-emergency extra-contractual referrals if ECR budgets become overspent.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 17 February 1993]:* Health boards are required to ensure that patients are treated within the time scales referred to in the patients charter. From monitoring information provided to the Department, there is no evidence to suggest that health boards are restricting non-emergency extra-contractual referrals due to budget constraints.

Hospitals

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to ensure elective work is not deferred until a new financial year if provider units overspend.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 17 February 1993]:* Health boards and NHS trusts are required to ensure that patients are treated within the time scales referred to in the patients charter. Providers are required to deliver the contracted level of care from within their contract income. Where this is at risk they should advise their purchasers. The Department is not aware of any significant overspends which could lead to elective work being deferred until the next financial year.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what advice he is giving to hospitals which find they have treated more patients than the number specified in their contracts.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 17 February 1993]:* National health service trusts and health boards' directly managed units have been advised to work closely with their purchasers and to share information on activity levels in year. Providers must recognise the need for health boards to manage their resources within their cash limits. Early warning to purchasers of projected variances will provide opportunities to redeploy funds to ensure that patient care is delivered in line with local health strategies.

Health Service Treatment Costs

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what account will be taken of fixed overheads such as capital costs when calculating the costs of treatment *(a)* as a matter of routine in all cases or *(b)* as a matter of local discretion; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 17 February 1993]:* The procedural manual on contracting requires that contract and extra-contractual referral prices are based on full costs with fixed overheads and capital charges allocated to different services on a fair and reasonable basis. The only exception to this requirement is where contracts relate to utilising spare capacity in year where the fixed costs have already been recovered against planned activity. Waiting list initiatives could fall into this category and could be priced on marginal cost. Health boards and NHS trusts do not have any discretion to deviate from these requirements.

EDUCATION

Fridges and Freezers

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what are the latest available annual figures for his Department's purchase of domestic fridges and freezers;

(2) how many domestic fridges and freezers his Department intends to purchase in 1993;

(3) if his Department will make it its policy to purchase domestic fridges and freezers that do not contain ozone-depleting substances.

Mr. Forth: In 1992 the Department purchased 13 domestic fridges and two freezers. We do not expect to make any further purchases in the current year. When the need to purchase more or replacement equipment arises, we will wherever possible purchase a type which does not contain ozone-depleting substances.

The Department's purchasing policy is to avoid buying materials and equipment which rely on ozone-depleting substances in their use or manufacture, unless suitable alternative products are unavailable. A reduction in the amount of ozone-depleting chemicals used in its premises will automatically follow as a result of the implementation of this policy.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list the names of grant-maintained schools within each local education authority area in England.

Mr. Forth: The information requested is as follows:

OPERATING GM SCHOOLS

Avon LEA
Beechen Cliff School
Oldfield School

Barnet LEA
Mill Hill County High School
Queen Elizabeth's GM School For Boys
Hendon School

Bedfordshire LEA
Manshead School Grant Maintained
Sharnbrook Upper School
Thomas Whitehead CE School
Queensbury School

Berkshire LEA
Reading School
Langley Grammar School
Denefield School
The Downs School
Desborough Comprehensive School
St. Bartholomew's School
Holy Family RC School
Cippenham Middle School (Grant Maintained)
Herschel Grammar School
Southlands School
Upton Grammar School
Priory School

Bexley LEA
Barnehurst Junior Grant-Maintained School
Barnehurst Infant Grant-Maintained School

Birmingham LEA
Baverstock Grant-Maintained School
Small Heath School
Handsworth Grammar School for Boys
Great Barr Grant-Maintained School

Bolton LEA
Crompton Fold Primary School
St. James' CE School

Bradford LEA
Bingley Grammar School

Brent LEA
Claremont High School (Grant-Maintained)
Copland Community School and Technology Centre

Bromley LEA
St. Olave's and St. Saviour's Grammar School
Coopers School
Holy Innocents Roman Catholic Primary School
Charles Darwin School
Kelsey Park School
Langley Park School for Boys
St. John Rigby School
Beaverwood School for Girls
Ravens Wood School for Boys
Hayes School
Crofton Junior School
Newstead Wood School for Girls (GM)
Bullers Wood School for Girls

Buckinghamshire LEA
Bridgewater Hall School
Beaconsfield High School
Brookmead School
Brindley Hall School
Overstone Grant Maintained Combined School
The Chalfonts Community College (GM)

Calderdale LEA
The Crossley Heath School
Salterlee Primary School
The North Halifax High School

Cambridgeshire LEA
Wheatfields Junior School
Jack Hunt School, Peterborough
Sawtry Village College GM School
The King's School (Peterborough Cathedral Sc)
Bassingbourn GM Village College
St. Helen's Primary School
Crosshall Junior School
Crosshall Infant School
The Park Lane Primary School
The Queen's School
Gamlingay (Grant-Maintained) Village College

Cheshire LEA
Kettleshulme St. James CE GM Primary School
Bankfield High School (GM)

Croydon LEA
Riddlesdown Grant-Maintained School

Cumbria LEA
St. Aidan's County High School
Hayton CE Grant-Maintained School
Trinity School, Carlisle
Kirkbie Kendal School
Queen Elizabeth Grammar School
The Queen Katherine School
Scotby CE Grant-Maintained Primary School

Derbyshire LEA
Chellaston School
Borrow Wood Junior School
Belmont Primary School
Netherthorpe School
The Merrill Community School
The Ecclesbourne School

Devon LEA
Colyton Grammar School
Torquay Boys' Grammar School

Dorset LEA
Highcliffe Comprehensive School
Bournemouth School
Avonbourne School
Budmouth School
Parkstone Grammar School
The Woodroffe School
Bournemouth School for Girls

Dudley LEA
Old Swinford Hospital

Ealing LEA
The Ellen Wilkinson School for Girls
Brentside High School
Greenford High School
Drayton Manor High School
Wood End Middle School
Northolt High School
Wood End First School

Essex LEA
West Hatch High School
The Plume School
King Harold Grant-Maintained School
The Rickstones School
Saffron Walden County High School
Westcliff High School for Girls
Katherines Primary School
Great Totham Primary School, Essex
Chalvedon School
Castle View School
Beauchamps Grant-Maintained School
Furtherwick Park School
North Crescent Primary School
The Cornelius Vermuyden School
The Fitzwimarc School, Rayleigh
Westborough County Primary School
Westcliff High School for Boys

Newlands Spring Grant-Maintained School
Thurstable School
Northlands Grant-Maintained Junior School
Chelmsford County High School for Girls
The King John School
The Philip Morant School
The Appleton School
The Hedley Walter High School (GM)
The King Edmund School
Torells Grant-Maintained School
The Elmwood Primary School
The Deanes School
King Edward VI Grammar School (GM)
Bromfords School, Wickford
The Boswells School
Eastwood County High School and Sixth Form Centre

Gloucestershire LEA
The Rednock School
Tewkesbury Grant-Maintained School
Katharine Lady Berkeley's School
Chipping Campden School
Balcarras School
Saintbridge GM Technology School
Robinswood Primary School
Ribston Hall High School
Pate's Grant Maintained Grammar School
The Cotswold School
Stroud High School
Newent Community School
Marling School
Churchdown Grant-Maintained School
The Crypt School
Chosen Hill School, Gloucester
The Catholic School of St. Gregory the Great

Hammersmith LEA
London Oratory School

Hampshire LEA
Testwood School
Hardley School (Grant-Maintained)
Ringwood School (GM Comprehensive)
Burgate School
Front Lawn Middle School
Abbotswood Grant Maintained Middle School
The Priory County Primary School
Crofton School, Fareham
The City of Portsmouth Boys' School
The Arnewood School

Hertfordshire LEA
St. Mary's Catholic Primary School
Hertingfordbury Cowper JMI School
Christ Church CE School
Rickmansworth School
Parmiters School
Parkside First School
Francis Bacon School
Watford Grammar School for Girls
Watford Grammar School for Boys
The Bishop's Stortford High School

Hillingdon LEA
Bishopshalt School
Haydon School
Queensmead School
Oak Farm Junior Mixed School (GM)
Oak Farm Infant School (Grant-Maintained)
Northwood School
Vyners School
Uxbridge High School
Mellow Lane School
The Hayes Manor School
The Douay Martyrs School

Humberside LEA
Wold Newton Grant-Maintained Primary School

Kensington LEA
Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School

Kent LEA
Thamesview School
Homewood School
St. Simon Stock School
Holy Trinity CE Primary School
St. George's Church of England School
Wrotham School
Southlands Comprehensive School
Borough Green Primary School
Snodland CE Primary School
Sir Roger Manwood's School
Simon Langton Grammar School for Boys
The Skinners' School, Tunbridge Wells
Senacre Technology School
Sandown Court Community College
Chatham Grammar School for Girls
Rainham Mark Grammar School
Aylesford School
Fulston Manor School
Oldborough Manor Community College
Oakwood Park Grammar School
Wilmington Grammar School for Boys
Minster College
The Robert Napier Grant-Maintained School
Meopham School Grant-Maintained School
Dartford Grammar School for Girls
Dartford Grammar School
The Maplesden Noakes School
The Malling School
The Hugh Christie School
Angley School
The Grammar School for Girls Wilmington
The Cornwallis School
Cranbrook School
The Canterbury High School
The Bradbourne School
The Archbishop's CE Grant Maintained School

Kingston-upon-Thames LEA
Tiffin School

Kirklees LEA
Heckmondwike Grammar School
Castle Hall Grant-Maintained School

Lambeth LEA
St. Bernadette RC Junior Mixed School
La Retraite RC Girls (GM) School

Lancashire LEA
Clitheroe Royal Grammar School
Baines School
Bacup and Rawtenstall Grammar School
Newton Bluecoat C of E GM Primary School
Lancaster Royal Grammar School
Lancaster Girls Grammar School

Leicestershire LEA
Long Field GM High School

Lewisham LEA
Turnham Primary with Nursery GM School

Lincolnshire LEA
The Ancaster High School, Lincoln
Bourne Abbey Primary School
St. George's Grant-Maintained School
Skegness Grammar School
Robert Pattinson Grant-Maintained School
Rauceby School CE GM
Queen Elizabeth's GM Grammar School
Gleed Girls Grant Maintained School
Carre's Grammar School
Caistor Grammar School
Ermine Junior Grant Maintained School
Yarborough High School
North Kesteven Grant-Maintained School
William Farr CE Comprehensive School
William Alvey CE Junior School
Monks' Dyke High School
The Magdalen School
The Kings School Grantham
The Gartree Grant Maintained School

Lincoln Christ's Hospital School
The Castle Hills GM School, Gainsborough
King Edward VI School

Liverpool LEA

St. Francis Xavier's College

Newham LEA

Stratford School

Norfolk LEA

South Wootton Grant-Maintained Junior School
Heacham Middle School (GM)
Sheringham High School
Robert Kett Grant-Maintained Middle School
Gresham Village School (Grant-Maintained)
Redgate Grant-Maintained Middle School
Norwich Road School
Acle High School
Wymondham College (GMS)
Downham Market High School—Grant-Maintained
West Flegg Middle School (GM)
Dereham Church CE Grant-Maintained School
Marshland High School
Loddon Middle Grant-Maintained School
Cromer High School—Grant-Maintained
Costessey High School, Grant-Maintained

Northamptonshire LEA

Southfield School For Girls
Sir Christopher Hatton School
Wrenn School
Northampton (GM) School for Boys
Weavers School
Moulton Primary School (Grant-Maintained)
Montagu School
The Windmill County GM Primary School
Manor School, Northamptonshire
The King John School
Lodge Park School
Kingswood School
Kingsley Park Middle School

Nottinghamshire LEA

Ravensdale Middle School

Rochdale LEA

Crossgates Primary School

Sandwell LEA

Manor High School, Sandwell

Sheffield LEA

Clifford CE Grant-Maintained School

Shropshire LEA

Adams' Grammar School

Solihull LEA

Hatchford Grant-Maintained Primary School

Somerset LEA

Sexey's School
Bruton Primary School

Southwark LEA

London Nautical School

Staffordshire LEA

St. Thomas More RC High School

Surrey LEA

Thamesmead School
Collingwood Grant-Maintained School
Stoneleigh First School (Grant-Maintained)
St. John the Baptist School
Heathside Secondary School
Send C of E First School (Grant-Maintained)
Hawkedale First School
Rosebery School
Guildford County School
Gordon's Grant Maintained School
Glyn School
Epsom and Ewell High School
de Stafford School
The Manor County First School
The Beacon School

Sutton LEA

Sutton Grammar School for Boys
Cheam High School
Wilsons School
Nonsuch High School for Girls
The John Fisher School

Tameside LEA

Audenshaw High School

Tower Hamlets LEA

Raines Foundation School

Walsall LEA

Streetly School
St. Thomas More RC Comprehensive GM School

Waltham Forest LEA

Highams Park School

Wandsworth LEA

Salesian College
Graveney School
Ethelburga Primary School (Grant-Maintained)
Elliott School (GM)
Burntwood School

Warwickshire LEA

Hartshill Grant Maintained School
Queen Elizabeth Upper Atherstone GM School
Queen Elizabeth Lower Atherstone GM School
Myton School
Ash Green Grant-Maintained School
The Avon Valley Grant-Maintained School

Wiltshire LEA

Highbury Secondary Boys' School
St. Augustine RC (GM) Comprehensive School
Aloeric Grant-Maintained School
Lavington Comprehensive School

Wolverhampton LEA

Wolverhampton Girls High School
Moseley Park GM School

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what payments have been made by the Grant-Maintained Schools Centre to Choice in Education, and for what purpose, during the last two years; and if he will make a statement on the financial relationship between the two bodies.

Mr. Forth: The Government pay grant to the Grant-Maintained Schools Centre Ltd. for specific purposes. The purposes to which the Grant Maintained Schools Centre Ltd. puts its other income is a matter for the directors of the company. The Government do not pay grant to Choice in Education Ltd.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what accounts his Department receives from the Grant-Maintained Schools Centre; and if he will place each year's accounts in the Library.

Mr. Forth: The Grant-Maintained Schools Centre Ltd. is required to provide to the Department an audited income and expenditure account, balance sheet and supporting notes in respect of its activities during that year. The accounts for the financial year ending March 31 1989, and for all subsequent years, have been placed in the Library.

Textbooks

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what surveys he is conducting about shortages of textbooks in schools.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend is not conducting any survey of the availability of textbooks in schools, although he is continuing to monitor the use made of specific grant funding to support books, equipment and training for the national curriculum. The office for standards in education will ensure that reports of school inspections continue to address the question of resources for the curriculum.

Nursery Education

Ms. Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what funding will be available for the in-service training of nursery school staff in 1993-94.

Mr. Forth: It is for local education authorities to determine what provision might be made for in-service training for nursery school staff in 1993-94 in the light of their priorities and the overall resources available to them.

Ms. Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has to improve the quality and quantity of nursery education in England and Wales.

Mr. Forth: Nursery education in Wales is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales. It is for local authorities to determine the scope and form of provision for the under-fives in collaboration with other local providers. Within this frame the numbers of under-fives attending maintained schools in England have risen by 200,000 over the period of the present Government, including a rise of 26,000 between 1991 and 1992. Quality issues have been addressed in reports by Her Majestys inspectorate and the report of the Rumbold committee, which informed the educational content of guidance under the Children Act, and training for under-fives workers has been a priority within the grants for education support and training scheme for the last four years. It is for schools to ensure that the quality of their nursery provision receives appropriate attention within their overall planning.

English Tests

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education on which date the Schools Examinations and Assessment Council informed schools about which Shakespeare plays had been chosen for the key stage 3 English tests for June 1993.

Mr. Forth: The Schools Examinations and Assessment Council sent out guidance on the 1993 tests to schools in the second week of September 1992. This guidance included information about the three Shakespeare plays from which teachers could choose one for their pupils to answer questions on as part of the English tests for 14-year-olds in June 1993. Schools would have received the information in the second or third week of September.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list the publishers who were told which Shakespeare plays had been selected for the key stage 3 English tests in June 1993, and the date on which each was informed.

Mr. Forth: No publishers were so informed. I understand that at least two publishers have sufficient stocks of the Shakespeare plays selected for the English tests for 14-year-olds in June 1993. The selected plays were chosen partly on the basis that most schools had sufficient copies readily available. For those which do not, the Department's grants for education support and training programme support expenditure on buying additional copies.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 22 February 1993

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

European Communities (Amendment) Bill

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he requested legal advice on amendment No. 27 to the European Communities (Amendment) Bill from the Government's Law Officers.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The Law Officers were formally consulted on 9 February.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish the advice his Department has received on amendment No. 27 to the European Communities (Amendment) Bill.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on 15 February, at column 27.

El Salvador (Human Rights)

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has concerning the fulfilment of the guarantee given by Alfredo Cristiani of El Salvador to the United Nations Secretary-General in November 1992 concerning the transfer or retirement of officers from his army who had been named as human rights violators.

Mr. Garel-Jones: In a letter to the President of the United Nations Security Council on 7 January, the UN Secretary-General accepted as satisfactory the measures adopted and implemented by the Government of El Salvador with respect to 87 of the 102 army officers covered by the recommendations of the ad hoc commission set up under the El Salvador peace accords. However, the Secretary General said that the measures adopted in respect of the other 15 officers did not comply with those recommendations. The Security Council on 9 February expressed concern at this situation.

Bosnia

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many representations he has received about the situation in Bosnia since 8 February; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Secretary of State has received no visitors specifically to discuss Bosnia since 8 February. It is a frequent topic in his discussions with overseas visitors and others. He has received numerous letters from members of the public and hon. Members on behalf of their constituents.

Palestine Liberation Organisation

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will instruct Her Majesty's ambassador in Tunis to convey to the Palestine Liberation Organisation the concern of Her Majesty's Government at the continuing contacts between Yasser Arafat and Saddam Hussein.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The PLO is well aware of our views on Saddam Hussein.

Publicity

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 2 June 1992 to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) *Official Report*, column *358*, what is his Department's *(a)* current outturn estimate for publicity expenditure for 1992-93 and *(b)* budgeted publicity expenditure for 1993-94.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The current estimated expenditure by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for publicity in 1992-93 and the budgeted expenditure for publicity in 1993-94 are:

	FCO Diplomatic wing £	*FCO ODA wing* £
1992-93	951,500	680,000
1993-94	566,001	680,000

Communications Courses

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what equipment those attending communications courses in Northamptonshire in the last six months have been trained; when the models of equipment concerned are to be withdrawn; and what is the per capita cost for those attending such courses, including travelling, subsistence and accommodation.

Mr. Goodlad: No FCO personnel have attended communications courses in Northamptonshire in the last six months. FCO staff have been trained at Hanslope Park in Buckinghamshire on numerous types of equipment over the last six months. Certain radio and teleprinter equipment is now being withdrawn as more cost-effective PC-based communication systems are installed worldwide. The average cost, including all overheads, per student per day is about £90.

Air Travel

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what class of air ticket staff travel when travelling to and from posts abroad; and what assessment he has made of the relative costs to his Department of their travelling on *(a)* economy or excursion fares and *(b)* business class fares.

Mr. Goodlad: The types of ticket to which diplomatic service officers and their families are entitled accord with guidance set by HM Treasury. Almost all officers on duty, transfer and mid-tour leave travel economy class on journeys of up to two and a half hours, and business class for longer journeys. Very senior officers may travel in a higher class in certain circumstances, by virtue of their grade or for operational reasons: such cases amount to about 1·5 per cent. of total journeys. All other leave journeys and children's holiday visit passages, including journeys over two and a half hours, are by the cheapest means: economy or Apex fares.

We have not made an assessement of the relative cost of downgrading the class of travel, for example from business to economy class. Air fare pricing is constantly changing: our travel services contractor logs 1·6 million changes a day. We judge that the entitlements set by HM Treasury represent a reasonable balance of economy, operational needs, and comfort for the traveller.

The FCO constantly strives for greater value for money. We have agreements with a number of airlines which provide for substantial discounts, negotiated in partnership with our travel services contractors, with whom we also have a special arrangement to reduce cost.

Mr. Mahal Khalil

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 12 February, *Official Report*, column *840*, concerning Mr. Mahal Khalil—Ref: IMM/B4131—if he will make it his policy that any appeal made by Mr. Khalil against refusal to grant entry clearance will be accepted; if he will arrange for an appeal to be given priority in view of the delay caused by administrative error; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Should Mr. Khalil submit an appeal against the decision to refuse entry clearance, the entry clearance officer—ECO—at the high commission in Islamabad will accept the appeal. The ECO will give priority to the preparation of his explanatory statement. Mr. Khalil may wish to ask in his appeal that it be given priority, and the independent appellate authority would no doubt give full consideration to such a request.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Authorities (Legislation)

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to review the consultation procedures with local authorities on the implications for them of intended legislation.

Mr. Robin Squire: Under recent legislation, where consultation is necessary, the Secretary of State is required to consult

> "such representatives of local government as appear to him to be appropriate".

For these purposes we consult the local authority associations. Consultation documents cover the resource implications of proposals for local authorities. Even where there is no statutory requirement, it is the Government's policy and practice to consult the associations so that local government's views can be taken into account as early in the formulation of policy and legislation as possible. In addition, there are regular informal meetings between Ministers and the chairmen of the associations at which the direction of policy and the possibility of future legislation are discussed.

These consultation arrangements are kept under review and are regularly discussed with the associations.

Urban Programme

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which organisations are currently being funded under the urban programme in Lambeth.

Mr. Robin Squire: The organisations currently being funded under Lambeth's urban programme are listed as follows

1. London Borough of Lambeth
2. Camberwell District Health Authority
3. West Lambeth District Health Authority

Voluntary Organisations

1. Melting Pot Foundation-Green Badge Taxi School
2. LMHS-Roots and Shoots
3. Angell Town Estate Enterprise Centre
4. Front Line Women's Organisation
5. Lambeth Turkish Speaking Community
6. Lambeth Youth Aid-Textile Printers
7. Worklink
8. Plant Exchange
9. Allen Edwards Nature Gardens
10. Loughborough Estate Tenants Association
11. Brixton Sheltered Street Scheme
12. Lambeth Chinese Community Association
13. St. Martins Estate Community Project
14. CLUFO/Vietnam Refugees
15. Angell Town Community Nursery
16. Frontline Development-Brixton Cares
17. HAPA
18. Allen Edwards Oasis Environmental Project
19. Stockwell Good Neighbours
20. Vietnamese Elderly Project
21. Apostolic All Nations Community Centre
22. Oval Options
23. 198 Gallery
24. Fanon Project-Brixton Circle
25. Ashmole Tenant's Hall
26. Norbury CHAS
27. North Lambeth Day Centre Resettlement
28. Organisation for Sickle Cell Research
29. South Island Workshop Training Programme
30. Myatts Field Community Centre
31. Asian Community Action Group
32. St. Vincents Community Centre
33. Heath Road Community Project
34. Black Contractors Association
35. Lambeth Accord-Worklink
36. Lambeth Business Association
37. Lambeth Drugline
38. Help 71
39. Lilford Afterschool Group
40. Springfield Community Flat
41. Cathedral Employment
42. QTAB
43. LMHS-All Sewn Up
44. The Baytree Centre
45. Brixwork
46. CALA Training Centre
47. Blackfriars Settlement-Work Centre
48. Eritrean Community
49. Ethelred Estate
50. Lambeth Summer Project
51. Bondway Night Shelter
52. West Indian Ex-Serviceman's Association
53. Holy Trinity Church, Tulse Hill
54. Lambeth Somali Community Association
55. Turkish Speaking Community Project
56. Dorset Road Community Hall

Housing Starts

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the number of private sector housing starts in each year from 1988; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: Estimates of housebuilding starts in England by sector each year from 1988 to 1991 are shown in table 6.1(a) of "Housing and Constuction Statistics 1981-1991". A copy of this publication is in the Library.

Figures for 1992 have been released in an information bulletin. On provisional estimates, there were 99,500 private enterprise and 27,400 housing association starts in England during 1992.

Super-quarries

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the impact of establishing super-quarries in Scotland on the requirement for production of aggregates in England and Wales.

Mr. Baldry: In considering the potential contribution which coastal super-quarries in north-west Europe might make to aggregates supplies, the consultants employed by my Department made a broad assessment of the planning and environmental issues involved. The Government have made it clear that individual applications will need very careful assessment and full regard will be had to their possible environmental impact.

Rent Deposit Scheme

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the outcome of the pilot rent deposit scheme in west London funded by his Department; and if he will publish a report on the scheme.

Mr. Baldry: The pilot project for a rent deposit fund operated by the Notting Hill Housing Trust—NHHT—and funded by my Department as part of the rough sleepers initiative in central London is due to end on 30 June 1993. My officials are at present discussing with NHHT how best to evaluate the scheme.

Housing Associations (Grants)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, if he will publish the affordability assumption used to determine grant rates to housing associations.

Sir George Young: Outturn rents are determined by housing associations. The Government do not publish the factors and assumptions implicit in the grant rate model or any general definition of affordability, since they do not wish to imply a view as to what constitutes an affordable rent in any particular case.

Waste Incineration

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will make it his policy to ensure that all developments at waste incineration sites are subject to full environmental impact assessments;

(2) if he will make it his policy to ensure that environmental impact assessments must be undertaken prior to developing new stacks on existing waste incineration sites;

(3) if he will make it his policy to secure that environmental impact assessments are undertaken prior to any modification of existing waste incineration plants.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 19 February 1993]:* The Town and Country Planning (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations 1988, which implement directive 85/337/EEC in respect of projects requiring applications for planning permission, set out the circumstances in which an environmental assessment—EA—is required. For projects of the types described in scheduled 1 to the regulations, which include new waste disposal installations for the incineration of hazardous waste, an EA is mandatory. For projects of the types described in schedule 2 to the regulations, which include new installations for the incineration of non-hazardous waste and modifications of existing hazardous and non-hazardous waste incineration installations, an EA is required if the particular development proposed would be likely to have significant effects on the environment by virtue of factors such as its nature, size or location.

Taxi Drivers

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those local authorities with responsibility to issue hackney carriage and private hire vehicle drivers' licences which have not adopted the Local Government Miscellaneous Provisions Act 1976.

Mr. Freeman: I have been asked to reply.

The following local authorities had not adopted the 1976 Act by 18 February 1993:

Aberconwy District Council
Bridgnorth District Council
Broxbourne Borough Council
Epping Forest District Council
Glanford Borough Council
Leominster District Council
Mid Devon District Council
Mid Suffolk District Council
Monmouth District Council
Newbury District Council
Radnor District Council
Rother District Council
South Buckinghamshire District Council
South Staffordshire District Council
West Lindsey District Council

Unless there is a local Act in force which contains a provision requiring them to be satisfied as to the fitness of an applicant, councils that have not adopted the 1976 Act cannot require a criminal record check of hackney carriage or private hire vehicle driver licence applicants.

Royal Family

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what, for the latest available year, was the cost to his Department of expenditure in support of the royal family in respect of *(a)* expenditure on palaces in occupation of Her Majesty and residences occupied by members of the royal family and *(b)* the gentlemen-at-arms and yeoman of the guard.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 19 February 1993]:* I have been asked to reply.

Expenditure in 1991-92 was £26,880,700 on the royal palaces and residences and £47,000 on the gentlemen-at-arms and yeoman of the guard.

Housing Revenue Account Subsidy

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assistance he proposes to make available to London boroughs and the Common Council during 1993-94 in respect of the extra costs due to his decisions on housing revenue account subsidy in respect of debt from the former Greater London council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood *[pursuant to his answer, 17 February 1993, c. 283-84]*: To assist authorities further, my right hon. and learned Friend intends to change the statutory rules on minimum revenue provision so as to reduce the required minimum repayment of principal deemed debt in 1993-94 from an amount of 4 per cent. of the deemed debt to an amount of 0·5 per cent. of the deemed debt.

I am arranging for London boroughs and the Common Council to be notified today of my right hon. and learned Friend's intentions, so that authorities can take account of them when setting their budgets for 1993-94.

TRANSPORT

Safe Buses for Women

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research he is carrying out into the operation of safe buses for women; what assessment he has made of their contribution; in which areas they are operating; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: My Department is concerned with the safety of women as public transport users, as pedestrians and as motorists. No specific research has been undertaken into safe buses for women; our priority is, rather, to promote the safety of all passengers on public transport, including women.

Ships (Seaworthiness)

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps are taken to ensure that ships entering British coastal waters are seaworthy.

Mr. Norris: All ships entering British coastal waters must carry valid safety certificates issued on behalf of the flag stage stating that the ship meets international requirements.

United Kingdom ships are subject to surveys and random inspections by surveyors from the Department of Transport who also inspect foreign ships arriving at British ports under port state control procedures.

Over 30 per cent., of foreign ships arriving at British ports are inspected under these procedures and it is estimated that 80 per cent. of all ships arriving at ports within the area controlled by the memorandum of understanding for port state control are inspected.

Vehicle Licensing

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency has to invite tenders to extend licence issuing outlets; and how many such additional outlets are to be authorised.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency invited competitive tenders for the issue of vehicle excise licences by advertisement in the national press on 30 October last. The tender process is now under way but it will be some time yet before the final outcome is known. I will write to the hon. Member in due course.

Rail Travel Concessions

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy that under his proposals for the railways all those categories of persons currently enjoying privileged and concessionary travel facilities, in addition to British Rail staff will continue to enjoy those benefits; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail introduced railcards as a commercial decision, not as a result of any legal obligation. There is every reason to believe that the private sector will introduce new initiatives in order to attract more passengers.

However, the provision of the disabled persons railcard is a voluntary initiative on British Rail's part; it is not profitable. The Government wish to guarantee that common discount facilities for disabled people will continue in the future, and a requirement to this effect will be incorporated into every franchise agreement.

British Rail Capital Expenditure

Mr. Cann: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the capital expenditure of British Rail annually from 1979 on *(a)* asset replacement, *(b)* new capital schemes and *(c)* other capital expenditure.

Mr. Freeman: This information is not available in the form requested. However, a breakdown of investment between 1979 and 1991-92 is provided in the table.

British Rail investment expenditure 1979 to 1991-92

£ million cash

	New routes	*New electrification*	*Rolling stock*	*Other capital investment*		*Infrastructure revenue investment*	*Total*
				Rail	*Non-rail*		
1979	1	5	93	48	14	106	266
1980	0	5	122	54	14	115	309
1981	0	4	106	47	13	107	277
1982	0	2	98	41	6	111	258
1983	0	4	70	54	5	146	279
1984-85	0	13	79	95	13	201	402
1985-86	3	36	80	131	12	150	412
1986-87	8	43	79	147	19	102	398
1987-88	9	43	100	148	9	172	481
1988-89	9	20	206	152	25	148	560
1989-90	42	38	208	223	27	174	712
1990-91	63	29	262	267	30	182	833
1991-92	97	25	325	320	34	205	1,005

Notes:

1. Figures exclude changes in advance payments on rolling stock orders.
2. Infrastructure Revenue Investment is expenditure on infrastructure renewal charged to profit and loss account, exclusive of track renewals.
3. Other non-rail figures for 1979 and 1980 exclude ships, harbours, hovercraft and hotels.
4. Figures rounded to nearest million.

Public Transport

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many persons have been employed in public transport in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland in each year since 1981 by (i) bus services, (ii) train services, (iii) maritime ferry services and (iv) other public transport services.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 17 February 1993]:* Information is not available in the form requested. Figures that are available appear in the annual publications "Scottish Transport Statistics" and "Bus and Coach Statistics).

The tables gives the number of staff employed by bus and coach operators based in Scotland, by Scotrail, and by Strathclyde passenger transport executive—underground.

Staff employed in public transport

Bus and coach[1][2]		*Scotrail*[3]		*Strathclyde passenger transport executive—underground*	
1981	22,200	1981	17,887	1981-82	308
1982	21,300	1982	16,999	1982-83	316
1983	21,700	1983	16,493	1983-84	311
1984	21,300	1984-85	15,798	1984-85	308
1985-86	20,300	1985-86	15,272	1985-86	317
1986-87	20,400	1986-87	14,610	1986-87	316
1987-88	20,100	1987-88	13,650	1987-88	321
1988-89	19,600	1988-89	12,908	1988-89	322
1989-90	19,800	1989-90	11,108	1989-90	327
1990-91	19,200	1990-91	10,926	1990-91	315
1991-92	19,200	1991-92	9,500	1991-92	310

[1] Figures for 1985-86 and 1986-87 are annual averages; for all other years they relate to the year end.

[2] Figures are approximate, as only a sample of the smaller bus and coach operators is surveyed.

[3] From 1984-85 onwards, figures relate to 31 March.

Figures are not available for maritime ferry services and air transport.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Computer-assisted Transcription

Mr. Soley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department whether he will publish the cost of *(a)* implementing computer-assisted transcription in the crown courts, the High Court and the Court of Appeal since March 1988, including training costs and *(b)* introducing tape recording as a means of taking official records in the crown courts, the High Court and the Court of Appeal in the same period.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The cost of implementing *(a)* computer aided transcription—CAT—and *(b)* of introducing tape recordings in the Supreme Court, under the court reporting contracts in place since June 1988, was met by contractors under the terms of their contracts and the information is not available to my Department.

Between 1 April 1988 and 31 December 1992 my Department paid £753,450·79 in training grants to contractors. This sum related almost entirely to the training of CAT operators to assist the contractors in meeting the terms of their contracts, but it is not possible to isolate the exact amount.

The cost of the new tape recording equipment presently being installed in the crown court and comined court centres, together with the cost of tapes over the first year, is £833,000. This sum also includes the cost of some additional county court equipment.

Mr. Soley: To ask the Parliamentary Scecretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what is his Department's policy in respect of supporting computer-assisted transcriptions as a method of keeping offical shorthand records of proceedings in court;

(2) what policy changes have taken place within his Department in relation to the use of verbatim reporters using computer-assisted transcription for recording proceedings in law courts from 1 March 1992 until 14January;

(3) what was the basis for his decision to reduce the number of law courts designated as computer-assisted transcription courts between 1988 and 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: My Department's policy is that CAT should be retained as a court reporting method, but that it should be directed to those courtrooms where its potential attributes, in terms of the speed of delivery of accurate transcript and information technology might be best utilised.

There have been no changes in policy between 1 March 1992 and 14 January 1993. The present court reporting contracts expire on 31 March 1993. In establishing the requirement for CAT in the new contracts, the Department has taken into account the experience gained over the past four years. CAT will be required at courts hearing the most lengthy and complex cases and from which the greatest demand for transcripts arise. In addition, contractors are not barred from using CAT in other courtrooms if they wish.

The new contracts provide for CAT in 179 courtrooms at 35 court centres. The Royal Courts of Justice and the Central Criminal Court will continue to have CAT in every courtroom which currently has CAT.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Disclosure of Information

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the Acts of Parliament affecting public scrutiny of the civil service and prohibiting disclosure of information which he is reviewing.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) on 2 November 1992, *Official Report*, column 55.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to increase the release of information to Parliament hitherto regarded as confidential for reasons of national security.

Mr. Waldegrave: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made clear in the House on 6 May 1992, this Government are committed to greater openness and to removing unnecessary secrecy. In pursuit of this policy objective, the Government continue to review records which have a bearing on national security with the purpose of identifying material which can safely be released. There will, however, remain matters relating to security and intelligence on which it is difficult to comment without revealing, by what is said or not said, information that can have a bearing on the effectiveness of the security and intelligence services and the safety of their staff.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisoners

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women were on rule 43 in prisons in (i) England and Wales, (ii) Scotland and (iii) Northern Ireland on 12 February.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The table shows the number of males and females—both adults and young persons—removed from association under rule 43 of the prison rules and rule 46 of the young offender institution rules on 12 February, in prison service establishments in England and Wales.

	Rule 43/46 Own protection	*Rule 43/46 Good order and discipline*	*Total*
Males	1,570	241	1,811
Females	22	7	29
Total	1,592	248	1,840

The table does not include inmates in designated vulnerable prisoner units where ruled 43 and 46 restrictions do not apply.

Responsibility for prisons elsewhere in the United Kingdom rests with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Offences on Bail

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number and percentage of persons found guilty of further offences whilst on bail in each police force in England and Wales in 1981 and 1991.

Mr. Jack: Although information is not collected centrally on the number of persons found guilty of further offences while on bail, research findings based on samples of a limited size offer an indication of the percentage of persons convicted of an offence while on court bail. For 1981, the Home Office survey "Estimates of offending by those on bail"—statistical bulletin 22/81—offers a national figure of 9 per cent. Between 1986 and 1988, surveys in four police force areas indicated that the percentage of persons given bail by the courts who were convicted of an offence committed while they were on bail ranged between 8 and 12 per cent. A survey by Northumbria police in 1989 gave a higher figure of 17 per cent., but this included offences "taken into consideration" by the courts or dealt with by formal caution—Morgan P., 1992, "Offending while on bail: a survey of recent studies." Home Office, RPU 65.

Re-offenders

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number and percentage of persons found guilty of further offences subsequent to *(a)* a term of imprisonment and *(b)* a non-custodial sentence in each police force area in England and Wales in 1981 and 1991.

Mr. Jack: This information is not available. Regular reconviction studies are made, but these are based on relatively small samples and estimates of reconviction rates by police force area are not made. The most recent estimates of national reconviction rates were published in "Prison Statistics 1990".

Security Service

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will publish, in any form that does not jeopardise national security, the approximate total number of files accessible by the name of the individual and held by the security service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: It is not possible to disclose such details without jeopardising the service's operational capability.

Wolds Prison (Escape)

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the circumstances leading to the escape of a prisoner from Wolds prison on 9 February while he was being escorted for treatment at Hull royal infirmary.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The prisoner was taken to Hull royal infirmary on the evening of 9 February. He apparently had difficulty in walking and a wheelchair was used to taken him into the hospital. His handcuffs were removed for the examination and treatment. This is usual practice, particularly where, as here, X-rays are taken. On completion, the Wolds staff went to reapply the handcuffs prior to escorting him back to their vehicle. But before they could do so the prisoner ran through the doors, out of the hospital and along the road. The staff gave chase but lost him. Police were contacted immediately and he was rearrested the following night. An internal inquiry was mounted to review procedures. The Home Office controller was kept informed of events from the start.

Prison Escorts (Escapes)

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many escapes there have been from prison escort in each of the last 12 months; and how many of these escapes were from *(a)* cellular vehicles and *(b)* hired taxis.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: There have been 124 escapes from escort incidents involving 146 prisoners.

Monthly breakdown	*Incidents*	*Prisoners*
February 1992	8	8
March	13	15
April	9	9
May	5	6
June	10	12
July	10	12

Monthly breakdown	*Incidents*	*Prisoners*
August	8	9
September	12	13
October	9	13
November	19	19
December	10	16
January 1993	11	14
Total	124	146

(*a*) There were no escapes from cellular vehicles during this period.

(*b*) There were seven prisoners who escaped from hired taxis during this period.

	Number
February 1992	1
April 1992	1
June 1992	3
January 1993	2
Total	7

Juvenile Offenders

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Government expect to abolish prison department custodial remands for 15 and 16-year-olds.

Mr. Jack: We aim to end the remand of 15 and 16-year-old boys to prison custody as soon as enough places in local authority secure accommodation are available. The necessary plans are being forwarded through the Department of Health with the aim of completing them by the end of 1995.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many juveniles held in custody on remand or after conviction have in each of the last five years (*a*) committed suicide or (*b*) been recorded as having attempted self-mutilation.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The available information is set out in the table. Both sentenced and unsentenced juveniles are included. Figures for the incidence of deliberate self-harm prior to 1991 are not available.

Acts of deliberate self-harm by prisoners aged under 17 in HM prison service establishments 1988-92[1]

Year	*Acts of deliberate self-harm* *Not causing death*	*Causing death*
1988	N/A	—
1989	N/A	—
1990	N/A	2
1991	59	1
1992	100	1

[1] 17-year-old prisoners were not regarded as juveniles until the Criminal Justice Act 1991 came into effect on 1 October 1992.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what policies he has for reducing the disruption to education, training and work to those juveniles who are in custody.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I do not accept that there will be disruption to the education, training and work of juveniles in custody.

I am confident that, where changes take place as a result of the competitive tendering exercise, prison governors and the contractors will arrange a smooth transition from the current to the new education provider so as to ensure an effective continuation in the delivery of education services.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many juvenile offenders received custodial sentences in 1979, in 1981 and in 1992.

Mr. Jack: Information on persons aged 14 and under 17 sentenced to immediate custody is published annually in the Command Paper "Criminal statistics, England and Wales". Table 7.15 of the 1989 publication gives the requested data back to 1979. Copies of this publication are available in the Library. 1992 data will not be available until the autumn of 1993.

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many juveniles (*a*) under 15 years of age and (*b*) between 15 and 17 years of age committed offences (i) after a police caution, (ii) while on bail, (iii) while on remand in local authority accommodation and (iv) while undergoing non-custodial community penalties, in each of the last three years.

Mr. Jack: This information is not available. The number of people who commit offences cannot be measured. Research studies of those convicted for offences are made and published from time to time by the Home Office. The most relevant estimates—Home Office statistical bulletin 20/92—are that 11 per cent. of those aged under 14 and 16 per cent. of those aged 14 to 16 who had been cautioned in 1985 were convicted of standard list offences within two years of their caution.

Mrs. Rushina Begum

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the decision is going to be taken over the application of Mrs. Rushina Begum—ref. R258995/5 (S) and PO 25725/92—to join her husband in the United Kingdom following the submission of further evidence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: A telex authorising the issue of an entry clearance to Mrs. Rushina Begum to join her husband in the United Kingdom was sent on 16 February to the high commission in Dhaka.

Police (Discipline)

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police retired on sickness grounds while disciplinary action involving them was under consideration in the most recent year for which the information is available.

Mr. Charles Wardle: In 1991, 19 police officers retired after disciplinary charges had been brought against them, but before those charges had been heard. It is not known how many of those retirements were on medical grounds; nor is it known how many officers retired while disciplinary action was under consideration but before charges had been brought.

Official Secrets Act 1989

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will bring forward proposals to repeal section 2 of the Official Secrets Act 1989.

Mr. Jack: There are no plans to amend the Official Secrets Act 1989.

Members of Parliament

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will bring forward proposals for a reduction in the number of hon. Members from 651 to 450.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Government have no plans to make a reduction in the number of hon. Members of this House.

Rape

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the number of reported offences of rape and indecent assault on women in England and Wales for the year 1979 and for the most recent year for which he has information; and what are the figures for Nottinghamshire.

Mr. Jack: The available information relates to recorded offences and is given in the table.

These figures may reflect increased reporting by victims and/or changes in police recording practices.

Notifiable offences of rape and indecent assault on a female recorded by the police

England and Wales	*Number of offences*	
	1979	1991
Nottinghamshire		
Rape	28	111
Indecent assault on female	553	642
England and Wales		
Rape	1,170	4,045
Indecent assault on female	11,834	15,792

Miss Carolyn Nunez

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to reply to the letter of 24 January from the hon. Member for South Hams regarding the application by Miss Carolyn Nunez for her British citizenship to be reinstated.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I have written to my hon. Friend today about the outcome of this application.

Police, Plumstead

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1), pursuant to his answer of 10 February, *Official Report,* column *630,* what are the current and proposed numbers of uniformed constables in the Plumstead division of the Metropolitan police;

(2), pursuant to his answer of 10 February, *Official Report,* column *630,* what was the number of uniformed police officers in the Plumstead division of the Metropolitan police for each of the years 1991, 1992, and proposed for 1993, broken down by rank.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 19 February 1993]:* The information is as follows:

	1991	*1992*	*1993*
Chief superintendent	1	1	1
Superintendent	1	1	1
Chief inspector	2	2	2
Inspector	10	9	9
Sergeant	40	37	37
Constable	209	204	194

Although the total number of uniformed constables is due to reduce during the current year, an equivalent increase in civilian staff will release police officers at present in support posts. As a result, the number of constables available for operational duties will be unchanged.

69. **Mr. Austin Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 4 February, *Official Report,* column *286,* what representations he has now received about the number of police officers in the Plumstead and Greenwich divisions of the Metropolitan police; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 19 February 1993]:* The following have now written to my right hon. and learned Friend:

the chairman and Secretary of the Greenwich Police/Community Consultative Group:
Mrs. Grace Sole of Charlton;
Mr. Roy Martin of Eltham, the Chairman of the Courtlands Residents Association;
the Chairman of the Eltham Police/Community Working Group;
the Secretary of the Woolwich Central Baptist Church;
and the Warden of Trinity College.

My right hon. and learned Friend has also received letters from my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) enclosing correspondence from the chairman and secretary of the Greenwich Police/Community Consultative Group; and the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) enclosing correspondence from the chairman of the Greenwich Police—Greenwich Sector Working Group.

Sex Discrimination Act

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will bring forward proposals for the repeal of section 23(1) of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, as subsequently amended, or of section 25(1) of the same Act; and what assessment he has made of the proposed consequences of repeal.

Mr. Forth: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend has the matter of sex discrimination in the provision of school places under consideration.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Maastricht Treaty

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Attorney-General whether he will list those articles, protocols and declarations relating to titles II, III and IV of the treaty of European union as adopted at Maastricht from which no rights and obligations arise which need to be given effect in domestic law.

The Attorney-General: The articles and protocols relating to titles II, III and IV of the treaty of European union amend the Community treaties.

Any amendment to the Bill which, by preventing incorporation of a treaty provision into our domestic law, makes it impossible for the United Kingdom to implement its Community obligations would cause us to regard ourselves as unable to ratify the treaty; and would mean that, if we did ratify, we should be in breach of our treaty obligations as soon as the treaty came into effect.

As a general principle, it is important to preserve consistency between our domestic law and Community law as it is applicable to the United Kingdom. This is best achieved by following the United Kingdom's consistent legislative practice of incorporating in domestic law not only all amendments to the Community treaties but any protocols annexed to those treaties.

The Government therefore continue to oppose deletion of the social protocol from the proposed revised list of Community treaties in section 1(2) of the European Communities Act 1972. But since the social protocol expressly states that acts adopted under the agreement of the other 11 member states shall not be applicable to the United Kingdom, its deletion would not render the United Kingdom incapable of fulfilling its obligations under the treaty of union and would not, therefore, prevent ratification.

Some amendments may add domestic procedures when implementing the treaty obligations. Some protocols may relate only to a particular member state. In such cases, the Government would have to examine carefully whether, if the Bill were amended, our law would still be consistent with our international obligations. But provided this condition were met, amendments in these categories would not be fatal to ratification.

Application of these principles will, I think, make it clear into which category particular amendments fall. If it is not clear how to apply these principles to a particular amendment I am willing to examine the matter carefully and give the House further advice on that amendment.

Crown Prosecution Service

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of cases referred to the Crown prosecution service in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1991 and *(c)* July to June 1992 resulted in (i) prosecution and (ii) conviction, in each offence category.

The Attorney-General: I have been asked to reply.

Records are not maintained by the Crown prosecution service of outcomes in relation to offence categories. Percentage calculations of the number of cases prosecuted and the number resulting in a conviction cannot be given on a fully consistent basis for the periods requested. A revised system of data collection was introduced in April 1991 which makes comparison of figures before and after that date inappropriate. The figures in the tables relate to the number of defendants whose cases were handled in the 31 areas of the Crown prosecution service, but do not include specialist casework undertaken at the headquarters of the service.

In table one, in respect of magistrates courts, column 1 shows the number of defendant cases received; column 2 shows the number which proceeded to a full hearing and disposal in the magistrates courts; and column 3 shows the number which resulted in conviction.

Table one—Magistrates Courts

	Column 1 *Received*	*Column 2* *Hearings*	*Column 3* *Convicted*
1990	1,638,751	1,136,235	1,107,444
1991	1,575,021	1,078,006	1,051,362
July 1991 to June 1992	1,563,686	1,045,279	1,019,615

The number of cases received during a particular period does not equal the number finalised in that period, as incomplete cases are carried over from period to period. Cases which have not been included in the total proceeding to a full hearing and disposal in the magistrates courts include cases committed to the Crown court for trial, cases discontinued, cases resulting in a bind over, cases adjourned sine die, and cases in which the defendant could not be traced. Also not included in column 2 are cases submitted by the police for advice only and some non-criminal proceedings, such as forfeitures under section 3 of the Obscene Publications Act 1959.

In table two, in respect of Crown court cases, column 1 shows the number of cases received; column 2 shows the number of cases which proceeded to a full hearing; and column 3 shows the number which resulted in a conviction.

Table two
Crown court

	Column 1 *Received*	*Column 2* *Hearings*	*Column 3* *Convicted*
1990	152,199	105,516	96,790
1991	153,652	106,026	97,114
July 1991 to June 1992	151,603	105,373	96,596

Cases not included in the total proceeding to a full hearing in the Crown court include cases in which no evidence was offered, cases in which all charges were left on file, cases resulting in a bind over, and cases in which the defendant could not be traced or was found unfit to plead. Also not included in column 2 are cases committed to the Crown court for sentence, and appeals.

PRIME MINISTER

Ministers' Homes

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Prime Minister in how many cases improvements made at public expense in the past five years to the private homes of Ministers, for reasons of personal security, have not been used wholly or mainly for those purposes.

The Prime Minister: I am aware of no such case. Since November 1990, responsibility for the provision of security measures for public figures at threat from terrorist attack has rested with the Home Office. Before November 1990, the provision of security measures was the responsibility of the accounting officer advised by the police and the relevant departmental security officer.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Prime Minister how many houses or buildings attached to homes belonging to Ministers or their families which have been converted or improved at public expense for reasons of personal security have been the subject of professional fee payments out of public money in the last five years.

The Prime Minister: Where security measures are provided at public expense to a person at threat from

terrorist attack, professional fees will be paid if this offers the best value for money. It is not possible to identify every case where such fees have been paid.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister if he will set out those matters in regard to exports to Iraq on which Ministers are prepared to give substantive answers while the Scott inquiry is sitting.

The Prime Minister: Lord Justice Scott has terms of reference which allow him to look into all the issues which he regards as relevant to his inquiry. Ministers will continue to answer substantive questions where to do so would not prejudice the issues being investigated by the inquiry.

Law and Order

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to transfer responsibility for law and order concerns within Wales to the Secretary of State for Wales.

The Prime Minister: The Government always keep departmental distribution of functions under review.

Polly Peck

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Prime Minister what activities were undertaken in northern Cyprus and the east Mediterranean directly or indirectly by Polly Peck for the United Kingdom Government between 1985 and 1990.

The Prime Minister: I am not aware of any such activities having been undertaken. A full trawl of all Government Departments and agencies could not be carried out without incurring disproportionate cost.

N M Rothschild

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the work obtained and the fees paid to N M Rothschild in the course of the Government's privatisation programme since 1983.

The Prime Minister: The table shows the Government appointments made to N M Rothschild in privatisations since 1983. The fees paid are a matter of commercial confidentiality. Appointments for adviser to the Government are made following full competition. The Government's consistent practice has been to select the firm offering the best value for money.

N M Rothschild privatisation appointments

Privatisation	*Year*	*Appointment*
BT	1984	Underwriter
Britoil	1985	Underwriter
British Gas	1986	Adviser to Government Underwriter
Royal Ordnance	1987	Adviser to Government
British Airways	1987	Underwriter
Rolls-Royce	1987	Underwriter
BAA	1987	Underwriter
British Petroleum	1987	Adviser to Government Underwriter
British Steel	1988	Underwriter
Water	1989	Underwriter
Regional Electricity Companies	1990	Underwriter
BT	1991	Member of French syndicate
Northern Ireland Electricity	ongoing	Adviser to Government
British Coal	ongoing	Adviser to Government

Matrix Churchill Trial

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral answer of 4 February, *Official Report*, column 472, how much of the evidence of the key witness was given in response to questions which referred to the disclosed documents.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 19 February 1993]:* As I indicated in my answer of 4 February, I suggest matters relevant to the Matrix Churchill trial should await the outcome of Lord Justice Scott's inquiry.

Kashmir

Mr. Cox: To ask the Prime Minister how he intends to monitor the commitment of the Prime Minister of India to respect human rights in Kashmir.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 17 February 1993]:* During my visit, I encouraged the Indian Prime Minister to allow international human rights organisations and others to visit Kashmir. We shall continue to monitor the situation through our high commission in Delhi, through our contacts with human rights organisations and through media reports. We shall continue to raise human rights issues with the Indian Government.

NATIONAL FINANCE

VAT

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what provisions of European legislation govern the introduction of a 5 per cent. VAT rate of goods and services now *(a)* exempt, *(b)* zero rated and *(c)* subject to the standard rate.

Sir John Cope: Article 1(1) of Council directive 92/77/EEC adopted on 19 October 1992, replacing article 12(3) of the sixth VAT directive 77/388/EEC, provides for reduced rates of VAT, of not less than 5 per cent., which may be applied to goods and services in a list annexed to the directive, regardless of their current VAT rating.

In addition, article 1(4)(b) of 92/77/EEC, replacing article 28(2) of 77/388/EC provides for the application of a reduced rate, of not less than 5 per cent., to goods and services which at 1 January 1991 were subject to a zero rate in accordance with Community law.

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much additional revenue would be obtained by applying VAT at a level of *(a)* 5 per cent. and *(b)* 17·5 per cent., to each of *(a)* food, *(b)* children's clothes and shoes, *(c)* public transport, *(d)* energy, *(e)* newspapers and *(f)* books.

Sir John Cope: Table D1 of the "Statistical Supplement to the 1992 Autumn Statement" shows the estimated cost of the main VAT zero rates. These estimates suggest the following yields:

		£ billion
	5 per cent.	*17·5 per cent.*
(a) Food	2·0	7·0
(b) Children's clothes and shoes	0·2	0·6
(c) Passenger transport	0·5	1·9
(d) Domestic fuel and power	0·5	1·8
(e) Books, newspapers and magazines	0·3	1·1

The estimates make no allowance for the behavioural responses to applying VAT to these categories, so that actual yield would probably be less than suggested.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the effect on the level of sales of local newspapers of the imposition of a standard rate of VAT on newspapers.

Sir John Cope: The Institute for Fiscal Studies has estimated an own price elasticity of −0·657 for all leisure goods, which include newspapers. This elasticity suggests that a 17½ per cent. increase in price would reduce demand, in volume terms, by around 10 per cent.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many farmers and other eligible producers have registered for the VAT flat-rate scheme for farmers.

Sir John Cope: The flat rate scheme for farmers started on 1 January. Up to 17 February, 85 certificates had been issued to persons opting to join the scheme.

Trade Union Subscriptions

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will estimate the administrative savings and the tax expenditure if trade union subscriptions were paid net of tax with block credit of tax directly to trade unions;

(2) if he will estimate how many trades union members *(a)* obtain and *(b)* are eligible for tax relief on their subscriptions.

Mr. Dorrell: It is estimated that 63,000 people are receiving relief through their PAYE code numbers for that part of a subscription to a trade union which is attributable to the provision of superannuation, life insurance or funeral benefits. The information required to estimate the number of union members eligible for the relief and the potential tax cost of moving to a relief by deduction system is not available. The cost of setting up and operating a scheme of relief by deduction cannot be estimated with sufficient certainty to establish whether net administrative savings would result.

Bank Auditors

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will propose legislation under which the auditors of all banks regulated under the Banking Act 1987 would be appointed by the regulatory body.

Mr. Nelson: I have no plans to do so.

Green Pound

Ms. Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the effect of the departure of sterling from the exchange rate mechanism on the value of the green pound; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Since sterling left the exchange rate mechanism, the green pound has devalued by 17·86 per cent. against the green ecu.

Tax Income

Mr. Michael: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the Government's tax income currently goes on *(a)* servicing debt, *(b)* unemployment benefit and its administration and *(c)* other transfer payments.

Mr. Portillo: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the breakdown of general Government receipts shown in table 3.10 of the 1992 "Autumn Statement", Cm. 2096; to the breakdown of general Government expenditure shown in tables 2.5 and 2.6 of the "Statistical Supplement to the 1992 Autumn Statement", Cm. 2219; and to the figures for unemployment benefit administration in figure 27 of the "Social Security Departmental Report", Cm. 2213.

Revenue Expenditure

Mr. Michael: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the Government's current revenue expenditure goes on *(a)* servicing debt, *(b)* unemployment benefit and its administration and *(c)* other transfer payments.

Mr. Portillo: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the breakdown of general Government expenditure shown in tables 2.5 and 2.6 of the "Statistical Supplement to the 1992 Autumn Statement", Cm. 2219; and to the figures for unemployment benefit administration in figure 27 of the "Social Security Departmental Report", Cm. 2213.

Personal Sector Debt

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) of 10 February, *Official Report*, column *632*, if he will give a regional breakdown of the levels of personal sector debt per £100 of disposable income for each year since 1979.

Mr. Nelson: Regional figures for the level of personal sector debt outstanding are not available.

Royal Family

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what, for the latest available year, was the cost to his Department of expenditure in support of the royal family in respect of the central chancery of the orders of knighthood.

Mr. Lamont *[holding answer 19 February 1993]*: Assuming that the right hon. Member wishes to update information contained in the 1990 report of the royal trustees—HC 629, October 1990—the comparable outturn for staff costs for 1991-92 was £201,000. In addition, the Treasury paid £364,000 mostly for the costs of the insignia themselves.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Prayers

38. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Lord President of the Council whether he will bring forward proposals to arrange for Prayers to be moved from the Floor of the House to the Crypt and for questions to begin at half-past two o'clock.

Mr. Newton: No.

Annual Parliamentary Calendar

39. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Lord President of the Council when he will be in a position to announce an annual parliamentary calendar.

Mr. Newton: I have already made progress towards giving the House greater notice of recess dates, having announced Easter recess dates on 26 November and the Whit recess dates on 4 February. How far it will prove possible to build further on this is of course linked with the discussions on the Jopling report to which I referred in an earlier reply today.

European Communities (Amendment) Bill

40. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Lord President of the Council how many hours have now been spent on the Committee stage of the European Communities (Amendment) Bill.

Mr. Newton: Before today's proceedings, the House has spent 75 hours and 14 minutes on 11 days in Committee on the European Communities (Amendment) Bill.

Annie's Bar

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee what is his policy on the continued existence of Annie's Bar.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: The Committee is at present undertaking an inquiry into refreshment services for the House of Commons. The functions of the various Refreshment Department facilities, including Annie's Bar, are being considered during that inquiry together with the possible provision of new services. The Committee hopes to report later this year.

Visitors (Refreshment Facilities)

Mr. Enright: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee what financial provision will be made for basic refreshment facilities for visitors.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: The Committee is including consideration of the possible provision of refreshment facilities for line of route visitors in its current inquiry into refreshment services for the House of Commons. It is, therefore, too early to establish what financial provision might need to be made.

Smoking

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee what plans he has to review the policy regarding smoking in eating areas in the House.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: The policy regarding smoking in the various Refreshment Department outlets is kept under consideration in the light of customer demand.

Hair Dryers and Showers

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee (1) how many *(a)* hair dryers and *(b)* showers are planned to be installed in the Palace of Westminster and outbuildings occupied by House of Commons staff;

(2) at whose request, and on whose authority, a hair dryer was installed in the ladies' wash room in 3 Dean's Yard; what was the cost of installing it; and under what budget the cost will fall.

Mr. Ray Powell: These are matters for the Director of Works.

Wheelchair Members

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what arrangements are being made to help hon. Members confined to wheelchairs to work in the Chamber and offices in the House.

Mr. Ray Powell: This matter is currently under consideration by the Accommodation and Works Committee in the context of a comprehensive survey on access for the disabled commissioned by its predecessor Committee.

Blood Donors

Mr. Luff: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what plans he has to facilitate the giving of blood by all those who work in the Palace of Westminster.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: The north London centre of the blood transfusion service operates a two-day clinic in the Treasury once every six months when Members, their staff and staff of the House may give blood. The next planned visit is between 29 and 30 March. Arrangements for it may be made through the nursing sister.

Car Parking

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what consideration is being given to proposals to increase the amount of car parking available to hon. Members.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: The Administration Committee is currently examining existing and future car parking requirements of this House and their regulation by the Serjeant at Arms. This inquiry will be able to consider the issue raised by the hon. Member.

Payroll and Personnel System

Mr. Steen: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission if he will make a statement on the reasons for the introduction, and the budgeted and actual cost, of the new payroll and personnel system for House of Commons staff; and what savings he expects to be made in each of the next two years.

Mr. Beith: The new payroll and personnel system is being introduced to replace two separate systems, one of which was introduced in 1984, and the other in 1988. The new system will provide additional personnel information and improved payroll analyses to facilitate the introduction of financial management systems within the House. It will also provide the facility for payroll and personnel records functions for the staff of the Parliamentary Works Directorate.

Outline provision for hardware and software costs was made in the estimates for £130,000, excluding training costs and VAT, for the new system. The actual cost is expected to be slightly less than this figure. No direct staff savings are expected, but the new system will allow for an increase in the workload of some 15 per cent. as a result of the transfer to the House of the staff of the Parliamentary Works Directorate.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Package Travel Industry

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement regarding his decision on the possible reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission of the Airtours plc bid for Owners Abroad plc.

Mr. Heseltine: I shall take a decision on whether to refer this proposed acquisition to the MMC in due course, following advice from the Director General of Fair Trading. When taking that decision, I shall take into account all relevant factors.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his policy regarding the concentration of ownership within the package travel industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: The main, but not exclusive, consideration when assessing mergers in the travel industry, as in any other industry, is the likely impact of the merger on competition in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will refer the Airtours bid for Owners Abroad to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what assessment he has made of the effect of a successful bid by Airtours for Owners Abroad on consumer choice, value for money and employment within the United Kingdom travel industry; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what percentage of the market share Airtours would hold in the event of its bid for Owners Abroad being successful.

Mr. Heseltine: I shall take a decision on whether to refer this proposed acquisition to the MMC in due course. When taking that decision, I shall take into account all relevant factors.

Details of current market share figures for the relevant markets in this case have been provided by a number of sources. Section 133(1) of the Fair Trading Act 1973 requires that information with respect to any particular business and obtained in this way should not be disclosed without the consent of the parties.

Land Mine Exports

Mr. Mullin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on United Kingdom policy on the export of land mines.

Mr. Needham: My right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office wrote to the hon. Gentleman on 22 January setting out the Government's views on this matter. I have nothing further to add.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many licences have been granted for the export of land mines for each year since 1988.

Mr. Needham: Separate statistics are not maintained for land mines and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Land mines fall within heading ML4a of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1992, which prohibits the export without a licence of a wide range of bombs, torpedoes, rockets, missiles and similar weapons.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions he has had regarding the United States Government's embargo on the export of land mines.

Mr. Needham: None.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Mr. Morgan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 8 December 1992, *Official Report*, column *593*, on ECGD, what response he has received to the offer of voluntary redundancy; how many staff have chosen *(a)* early retirement, *(b)* redundancy, *(c)* transfer to other divisions of his Department and *(d)* to other departments in south Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: The ECGD has issued a questionnaire to all its staff asking them to indicate their preferred options for location and continuity of employment. The objective is to establish the framework for an orderly run down in staff numbers over the next 12 months. The definitive position is unlikely to emerge for some months, but the early indications are that the desired run down will be achieved by wholly voluntary means.

Publicity

Mr. Morgan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 2 June 1992 to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), *Official Report*, columns *496-97*, *(a)* what is his Department's (i) current estimate for publicity expenditure for 1992-93 and (ii) budgeted publicity expenditure for 1993-94, exclusive of energy and *(b)* what is his Department's energy-related expenditure, as to (1) current estimate for publicity expenditure for 1992-93 and (2) budgeted publicity expenditure for 1993-94.

Mr. Eggar: Estimated expenditure on publicity in 1992-93[1] is:

	£ million
Energy-related	1·2
Other	7·0

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[1] Central publicity budget.

Allocations for 1993-94 will be made according to need during the year.

Political Risk Insurance

Ms. Harman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what short-term insurance or reinsurance is offered by the Export Credits Guarantee Department to United Kingdom exporters to non-OECD countries to cover political risk; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: Since December 1991, the privatised successor of the insurance services group of the ECGD has assumed responsibility for the provision to United Kingdom exporters of short term export credit insurance previously provided by the ECGD.

The new company currently sources over 90 per cent. of its reinsurance needs, for both commercial and political risk worldwide, from the private market. The ECGD participates in the company's reinsurance treaties so as to supplement the cover available from the market, thereby ensuring that the company's full needs are met. This transitional support will be available up to December 1994 in order to give time for the new company to arrange to source its full reinsurance requirements from the private market.

Quite separately, the ECGD provides the new company with 100 per cent. reinsurance of the risks, largely political, arising on certain high risk markets for which no capacity is being made available by the private market. This facility is not time limited and, subject to satisfactory financial performance, it will continue for as long as the Government consider it essential to meet the reasonable needs of United Kingdom exporters.

These arrangements are intended to ensure that United Kingdom exporters do not suffer any reduction in export credit insurance facilities as a result of the privatisation.

EC Funds

Mr. Alton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has made to have Merseyside included in objective 1 status by the European Community; what estimates he has made of assistance towards infrastructure, industrial development and training that such status would confer on Merseyside; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe) on 17 February 1993, *Official Report*, column *269*. It is too early to estimate the amount of financial assistance which objective 1 status would confer on Merseyside. This would depend on the Council's decisions on the extent of objective 1 regions elsewhere and on the criteria for the distribution of the funds between objective 1 regions. The Council will not decide which areas will become eligible for several months.

Nuclear Reprocessing

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish a breakdown of the daily financial effect on British Nuclear Fuels of the delay in the commissioning of the thermal oxide reprocessing plant at Sellafield.

Mr. Eggar: This is a matter for the company.

Office of Telecommunications

Mr. Alexander: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the successor to Sir Bryan Carsberg as director general of Oftel.

Mr. Heseltine: I have today appointed Mr. Don Cruickshank as Director General of Telecommunications from 1 April.

Mr. Cruickshank has had a varied and successful career in business. He was managing Director of Virgin Group plc from 1984-89 and before that, Commercial Director at Times Newspapers from 1977-80 and a Director of the Information and Entertainment Division of Pearson plc from 1980-84. Since 1989 he has been Chief executive of the national health service in Scotland, where he has done excellent work.

Since the privatisation of BT in 1984 the telecommunications industry has changed substantially and since the further liberalisation set in train by the Duopoly review in 1991, there has been an increasing number of operators entering the market in competition with BT. I wished to appoint someone to this important post who had direct experience of competition as a businessman. Mr. Cruickshank fulfils that criterion admirably and will, I am sure, do a very good job.

Since Sir Bryan Carsberg became Director General of Fair Trading in June 1992, Bill Wigglesworth, the then deputy director general of Oftel, has been acting as Director General and I would like to pay tribute to the sterling way in which he has carried out his duties. He will return to his position as deputy director from 1 April.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Prisons

Mr. A. Cecil Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the manning level of prison officers in *(a)* Crumlin Road, *(b)* the Maze, *(c)* Maghaberry and *(d)* Magilligan, for each year since 1990.

Mr. Mates: The table shows the manning levels of prison officers at these prisons since 1990:

	Average staff in post		
Prison	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
Belfast	667	683	716
Maze	1,148	1,107	1,037
Maghaberry	583	596	620
Magilligan	495	492	495

National Vocational Qualifications

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans there are to introduce the national vocational qualifications into Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Northern Ireland has been involved in the development of national vocational qualifications—NVQs—from their inception in 1986. NVQs have been available in Northern Ireland since that date as in the rest of the United Kingdom, as they have been developed by the awarding and validating bodies.

Prison Education

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much has been spent on education in each of the prisons in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years.

Mr. Mates: The table shows a breakdown, prison by prison, of the expenditure on education, including staff costs, over the last five years:

	Belfast £	*Maze* £	*Maghaberry* £	*Magilligan* £	*YOC Hydebank* £
1988-89	117,000	259,000	110,000	93,000	137,000
1989-90	118,500	274,500	144,000	91,500	134,000
1990-91	117,000	267,500	235,000	111,000	189,500
1991-92	153,000	290,000	215,000	140,000	232,000
1992-93	127,000	345,000	202,000	118,000	216,000

All figures are to the nearest £500.

Claimants, Newry and Armagh

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the number of claimants in each ward within the constituency of Newry and Armagh, or such relevant statistics as are available, who are in receipt of *(a)* unemployment benefit, *(b)* income support, *(c)* family credit, *(d)* disability living allowance and *(e)* child benefit.

Mr. Hanley: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Social Security Agency under its chief executive Mr. Alec Wylie. I have asked him for a reply to be given.

Letter from Alec Wylie to Mr. Seamus Mallon, dated 19 February 1993:

As I am responsible for Social Security operational matters your recent Parliamentary Question on the number of claimants in each ward within the constituency of Newry and Armagh who are in receipt of Unemployment Benefit, Income Support, Family Credit, Disability Living Allowance and Child Benefit has been passed to me for reply.

I regret that the information is not available in the format requested and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Some information however, is available on Unemployment Benefit and Income Support for the Newry and Armagh Social Security Office areas and this is set out below.

Date of most recent information	*Benefit claimed or received*	*Total number of customers claiming each benefit in Newry Social Security Office area*	*Total number of customers claiming each benefit in Armagh Social Security Office area*
14 January 1993	Unemployment Benefit	5,396	2,717
30 November 1992	Income Support	10,894	5,612

I hope you find this information helpful. A copy of this reply will appear in the *Official Rreport* and copies will be placed in the Library.

Bus and Goods Vehicle Licences

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on his review of the conditions of the issuing of operators licences for buses and goods vehicles in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Atkins: Because of the increasing differences between the operator licensing regimes in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Department of the Environment undertook a review of the Northern Ireland licensing system. Consultation with all interested parties was carried out in 1992 and the main recommendations of the review report were generally welcomed. Implementation of these recommendations would have significant resource implications and I am considering the way forward.

Buses

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many new buses have been purchased for public use in Northern Ireland over the past three years.

Mr. Atkins: I am advised by the managing director of Ulsterbus Ltd./Citybus Ltd. that the companies purchased 246 new buses over the past three years. None of the other operators of stage carriage services in Northern Ireland purchased any new buses in that period.

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many public service buses have been found unroadworthy following inspection carried out by the Department of the Environment in Northern Ireland over the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The information requested has been recorded only since September 1992, since when 114 buses have been examined of which 15 were found to be unroadworthy.

Fair Employment

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a statistical breakdown of employment in the various sectors of the Belfast education and library board in keeping with the 1991 census of the Belfast area as they reflect the percentages of Protestants and Roman Catholics employed.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 19 February 1993]:* The information is as follows:

Belfast education and library board staff (January 1992)

Section	*Total number of staff 1*	*Protestant*		*Roman Catholic*		*Non determined*	
		Number	*Per cent. of 1*	*Number*	*Per cent. of 1*	*Number*	*Per cent. of 1*
Administration	45	26	57·78	16	35·56	3	6·66
Architects	40	19	47·50	18	45·00	3	7·50
Education	106	58	54·72	41	38·68	7	6·60
Finance	97	52	53·61	37	38·14	8	8·29
Library—HQ (includes Administration and Technical staff)	112	62	55·36	42	37·50	8	7·14
—Branches	88	41	46·59	39	44·32	8	9·09
School Based (Non Teaching)	2,552	1,224	47·96	1,130	44·28	198	7·76
FE (Non Teaching)	360	223	61·94	109	30·28	28	7·78
FE (Teaching—Permanent)	594	321	54·04	198	33·33	75	12·63
	3,994	2,026	50·73	1,630	40·81	338	8·46

Source:—Belfast Education and Library Board's Fair Employment Review

The 1991 labour force survey revealed that in the Belfast education and library board area 53·2 per cent. of the economically active population was Protestant, and 46·8 per cent. was Roman Catholic.

SCOTLAND

General Practitioners

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what services are made available to GPs who are *(a)* non-fund holding and *(b)* fund holders.

Mr. Stewart: The range of services made available by national health service provider units to general practitioners does not vary according to whether or not they are fund holders. Rather than relying on the health board's purchasing arrangements, GP fund holders are able to use their funds to purchase the following hospital and community health services directly from providers:

—a specified range of elective surgical procedures;
—most out-patient treatments and diagnostic tests;
—certain specified direct access services;

and from 1 April 1993:

—certain community nursing services;
—additional direct access services;
—most out patient mental health treatments.

In respect of these services GP fund holders are required to work within their overall fund as approved by the health board, but are otherwise not constrained by any limitation on the funds available to a health board for referrals for these services.

In addition from 1 April 1993 as announced by my noble Friend, the Minister of State on 26 January, GP fund holders, where appropriate and qualified and with the prior approval of the health board, will be able to be reimbursed from their fund for providing certain specific diagnostic and minor surgical procedures for their patients.

Nimmo Smith/Friel Report

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library a copy and a transcript of a tape involving the *Sun* newspaper and a lawyer submitted as evidence to the Nimmo Smith/Friel inquiry and copies of letters to the Lord Advocate of 4 and 12 February relating to the Nimmo Smith/Friel report and the replies.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

World Summit for Children

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to increase resource allocations for the areas of clean water and sanitation and basic education, in the light of agreements made at the world summit for children.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's reply of 15 February 1993 at columns *43-44*.

United Kingdom Food Support

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people in *(a)* Somalia and *(b)* Eritrea are now estimated to be receiving daily food support from the United Kingdom; at what cost; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Since January 1992, we have pledged 48,100 tonnes of bilateral food aid worth £7,798,000 to Somalia and 17,596 tonnes worth £3,829,000 to Eritrea. It has all been delivered. Bilateral food aid is channelled through the World Food Programme, the International Committee of the Red Cross and British non-governmental organisations who distribute it according to need: actual numbers of those receiving food financed by the United Kingdom are not readily available.

Kenya

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent visit to Kenya of the Minister for Overseas Development.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[holding answer 19 February 1993]:* During her visit to Kenya my noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development met President Moi and other Kenyan leaders for discussions on a range of political and economic issues, including aid. She also visited a drought-affected district in the north-east to see relief and rehabilitation work, and pledged a further £750,000 to help drought victims in the Turkana region.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many convoys carrying humanitarian aid to Sarajevo and other towns in Bosnia Herzegovina by road have had as their point of departure *(a)* Belgrade and *(b)* Split; what have been the total quantities of supplies transported in each case; how many air-relief flights have delivered such aid; and what has been the quantity transported.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[holding answer 9 February 1993]:* Exact figures for the number of road convoys which have travelled into Bosnia Herzegovina are not available. However, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees who is co-ordinating the international community's response to this crisis estimates that over 57,000 tonnes of relief supplies have been delivered by road to Bosnia Herzegovina since July 1992. This consists approximately of 22,000 tonnes delivered from Split and Zagreb; 3,550 tonnes from Belgrade; and 31,900 tonnes from Metkovic (which is now used as the principal depot for convoys into Bosnia from the south, and which is supplied from Split and Ploce).

In addition a total of 2,646 relief flights have been made, delivering 29,098 tonnes of humanitarian relief; all of these were to Sarajevo.

Croatia

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what avenues are in use for sending humanitarian aid in postal packages to United Nations-protected zones in Croatia, including the routes employed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[holding answer 12 February 1993]:* We are not aware of any suitable avenues for delivering humanitarian aid to United Nations protected zones in Croatia by post. We have recommended that people wishing to assist should do so through established charities operating in the former Yugoslavia.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Rugby League

17. **Mr. Enright:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proposals he has made to remove restrictions placed on Rugby League players; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: As the hon. Member will be aware, sports organisations in this country are independent bodies which are free to lay down their own rules and regulations. I therefore have no plans to intervene in this matter. However I welcome the recent introduction of the "free gangway" system which allows rugby players to play both codes at amateur level and for clubs to share facilities, and hope that rugby authorities will do their utmost to ensure its effective implementation.

BBC (Funding)

18. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what arrangements he has made to consult representatives of elderly people on the future funding of the BBC.

Mr. Brooke: We have sent a copy of the consultation document about the future of the BBC, which asks questions about future funding, to four organisations representing elderly people, and have asked for their views. We welcome views from other organisations representing the elderly, as well as from interested individual viewers and listeners.

Government Art Collection

19. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will ensure that art treasures in the charge of Her Majesty's Government will be retained.

Mr. Brooke: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave earlier today to the question from the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms. Abbott).

Tourism

20. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he intends to meet the chairman of the British Tourist Authority to discuss the future of tourism in Great Britain.

25. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he next intends to meet the chairman of the British Tourist Authority to discuss the future of tourism in Great Britain.

Mr. Key: My right hon. Friend and I have regular meetings with the chairman of the British Tourist Authority. I expect to discuss the authority's corporate plan with the chairman when it is submitted in the spring.

North West Tourist Board

21. **Mr. Bryan Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he intends to meet the chairperson of the North West tourist board to discuss funding for that body.

Mr. Key: My right hon. Friend plans to visit the North West tourist board within the next few months. The allocation of Government funds to the regional tourist boards is a matter for the English tourist board.

Windsor Castle (Fire)

22. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage whether he is now in a position to announce the cost of the Windsor fire; and to which budgets the cost will fall.

Mr. Brooke: A very broad initial estimate of the costs of restoration suggests a figure in the range £30 to £40 million depending on the form of restoration chosen. More precise figures will not be available until decisions have been taken on the form of restoration.

Fossils and Offshore Sites

21. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement on the protection of fossils and offshore sites.

Mr. Key: I informed the House on 7 December 1992 that I have accepted that natural history objects, including fossils, should be brought within our export controls. We intend shortly to revise our national export controls in the Export of Goods (Control) Order to include skeletal remains and fossils, found in United Kingdom soil or territorial waters.

Local Authority Arts Provision

26. **Ms. Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment he has made of the impact of the current year's local government finance settlement on local authority arts provision.

Mr. Brooke: Most local authorities are still in the process of determining their budgets for 1993-94, so an overall assessment of planned local authority provision for the arts cannot yet be made. Arts provision is discretionary and it is for authorities themselves to fix its level. They must, of course, work within overall expenditure constraints. I hope that they will, nonetheless, continue to recognise the very real benefits of spending in support of the arts.

28. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to visit West Yorkshire to discuss the provision of art and recreation with the leaders of the local authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: I will be visiting Leeds and Sheffield shortly. I also visited Leeds last October. My Department assists in the provision of art and recreation facilities through its grants-in-aid to the Arts Council and to the Sports Council, and through its business sponsorship incentive schemes for sport and the arts; in addition, it assists in the provision of sports and active recreational facilities through credit approval cover to local authorities.

Sports Facilities

27. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations he has received about the wider use of publicly owned sports facilities.

Mr. Brooke: My Department has been involved in discussions with the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, the Association of District Councils, the Association of County Councils and the Sports Council about schedule 11 of the current Education Bill. This clarifies the legal position in relation to dual use joint management agreements and will facilitate the wider community use of school sports facilities.

Public Libraries

29. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to review the public library service in London.

Mr. Key: I have already initiated a major review of the public library service in England to provide a basis for its development up to and into the next century.

Cycling Holidays

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what information his Department has about the numbers of people who take cycling holidays in Britain each year.

Mr. Key: The United Kingdom travel survey indicates the figure in 1991 for people who take holidays in Britain with the primary interest is cycling as 1 per cent. (approximately 0·58 million trips).

However, 3 per cent. (around 1·74 million) of British tourists taking holidays in the same year stated they engaged in cycling as part of their leisure activities.

Sport

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what public money has been allocated to sport in each of the past three years at 1993 prices; what is proposed for the coming year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: My Department's direct funding of sport is its grant-in-aid to the Sports Council (Great Britain) and the Football Licensing Authority (FLA), and its support for the new business sponsorship scheme for sport, Sportsmatch.

Grant-in-aid to the Sports Council (Great Britain) and to the FLA in the current and last two financial years, expressed in 1993-94 prices, are:

£ million	*Sports Council (GB)*	*FLA*
1990-91	51·244	0·125
1991-92	49·973	0·775
1992-93	50·103	0·822

The grant-in-aid to each body in 1993-94 will be £50·604 million and £0·9 million respectively.

Sportsmatch was launched in the current year. I expect to provide £1·17 million in this financial year, and £3 million next year (cash prices).

The Government also provide substantial support for local authority revenue spending on sport through the revenue support grant arrangements. Basic credit approvals amounting to £79 million (cash price) for local authority capital spending have also been provided between 1991-92 and 1993-94. Sport has also benefited through the Government's inner city programmes.

It is also making available a total of £73 million (cash price) in support of Manchester's bid to host the Olympic Games in the year 2000.

Furthermore, reductions in the rate of pool betting duty are contributing approximately £44 million (cash price) per year to the Foundation for Sport and the Arts and to the Football Trust.

EDUCATION

Religious Education

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when he will publish the National Curriculum Council's analysis of agreed syllabuses for religious education.

Mr. Forth: The decision to publish such documents is one for the National Curriculum Council.

Access Funds

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many applications for each access fund have been made in each year since the establishment of the funds.

Mr. Boswell: The information is not available in the form requested. Many institutions make no distinction between the three funds when considering applications. Others have considered applications from students on a termly or ad hoc basis, and therefore make more than one payment to individual students.

From the available information it is estimated that the numbers of applications for the three funds which the Department has provided are as follows:

	Number
1990-91	116,000
1991-92	118,200

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what monitoring is conducted by his Department of the administration of student access funds.

Mr. Boswell: All institutions are required to account fully for their use of the access funds. Each is required to provide audited accounts, monitoring information and main uses reports for each year of operation of the funds.

Consultants

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list the contracts awarded by his Department to *(a)* Coopers and Lybrand management consultants, *(b)* Touche Ross management consultants, *(c)* Price Waterhouse management consultants, *(d)* Ernst and Young management consultants, *(e)* Crichton Roberts Ltd., *(f)* KPMG management consultants and *(g)* Leopold Joseph management consultants, with the total cost of the contracts with each contractor, for (i) the past 12 months and (ii) 1991-92.

Mr. Boswell: The information requested is as listed. No contracts were awarded in these periods to Crichton Roberts or Leopold Joseph.

CONTRACTS AWARDED IN THE FINANCIAL YEAR 1991-92

KPMG
(Total value £69,825)
Customer Survey for the Teachers Pensions Agency
Review of a Data Collection Processing System
Identification of a Market Testing Programme for the DFE

Coopers and Lybrand
(Total value £29,300)
Financial management survey at the Schools Examinations and Assessment Council
Commitment audit and cash flow verification

Price Waterhouse
(Total value £66,074)
Capital equipment survey of equipment held in further education and sixth form colleges
Financial management survey

Touche Ross
(Total value £144,595)
Assistance in preparing colleges for independence from Local Authority control
Tender budgeting and accounting methods
Provision of operational research assistance

Ernst and Young
(Total value £66,765)
Supply of telecommunications and distance working for the Department
Financial management survey of Purchasing procedures
FEFC relocation study

CONTRACTS AWARDED IN THE 12 MONTHS FROM 17 FEBRUARY 1992 TO 17 FEBRUARY 1993

KPMG
(Total value £63,750)
Follow up work to the Customer Survey for the Teachers Pensions Agency
Financial Management Review of Research Council contracts with other Government Departments
Project Audit of the Pensions Administration System (PAS) for the Teachers Pensions Agency

Coopers and Lybrand
(Total value £1,446,750)
Review of colleges preparations for independence
Scoping study for IS Business and Consultancy Division
Consultancy assistance to ISB Corporate Plan
Financial management survey of the National Curriculum Council (NCC)
Pensions Payments Opinions Review
Open University review of part-time costs

Price Waterhouse
(Total value £75,454)
Financial Consultancy Review
Capital equipment survey of equipment held in further education and sixth form colleges
Accountancy Review

Touche Ross
(Total value £55,342)
Assistance on file storage, file retrieval and document retention
Provision of operational research assistance

Grant-maintained Schools

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Education where he intends to hold conferences on grant-maintained status for schools; and if he will provide details of the target audience and costs, including the cost of publishing and distributing literature for those conferences.

Mr. Forth: Conferences for headteachers and governors of local education authority maintained schools are planned for Nottingham and Birmingham. The conference literature comprises a letter of invitation and a copy of the standard grant-maintained information pack. The unit cost of producing the information packs is 79p. Mailings of invitations and packs fall within the terms of the contract with the departmental despatch centre and therefore costs cannot be identified separately. The cost of conference accommodation and facilities is expected to be approximately £6,700 for each event. Specialised support services for each conference are likely to cost around £6,500. Further conferences will be held across the country to meet demand.

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will provide a breakdown on the costs, including the cost of publication and distribution of promotional literature, of the "Going Grant-maintained Conference" held on 10 and 11 February in Newcastle.

Mr. Forth: The conference material for the two one-day events held in Newcastle comprised a letter of invitation and a copy of the standard grant-maintained information pack. Production costs of the information packs were approximately £2,600. The mailing of invitations and packs fell within the terms of the contract with the departmental despatch centre and distribution costs cannot be identified separately. The total costs for conference accommodation and facilities were approximately £12,300. Specialised support services for the two conferences cost approximately £11,000.

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list the approved capital allocations for grant-maintained schools for the year 1993-94.

Mr. Forth: The information requested is contained in the following tables. Table A lists those self-governing state schools (grant-maintained schools) operating as at the end of December 1992 which are to receive a capital grant allocation for 1993-94. Table B shows the allocations made to these schools under the technology schools intiative. Schools which became self-governing state schools on 1 January 1993 were invited to submit bids by 25 January 1993 for named capital projects and for resources under the technology schools initative. Decisions on the allocations for these schools have not yet been made.

Table A
Grant-maintained school's capital bids
1993-94 allocations

School	*Project*	*£ thousand*
Avon		
Beechen Cliff	Urgent drainage and subsidence prevention work	139
Oldfield	2 new science laboratories and preparation rooms	200
Barnet		
Hendon	Extension and provision of additional science technology and maths facilities	420
Bedfordshire		
Manshead High	Replace oil with gas central heating system	110
Queensbury	Improvements to science and technology facilities	120
Berkshire		
Denefield	New science laboratory	55
The Downs	New laboratory and classrooms to replace mobiles	320
Herschel	Fire precaution works including alarm system	130
Langley Grammar	Extension for 2 science laboratories with prep. rooms	210
Priory Combined	Resources unit, 4 classrooms and toilets for physically disabled children	275
Southlands (Reading)	Re-roofing	15
Bexley		
Barnehurst Infants	2 new classrooms to replace mobiles	90
Barnehurst Junior	1 new classroom to replace mobile	50
Birmingham		
Baverstock	Roofing works; repairs and replacement	42
Great Barr	Fire prevention work to the 4-storey block	300
Handsworth	2 new technology rooms	184
Small Heath	Replace heating boiler and controls	55
Bolton		
Crompton Fold	New classroom and changing room to replace temporary accommodation	90
	Repairs to heating system	95
Bradford		
Bingley	Phase 2 of science wing	250
Brent		
Claremont High	Refurbish home economics and CDT accommodation	150
	Phase 2: Science wing	350
Copland	Convert and refurbish 4 science laboratories	150
Bromley		
Beaverwood	New technology block	277
Bullers Wood	Provision of 5 new laboratories	214
Charles Darwin	Phase 3: Rewiring of school	162
Coopers	New technology block	221
Crofton Junior	New science room	55
Hayes	Refurbish science accommodation and health and safety work	146
Kelsey Park	New technology block	315
Langley Park	Remodel and refurbish craft block	100
Newstead Wood	New technology block	267
Ravenswood Boys	Technology extension and upgrade existing	246
Buckinghamshire		
Beaconsfield	Re-roof main building	190
Bridgewater Hall	Improvements to science and technology	128
Bridgewater Hall with Brindley Hall	Replace shared boiler	200
Chalfonts	2 new science laboratories plus preparation rooms	305
Calderdale		
Crossley Heath	Laboratory refurbishment	225
North Halifax	Essential cladding repairs	125

School	*Project*	*£ thousand*
Salterlee Primary	Urgent health and safety work	40
Cambridgeshire		
Bassingbourne	Reorganisation and refurbishment to provide technology facilities	136
Gamlingay Village	New classrooms to replace 4 temporary classrooms	185
	Remodel science and technology facilities	137
Park Lane Primary	Re-roof	80
Queens	Science department extension	300
St. Helen's Primary	Replace mobiles with 2 classrooms and toilets	120
Cheshire		
Bankfield	Part re-fenestration	300
Croydon		
Riddlesdown	Health and safety works	400
Cumbria		
Hayton	Alterations and extension to replace temporary accommodation	170
Kirkbie Kendal	Phase 1: Science/technology facilities	950
Queen Katherine	Roof and cladding repairs to 2 blocks	50
St. Aidan's	Re-model and refurbish science laboratories	150
Trinity	Refurbishment of science laboratories	150
	Re-model technology suite and 1 classroom	198
Derbyshire		
Borrow Wood Junior	Health and safety improvements	65
	Resource area and circulation improvements	45
Ecclesbourne	Phase 2: Technology block	260
Netherthorpe	Replace temporary accommodation with modern language block	200
Dorset		
Avonbourne	Improvements to existing technology and science departments	220
Bournemouth School for Girls	4 new science laboratories	350
Budmouth	Refurbish 7 science laboratories plus preparation rooms	370
Highcliffe	Health and safety improvements	75
Parkstone Grammar	Remodel and refurbish science and technology facilities	500
Woodroffe	Refurbish 3 science laboratories	150
Ealing		
Drayton Manor	Repair and upgrade art and technology roof	77
Ellen Wilkinson	Window replacement in tower block	105
	Remodelling to provide 2 additional laboratories	95
Greenford High	Re-roof CDT, home economics and art block	165
Essex		
Beauchamps	Boiler replacement and energy conservation	118
Boswells	New technology block and refurbish technology and classrooms	350
Bromsford	Major repairs and remedial works	243
Chalvedon	Phase 3: Middle school refurbishment and extensions	300
Chelmsford Girls	New science department	500
Eastwood	Re-model and refurbish technology block	120
Elmwood Primary	Provide 4 new classrooms and hall and extend reception area	340
Furtherwick Park	Replace boiler, hot and cold storage and E.M.S.	145
Great Totham Primary	Demolish temporary classroom, and conversion of existing accommodation	75
Katherines Primary	Conversion of teaching areas	75
King Edward VI	Replace temporary accommodation with new technology/art block	270
King Harold	Re-roofing and renew curtain wall sealing	155
King John	Refurbish 4 laboratories and preparation rooms	188
North Crescent Primary	3 new classrooms	180
Northlands Junior	Essential perimeter security fencing	35
Philip Morant	Conversion to provide 3 laboratories	120
Plume	Re-model upper school design and technology block	148
Rickstones	Refurbish technology accommodation	50
Saffron Walden	Replace asphalt roofs and parapets	388
Thurstable	Re-model and extend technology	200
Torells	Refurbish technology	185
Westcliff Boys	2 new science laboratories	170
Gloucestershire		
Balcarras	Re-roofing part of school	80
Chosen Hill	Remodelling to form 3 science laboratories and preparation rooms	195
Cotswold	Replace heaters and insulation in the ROSLA block	42
Crypt	Refurbishment of science and technology facilities	190
Katherine Lady Berkeley	Major roof repairs	161
Marling	New science block and adaptations and demolition of some existing accommodation	475
Newent Community	Refurbish 3 home economics rooms	150
	Refurbish science laboratories	90

School	*Project*	*£ thousand*
Pates	Replacement buildings: Part phase 3 and phase 4	500
Rednock	New building to provide 2 science laboratories and 4 classrooms	650
Ribston Hall High	Replace glazed aluminium cladding to 3-storey block	198
Robinswood Primary	Replace school roof finish	27
	Rewire and update electrical installation	72
Tewkesbury	Replacement and rationalisation of heating and hot water services	259
Hampshire		
Burgate	2 new science laboratories and preparation rooms	230
City of Portsmouth	Refurbish 4 science laboratories	120
Crofton	New block containing new science laboratories to replace temporary accommodation	450
Hardley	New heating system to Butler block	145
Hertfordshire		
Christchurch	New classroom to replace mobile	71
Francis Bacon	Refurbish science laboratories	120
	Up-grade fire resistance	68
Parkside First	Internal alterations and repairs	141
Parmiters	6 new classrooms and 2 new laboratories	400
Rickmansworth	New art and design block	440
	Remove asbestos, reclad and reroof (excluding VI Form block)	120
St. Mary's Primary	Refurbish toilets	30
Hillingdon		
Bishopshalt	Replace old boiler with gas heating system	46
Haydon	New technology block and refurbish existing technology and classrooms	270
Hayes Manor	Fire protective ceilings and ventilation—West building	130
Mellow Lane	Major repairs and health and safety work (part only)	302
Northwood	Re-roofing and repairs to rainwater goods	136
Queensmead	New technology block and re-model technology provision	300
Uxbridge High	Phase 1: roof repairs	310
Humberside		
Wold Newton	Additional new classroom	54
Kensington		
Cardinal Vaughan	New technology building	300
Kent		
Angley	Remodelling of design and technology department	330
Archbishops	Conversion of workshop to laboratories and provision of CDT rooms and classrooms	640
Aylesford	Phase 2: New technology and art block	345
Borough Green	2 additional infant classrooms	95
Bradbourne	Technology provision	55
Canterbury High	New block of laboratories and toilets	218
Chatham Girls	New technology block	216
Cornwallis	Refurbish science laboratories	300
Cranbrook	Refurbish English and History accommodation	46
Dartford Girls	New technology block and adaptations to provide IT facility	280
Holy Trinity Primary	Classroom renovation	19
Malling	Re-model technology accommodation	285
Maplesden Noakes	Replace central heating boiler plant in each block	200
	Conversion to science and technology room	75
Meopham	Gas supply and new heating system	200
Minster College	Refurbish technology facility	364
Rainham Mark	Adaptations to science block	200
Robert Napier	New technology accommodation	358
St. Georges (Gravesend)	Alternative means of escape	40
Senacre	New technology block and remodelling of existing	230
Simon Langton	Remodelling to create art, design and technology centre plus new workshops	370
Sir Roger Marwood	Extension and improvements to laboratories	400
Skinners	Technology building	200
Snodland Primary	New classroom block to replace mobiles	200
Thamesview	Asbestos removal and boiler replacement	95
Wilmington Boys	Science block refurbishment	200
Kirklees		
Heckmondwike	Phase 2: Repairs to old block	189
	Additional technology accommodation and conversion	266
Lancashire		
Bacup and Rawtenstall	Technology and science laboratory	35
Clitheroe Royal	New classrooms and improvements to science	400
Lancaster Royal Grammar	2 classroom block	122
	Replacement of heating and domestic water system	46
Newton Bluecoat	New changing rooms, medical inspection room and disabled toilet	55

School	*Project*	*£ thousand*
Lincolnshire		
Ancaster High	Roof conversion	50
Bourne Abbey Primary	2 additional classrooms, new science/technology room and toilets	200
Caistor	New rooms for design/technology and IT	260
Carres	Reroofing laboratory and main teaching blocks	67
Castle Hills	Extension of technology block and science laboratory alterations	350
Ermine Junior	New science and technology classrooms	50
Gartree	Additional science laboratory and fire exit	130
Gleed Girls	Phase 1 of technology/science improvements	181
Kings (Grantham)	New science/IT block	385
Lincoln Christ Hospital	Demolish temporary accommodation and extend technology/science facilities	199
Magdalen	Heating system	65
North Kesteven	Re-wiring of lower school block	175
	Partial re-roofing	125
Queen Elizabeth (Alford)	New science and technology extension to replace temporaries	370
Queen Elizabeth (Horncastle)	Re-roofing—single storey Vic Hallam block	77
Rauceby	Extension to provide classrooms, resource facilities and toilets	170
Robert Pattinson	New science laboratories and re-model technology unit	500
St. George's (Sleaford)	Two new double classroom blocks to replace temporaries	200
	Replacement of 2 mobiles	200
Skegness	Replace temporary classrooms with new teaching block including technology provision	600
William Farr	Refurbishment of computer room science laboratories and new classrooms	160
Liverpool		
St. Francis Xavier	New general and technical rooms	600
Norfolk		
Acle High	Conversion to provide technology facilities	145
	Single classroom extension	50
Costessey High	Extension to provide 2 science laboratories	200
Cromer High	Improvements to technology facilities	205
Dereham First	New classroom	60
Gresham Village	Three classroom extension and refurbishment of existing accommodation	225
Heacham Middle	New technololgy room	50
Marshland High	Extension and adaptations to technology suite	235
Norwich Road	Roof renewal of main block	121
	Renewal of main boiler	45
Robert Kett	Repairs to roof and chimneys	75
Sheringham High	Refurbish existing technololgy facilities	270
West Flegg Middle	Two new classrooms to replace mobiles	130
Wymondham College	Technology centre to replace temporary accommodation	261
Northamptonshire		
King John, Northants	Replace slate roof and repair curtain walling	45
Kingswood	Replacement of main heating system	126
Lodge Park	Replacement of mobiles by new building	470
Moulton Primary	Phase 3: Replace of 4 mobiles	199
Northampton Boys	Refurbish 5 laboratories and repair works	280
Southfield Girls	Repairs to concrete frame, flat roofs and toilets	162
Nottinghamshire		
Ravensdale Middle	Structural repairs to craft areas	40
Rochdale		
Crossgates Primary	New classroom	35
Shropshire		
Adams Grammar	Repair support and facade of main entrance	100
Somerset		
Bruton Primary	Phase 2: Classroom Extensions	80
Sexey's	Science Department development	200
Southwark		
London Nautical	Boiler and calorifer replacement	140
Surrey		
Beacon	Expansion of canteen facilities	34
Cheam High	New technology block	216
Collingwood	External fabric refurbishment	294
	Refurbishment laboratory/science block	280
De Stafford	Urgent recladding and reroofing	640
Epsom and Ewell	IT Development	100
Heathside	Refurbishment 3 science laboratories	120
John Fisher	Science—Fire, health and safety improvements	200
Manor County First	Replace oil with gas central heating	86
Nonsuch High	New classroom and re-model science laboratories	335

School	*Project*	*£ thousand*
Send First	3 new classrooms and toilets	210
Stoneleigh First	Window Replacement	46
Sutton Grammar	Refurbishment 4 laboratories	160
Wilsons	Food technology, design and art area	150
Tameside		
Audenshaw	2 new classrooms	105
Tower Hamlets		
Raines Foundation	New science laboratories and ancillary accommodation	450
Walsall		
Streetly	Roof repairs	87
St. Thomas More	New science block	695
Wandsworth		
Burntwood	Window Replacement and Remedial works	340
	Upgrade science classrooms and fire escape	302
Elliott	Alteration to science accommodation	300
Warwickshire		
Ash Green	Replacement of boilers	111
Avon Valley	Phase 1: Extension of science and technology facilities and refurbishment	220
Hartshill	Rewire whole school	262
Myton	Extend and refurbish existing workshops for design and technology	499
Queen Elizabeth (Atherstone)	Refurbish laboratory	84
Wiltshire		
St. Augustines	New technology block	230
Wolverhampton		
Moseley Park	Two new science laboratories and associated facilities	255

Table B
Technology schools initiative 1993-94 allocations for grant-maintained schools

School	*Amount allocated (£ thousands)*
Baines School	205
Beacon School	185
Cornwallis School	207
Graveney School	300
Homewood School	176
Manshead School	252
Northolt High School	200
Ravenswood School for Boys	244
Small Heath School	211
Southlands School	223
Stratford School	300
Wymondham College	200

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many parents rang the telephone helpline set up in respect of advice on grant-maintained schools by his Department on 1 February, for each of the first two weeks of operation.

Mr. Forth: During the first weeks of operation, the helpline received 271 calls, of which 214 were from parents. The number of calls received during the second week was 848, of which 674 were from parents. This gives a total of 1,119 calls during the first two weeks, of which 945 were from parents.

Schools, Northamptonshire

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list the schools in Northamptonshire which *(a)* are operating as grant-maintained, *(b)* are approved for grant-maintained status but not yet open, *(c)* are schools which have voted yes and published proposals for grant-maintained status, *(d)* are schools which have voted yes but not yet published proposals and *(e)* are schools whose applications have been rejected.

Mr. Forth: The information requested is as follows:

(A) *Operating schools*
Kingsley Park Middle School
Kingswood School
Lodge Park School
Manor School
Montagu School
Moulton Primary School
Northampton (GM) School for Boys
Sir Christopher Hatton School
Southfield School for Girls
The King John School
The Windmill County GM Primary School
Weavers School
Wrenn School

(B) *Schools which are approved but not yet operating*
Danesholme Junior School

(C) *Schools which have published proposals for grant-maintained status*
Corby Beanfield Junior School
Queen Elizabeth School
Woodnewton Way Junior School

(D) *Schools which have voted in favour of grant-maintained status but have not yet published proposals*
Millbrook Infant School

(E) *Schools whose application for grant-maintained status has been rejected*
Bliss Charity Primary School
Kettering Boys School

Coventry LEA

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will provide extra resources for education for Coventry local education authority.

Mr. Forth: Over the three financial years 1990-91 to 1992-93, the education component of Coventry's assessment has increased by almost 21 per cent. once the 1992-93 additional grant for teachers' pay has been taken into account. This is a substantial increase, well in excess of the rate of inflation.

The local authority finance settlement for 1993-94 allows for an increase of 2·6 per cent. in education standard spending once account is taken of the transfer of responsibility for most further education to the Further Education Funding Council. This increase is reasonable, given that inflation is falling and that public sector pay settlements in the coming financial year should be restricted to between zero and 1·5 per cent. Coventry will receive its fair share of this increase.

Sidney Stringer School, Coventry

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make a statement about the subject matter of his consultation with governors of Sidney Stringer school in Coventry.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend is not aware of any issues arising from consultation of the governors of Sidney Stringer school. In conducting consultation exercises, from time to time, it is normal practice to consult a wide range of interested bodies, including teacher unions.

Nurseries

79. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the latest information on the number of children attending nursery schools and nursery classes in each local education area in England.

Mr. Forth: The number of pupils of all ages attending maintained nursery schools and nursery classes in maintained primary schools in each local education authority in England in January 1992 are shown in the table.

Pupils attending maintained nursery schools and nursery classes in maintained primary schools in each LEA in England January 1992

LEA	*Nursery schools*	*Nursery classes in primary schools*
City	0	29
Camden	191	821
Greenwich	682	2,425
Hackney	165	2,047
Hammersmith and Fulham	574	936
Islington	268	1,533
Kensington and Chelsea	264	564
Lambeth	447	1,847
Lewisham	231	2,342
Southwark	484	2,231
Tower Hamlets	695	1,997
Wandsworth	209	2,031
Westminster	165	884
Barking	0	1,751
Barnet	512	1,868
Bexley	180	947
Brent	241	2,231
Bromley	0	154
Croydon	454	707
Ealing	589	2,657
Enfield	0	1,484
Haringey	214	2,347
Harrow	0	958
Havering	0	247
Hillingdon	120	3,046
Hounslow	0	2,471
Kingston upon Thames	242	932
Merton	0	2,593
Newham	948	3,501
Redbridge	0	987
Richmond upon Thames	71	635
Sutton	240	1,445
Waltham Forest	321	2,181
Birmingham	2,368	7,975
Coventry	228	1,968
Dudley	71	2,810
Sandwell	216	4,425
Solihull	0	1,728
Walsall	792	3,431
Wolverhampton	847	3,089
Knowsley	0	2,524
Liverpool	561	5,789
St. Helens	75	1,558
Sefton	315	2,156
Wirral	315	1,999
Bolton	499	2,558
Bury	151	1,295
Manchester	554	6,814
Oldham	0	2,386
Rochdale	933	1,085
Salford	844	2,478
Stockport	910	822
Tameside	355	2,150
Trafford	0	1,820
Wigan	196	1,929
Barnsley	180	2,771
Doncaster	0	3,327
Rotherham	373	2,602
Sheffield	754	4,971
Bradford	508	5,528
Calderdale	0	1,799
Kirklees	543	3,903
Leeds	280	8,037
Wakefield	476	3,852
Gateshead	70	1,728
Newcastle upon Tyne	693	2,347
North Tyneside	292	2,356
South Tyneside	777	1,448
Sunderland	1,006	2,169
Isles of Scilly	0	0
Avon	1,679	3,307
Bedfordshire	1,402	3,753
Berkshire	2,134	3,664
Buckinghamshire	518	2,178
Cambridgeshire	717	1,480
Cheshire	860	4,621
Cleveland	143	9,280
Cornwall	113	1,502
Cumbria	798	2,204
Derbyshire	1,508	7,452
Devon	294	2,450
Dorset	0	805
Durham	2,699	4,177
East Sussex	298	1,163
Essex	266	2,180
Gloucestershire	0	0
Hampshire	338	1,655
Hereford and Worcester	0	1,274
Hertfordshire	1,699	6,745
Humberside	1,129	7,628
Isle of Wight	0	186
Kent	91	1,893
Lancashire	3,382	3,477
Leicestershire	50	5,343

LEA	*Nursery schools*	*Nursery classes in primary schools*
Lincolnshire	243	1,109
Norfolk	396	461
North Yorkshire	395	3,111
Northamptonshire	620	2,297
Northumberland	156	2,695
Nottinghamshire	563	12,762
Oxfordshire	1,097	1,494
Shropshire	119	1,224
Somerset	0	239
Staffordshire	2,035	4,532
Suffolk	100	2,867
Surrey	436	2,426
Warwickshire	757	1,366
West Sussex	459	143
Wiltshire	0	561
England	52,183	278,160

Publicity

81.**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to his answer of 2 June 1992 to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), *Official Report*, column 446, what is his Department's *(a)* current outturn estimate for publicity expenditure for 1992-93 and *(b)* budgeted publicity expenditure for 1993-94.

Mr. Boswell: As noted in the Department's annual report (Cm 2210), which was laid before Parliament on 9 February, expenditure by the Department on publicity and publications, excluding statutory orders, is expected to be about £6·8 million in 1992-93. The provisional budget for 1993-94 is £8·0 million.

Further and Higher Education

97. **Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the percentage of students who entered further and higher education for the latest year for which information is available; and what corresponding information he has for each EC country.

Mr. Boswell: In 1991-92 some 67 per cent. of 16-year-olds and 49 per cent. of 17-year-olds participated in full-time education in schools, sixth-form colleges and further education colleges in England. In the same year some 23 per cent. of 18 to 20-year-olds in Great Britain entered full-time higher education. Further details are shown in tables 17 and 21 of the departmental report, Cm 2210. Comparisons with certain EC countries are shown on pages 16 and 17 of "Education Statistics for the UK" 1992 edition, a copy of which is in the Library.

Primary and Secondary Schools (Resources)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps he is taking to rectify the imbalance of resources between primary and secondary schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: It is for each local education authority to determine the appropriate balance of spending between the primary and secondary school sectors. The 1993-94 local authority grant settlement allows for local authorities in England to spend £16,854 million on education overall, 2·6 per cent. more than the comparable figure for 1992-93.

Drug Abuse

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps he has taken to evaluate the impact of the decision to cease funding for health education co-ordination within the grants for education support and training programmes on drug abuse work.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend will look to the Office for Standards in Education to provide him with information and advice about all aspects of education provision in schools. This will include provision made for preventive health education, aspects of which are included in the national curriculum and must be studied by all pupils.

EMPLOYMENT

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many training and enterprise councils have had surpluses in excess of £1 million in *(a)* 1990-91 and *(b)* 1991-92; and if he will list them.

Mr. McLoughlin: Training and enterprise councils may earn surpluses by the effective use of some of the funds made available to them by the Department, to meet their needs for adequate reserves for their day-to-day commitments as companies, to finance any advances in funding they make to their training providers and to reinvest in local training, education and enterprise activities. Under their contracts, they can use their surpluses only on activities agreed with the Department to further the objectives in their plans. The surpluses held by each TEC for both 1990-91 and 1991-92 may be seen in their published accounts, which are available in the Library.

Health and Safety

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how she intends to continue funding of health and safety training by trade unions and for workers' representatives.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: As my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State announced in December, the current public subsidy for the training of trade union officials will be phased out over a three-year period from April. We will, however, be providing some additional funds to the Health and Safety Commission for health and safety training initiatives.

WALES

Police Areas

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the resident population of each police force area in Wales in 1981 and 1991.

Mr. David Hunt: The mid-year estimates of resident population for the police force areas of Wales for 1981 and 1991 are shown in the table.

	1981 Thousands	1991[1] Thousands
North Wales	624·9	653·8
Gwent	441·7	446·9
South Wales	1,302·7	1,316·1
Dyfed-Powys	444·2	469·5

Source: Registrar General's Mid Year Estimate of Resident Population.

[1] 1991 data are provisional.

Access Funds

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many applications have been made by students to each of the access funds within each university, college and college of higher education in Wales in each year since the establishment of the funds.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Since the access funds were established in 1990-91, the Universities Funding Council has been responsible for distributing access funds to the colleges of the university of Wales. The Welsh Office has distributed access funds to the other further and higher —FHE—institutions in Wales.

Institutions do not usually distinguish between the three access funds when considering applications. According to returns from FHE institutions in Wales a total of 3,160 students applied for assistance from the access funds in 1990-91 and 3,932 in 1991-92. Similar information for 1992-93 will not be available until later in the year.

Wilprint Group

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what date he received requests from the fraud squad for files relating to the placing of printing and publicity contracts with the Wilprint Group; and on whether that request was complied with.

Mr. David Hunt: My Department always co-operates fully with the police.

Tai Cymru

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many housing units have developed by Tai Cymru in areas with a population of under 3,000 in each of the last three years.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This information is not available centrally.

Local Authority Reserves

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish figures showing the level of reserves, excluding capital receipts, held by each local authority in Wales in each year from 1990 onwards; and if he will publish estimated reserve levels, excluding capital receipts, for the financial year 1993-94.

Mr. David Hunt: The information available is shown in table 8.9 of "Welsh Local Government Financial Statistics 1992", a copy of which is in the Library of the House. This includes estimated reserves at 31 March 1993.

Cardiff Bay Development Corporation

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to paragraph 9.13 of the Welsh Office report, "Government Expenditure Plans 1993-94 to 1995-96", Cm. 2215, on what date he estimates the quinquennial review of the aims and objectives of the Cardiff Bay development corporation will *(a)* commence and *(b)* be completed; what external consultancy assistance will be sought and by what means, to assist in the review; what the total cost of the review is estimated to be, inclusive of any such consultancy assistance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I expect the financial management and policy review of the Cardiff bay development to begin around the end of the financial year and to take approximately three months to complete. Such reviews are normally conducted by a Welsh Office official assigned to the project for its duration. On that basis, I estimate the cost to be about £14,000.

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to figure 3.09 of the Welsh Office report, "Government Expenditure Plans 1993-94 to 1995-96", Cm. 2215, when he expects to set the target rate of return on the Welsh Development Agency for its investment function in 1993-94.

Mr. David Hunt: I expect to agree a provisional financial duty shortly and to determine a final financial duty for 1993-94 later this year.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to paragraph 3.16 of the Welsh Office report, "Government Expenditure Plans 1993-94 to 1995-96", Cm. 2215, what consultations he has had with the Welsh Development Agency concerning the sale of all or any of the Treforest, Bridgend, Waterton Forestfach or Wrexham industrial estates; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The departmental report clearly sets out the Government's policy on planned disposals. Decisions on which properties to bring forward are for the Welsh Development Agency.

NHS Trusts

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* health authority members and *(b)* members of boards of national health service trusts are elected members of principal local authorities.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Seven health authority members and two national health service trust non-executive directors were elected members of a principal local authority in Wales at the time of their appointment. Since local authorities are not required to notify the Department about changes to their membership, the Welsh Office does not have a record of changes in elected member status for these or other health authority members and trust non-executive directors following appointment.

Health Promotion

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to paragraph 9.08 of the Welsh Office report, "Government Expenditure Plans 1993-94 to 1995-96, Cm.

2215", if he will place a copy in the Library of the October 1992 report on health promotion and the subsequent action plan.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The action plan is still under consideration. Publication of the scrutiny report and the Welsh Office's response will be addressed when that consideration is complete.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many members of TECs are elected members of principal local authorities.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Information as to whether members of TECs are also elected members of local authorities is not collected centrally.

A465

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when contracts will be signed for construction work to begin on the A465 link between Aberdulais and Glynneath.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The contract will be let shortly before main works start. This is planned for 1993-94 and is contingent on expenditure on other schemes in the roads programme.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Management Consultants

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the contracts awarded by his Department to *(a)* Coopers and Lybrand management consultants, *(b)* Touche Ross management consultants, *(c)* Price Waterhouse management consultants, *(d)* Ernst and Young management consultants, *(e)* Chrichton Roberts Ltd., *(f)* K.P.M.G. management consultants and *(g)* Leopold Joseph management consultants, with the total cost of the contracts with each contractor, for (i) the past 12 months and (ii) 1991-92.

Mr. Curry: Consultancy fees totalling £304,082 were paid to Coopers and Lybrand, Touche Ross, Price Waterhouse, and KPMG, for the financial year 1991-92. A further breakdown of figures cannot be given as this information is classified commercial in confidence. These consultancy firms were involved in six areas of work in my core-department. This answer excludes contracts made for information technology work and those made by executive agencies. The precise number of contracts, and information for the last 12 months, can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Set-aside Land

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his latest estimate of the number and percentage of cereal farmers in each EC member state who will have to place land in set-aside.

Mr. Curry: The information in the following table is derived from budgetary estimates of expenditure on the CAP reform package prepared by the Commission. The estimates do not distinguish between cereals farmers and those growing oilseeds or protein crops, both of which are also covered by the arable area payments scheme.

Country	*Number of growers expected to set land aside*	*Percentage of growers expected to set land aside*
Belgium	7,644	16
Denmark	37,770	46
Germany	105,474	21
Greece	4,378	1
Spain	58,169	8
France	202,744	34
Ireland	6,285	15
Italy	34,210	3
Luxembourg	256	10
Netherlands	6,068	26
Portugal	2,349	1
United Kingdom	50,363	63
Total	515,710	12

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of the likely acreage for set-aside for cereal land in each EC member state under the common agricultural policy reform proposals.

Mr. Curry: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 14 December 1992 at column *70*. That information was derived from Commission estimates which do not distinguish between land used to grow cereals and land used for other arable crops eligible for the new arable area payments.

Consultancies

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many contracts for consultancies were awarded by his Department over *(a)* the last 12 months and *(b)* 1991-92.

Mr. Curry: During the financial year 1991-92 contracts were awarded by my core-department to consultancy firms involved in ten areas of work. This answer excludes contracts made for information technology consultancies and those made by executive agencies. The precise number of contracts, and information for the last 12 months, can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Sheep Annual Premium

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the impact on the sheep annual premium of a change in the pound sterling/ecu exchange rate to £ = 1·25 ecu.

Mr. Curry: The final rate of sheep annual premium in respect of 1992 is calculated according to the green exchange rate in force on 3 January 1993. It will not be affected by changes in the pound sterling/ecu exchange rate subsequent to that date.

The rate of premium for future years will depend on the level of market prices and green rates operating in each member state throughout the year. The pound sterling/ecu exchange rate is therefore only one factor affecting the level of premium payable in the United Kingdom, and its impact cannot be assessed independently of the others.

Bee Diseases

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his actions to alleviate bee diseases.

Mr. Curry *[holding answer 19 February 1993]*: Since my reply to the Member for Linlithgow on 5 November at columns *405-06*, a further 33 cases of varroasis have been confirmed, all within the infected area, making a total of 318. I have arranged for letters to be sent to every beekeeper known to the Department to ensure that each is aware of the varroa controls and the advice that is available. I have also arranged for a further varroa search to take place in the spring. Until then existing controls will be maintained. Further action will depend on the results of the search. We shall also continue to take the necessary action to tackle other bee diseases including American foul brood and European foul brood.

Veterinary Science

Dame Jill Knight: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what Government funding is made available annually towards the cost of the training course for veterinary science.

Mr. Boswell: I have been asked to reply.

Funding for veterinary schools is the responsibility of the Universities Funding Council. The UFC's teaching unit of resource for veterinary science for the academic year 1992-93 is £9,589. The UFC is funding some 1,800 undergraduate places.

Fishing Vessels

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many fishing vessels 12 m long and under are registered in the United Kingdom; and what is their total horse power.

Mr. Norris: I have been asked to reply.

There are 9,153 fishing vessels of 12 m or less; total horse power is 697,237.

DEFENCE

Drugs

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 5 February, *Official Report*, column *373-4*, if he will list the drugs involved in each case of discharge from the services.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The drugs involved in dismissals following court martial or summary proceedings are as follows:

Class of Drug	*Numbers Discharged*					
	1986	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
Class A						
Importing	—	—	1	—	—	—
Supplying	—	—	—	—	4	4
Possessing	7	5	7	7	24	36
Class B						
Importing	—	—	—	—	—	1
Supplying	10	7	13	10	12	20
Possessing	43	43	45	51	75	103
Class C						
Importing	—	—	—	—	—	—
Supplying	—	—	Nil	—	—	—
Possessing	—	—	—	—	—	—
Toxic Substances:	—	2	2	—	6	6
Total Offenders:	60	57	68	68	121	170

Notes:

1. Class A drugs include heroin, opium, morphine, cocaine, pethidine, other narcotic drugs, LSD and certain other injectable amphetamines and hallucinogens.

Class B drugs include other narcotics, cannabis, cannabis resin and amphetamines.

Class C drugs include a number of amphetamine-like drugs.

Toxic material includes glue, lighter fuel and other inhaled hallucinogenic substances.

Information in respect of the types of drugs involved in cases of administrative discharge is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

In my answer of 5 February, columns *373-74*, the figures shown for dismissal related solely to those instances where an offender's most serious offence was either importing, possessing, or supplying drugs. The figures provided in today's answer also include those convicted of a more serious offence of violence in addition to a drugs charge and are therefore slightly higher than the figures previously provided.

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 5 February, *Official Report*, columns *373-74*, what were the ranks of all those discharged from the services for drugs-related offences.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The ranks of those dismissed for drugs offences following court martial or summary proceeding are as follows:

Rank	*Year*					
	1986	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
Royal Navy						
Ordinary rate	2	2	1	—	—	7
Able rate	3	6	4	13	23	56

Rank	*Year* 1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Leading rate	2	1	—	—	—	2
Petty Officer	—	1	—	—	—	—
Army						
Private	38	37	50	46	78	83
Lance Corporal	5	3	5	2	5	6
Corporal	1	1	1	1	2	1
Sergeant	—	—	—	—	3	1
Staff Sergeant	—	—	—	—	1	—
Lieutenant	—	—	—	—	1	1
Captain	1	—	—	—	—	—
Royal Air Force						
Aircraftman	—	1	—	—	1	1
Leading Aircraftman	8	5	7	5	7	12
Corporal	—	—	—	1	—	—
TOTAL	60	57	68	68	121	170

Information on the rank of those administratively discharged for drug offences is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

In my answer of 5 February, the figures shown for dismissal related solely to those instances where an offender's most serious offence was either importing, possessing or supplying drugs. The figures provided in today's answer also include those convicted of a more serious offence of violence in addition to a drugs charge and are therefore slightly higher than the figures previously provided.

Absence Without Leave

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the policy of the various branches of the armed forces towards punishment of service men and women who are absent without leave.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Absence without leave is an offence under the service discipline Acts and is punishable by up to two years' imprisonment. It is regarded as a serious offence as it can undermine the operational effectiveness of a unit and the morale of other personnel. Punishments awarded vary according to the circumstances of individual cases.

Meteorological Office

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) for which of its services to the public the Meteorological Office charges a fee directly to the user; (2) what income the Meteorological Office has generated from answering public inquiries about the United Kingdom inshore water forecast in each year since it began charging for the service.

Mr. Aitken: These are matters delegated to the Meteorological Office under the terms of the framework document. I have therefore asked the chief executive to reply directly to the hon. Member.

Letter from Professor Julian Hunt to Mr. Nick Ainger, dated 22 February 1993:

Dear Mr. Ainger

I am responding to your two written Parliamentary Questions.

(1) To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, for which of its services to the public the Meterological Office charges a fee directly to the user.

The Met Office provides services to the public in a variety of ways. Some services, such as severe weather warnings and a range of basic forecast scripts, are provided free of charge to the broadcasting media. Other television, radio and newspaper services (the majority) are provided on a commercial basis to the media companies, but are received by the user—the public—at no direct cost.

Only services offered directly to the public are charged directly. For example, Weathercall is a premium-rated telephone service run jointly by the Met Office and a private firm. Through its network of Weather Centres the Met Office provides weather forecasts for each of 27 areas around the UK, updated three times a day. Revenue from the calls is shared between the line provider (normally British Telecom) and the service providers.

A similar service, called Marinecall, is provided for leisure yachtsmen, giving weather forecasts for 15 inshore areas and two sea areas around the United Kingdom. Services for mountain walkers, skiers and holiday makers (Mountaincall, Skicall and International Weathercall respectively) are also offered.

Over the past year, the Met Office has extended the premium-rated approach to dial-in fax services. MetFAX offers a range of products, designed for yachtsmen, general aviation and schools. A version for the general public, corresponding to Weathercall, is planned for later this year.

Finally, the public can make use of special telephone numbers at Weather Centres and speak directly to forecasters, for which a subscription charge and a charge per call is made. However this service, together with a large range of more tailored services, is aimed more at specific markets, such as agriculture, building and the offshore industry, rather than the general public.

(2) To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what income the Meteorological Office has generated from answering public enquiries about the United Kingdom inshore weather forecast in each year since it began charging for the service.

The Met Office provides an inshore waters forecast for the United Kingdom twice daily to the BBC free of charge as part of the Office's Public Meteorological Service. The forecasts are broadcast on Radio 3 in the morning and Radio 4 in the evening.

In addition, a premium-rated telephone service (Marinecall) is available. The Marinecall service comprises 15 inshore areas, a national UK inshore and two sea area forecasts (for the English Channel and the southern North Sea). Forecasts are updated twice daily from our network of Weather Centres—for example the forecasts for St. David's Head to Hartland Point and for St. David's Head to Colwyn Bay are provided from Cardiff Weather Centre.

The service began in 1986, earning revenue as follows:

	£
1986-87	32,000
1987-88	82,000
1988-89	128,000
1989-90	213,000
1990-91	242,000
1991-92	240,000
[1]1992-93	194,000

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[1] 10 months to date.

Trident

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consultations he has had with his American counterpart with regard the maximum number of warheads to be carried by each British Trident submarine.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The number of warheads carried by a British Trident submarine is a matter for Her Majesty's Government. We have long made clear that each submarine will enter service carrying no more than 128 warheads. The exact number to be deployed will be decided in the light of the circumstances at the time.

European Fighter Aircraft

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the first flight of the European fighter aircraft to take place; in what country it is to occur; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: The first flight of Eurofighter 2000 is expected this year. The contractor's programme envisages that a German-assembled prototype will be the first to fly, followed shortly after by a second aircraft in the United Kingdom.

The activities leading to first flight have been somewhat delayed by the programme review commissioned last year and the changes introduced as a result of decisions taken at the quadripartite ministerial meeting on 10 December 1992. A number of technical issues—none of them of a serious nature—remain to be resolved, including qualifications of the flight control system software—which is critical to flight safety—and which is taking longer than originally expected. The precise timing of first flight is a matter for the manufacturers to decide when they judge sufficient development progress has been made to allow flight testing to proceed safely.

Vessel Hulls

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) for what classes of vessel his Department allows tenderers to respond on the basis of non-United Kingdom built hulls;

(2) on how many occasions and for what classes of vessel tenderers to his Department have responded on the basis of non-United Kingdom built hulls.

Mr. Aitken: Apart from the conversion of existing merchant shipping to meet certain specialist requirements, the only occasion on which tenderers were permitted to respond on the basis of non-United Kingdom built hulls was for the competition for single role mine hunters, cancelled in 1991.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what opportunities exist under the Independent European Programme Group/Western European Union arrangements for United Kingdom warship builders to bid to supply hulls for other European navies;

(2) what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the Independent European Programme Group/Western European Union arrangements for reciprocal purchasing in the field of warship hulls; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: The nations of the Independent European Programme Group which now all participate in the WEU, are under no obligation to include warship hulls in the arrangements agreed in the IEPG to open the European defence equipment market.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on the extent to which United Kingdom shipbuilders have been invited to tender to supply hulls to the navies of *(a)* France, *(b)* the Netherlands, *(c)* Belgium, *(d)* Italy and *(e)* Germany; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: I am not aware that any such invitations have recently been received from any of the countries listed.

Warships

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made of the proportion of warship building capacity which is state owned in *(a)* France, *(b)* the Netherlands, *(c)* Belgium, *(d)* Italy and *(e)* Germany; and what effect this has on reciprocal purchasing arrangements.

Mr. Aitken: I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) on 17 February, *Official Report*, column *254*.

Fatal Accidents

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will consider making it the practice of Her Majesty's Government to make publicly available the conclusions and recommendations of service boards of inquiry reports investigating fatal accidents subject to the agreement of the next of kin of the deceased and the minimum of security requirements.

Mr. Archie Hamilton *[holding answer 19 February 1993]:* Service board of inquiry reports are internal documents written for internal use by the service concerned. Their conclusions and recommendations may refer to failings on the part not only of the deceased, but also of other named, or identifiable, service personnel or service units involved. While this is no longer considered sufficient justification for withholding reports from the next of kin of the deceased, it does render the material inappropriate for routine publication by the Ministry of Defence.

HEALTH

Drug Prescribing

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy that the proposals to extend the selected list regulations to 10 therapeutic categories will not be implemented until after the two joint working groups set up by her Department with the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry to *(a)* to examine the factors contributing to the rate of growth of NHS expenditure on drugs and *(b)* to consider the future development of the pharmaceutical industry in the United Kingdom and its contribution to the national economy have had the opportunity to make initial recommendations to her.

Dr. Mawhinney: No.

NHS Staff (Medical Screening)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will give details of the responsibilities transferred by statutory instrument from the former medical officers of health to the health authorities on the occasions of health and local government reorganisation in respect of medical screening and examinations of local authority staff and applicants; and which such services are provided free of charge.

Dr. Mawhinney: The exact responsibilities of the national health service for providing services to local authorities are not set out in statute. They are covered in general terms by the requirement in section 22 of the National Health Service Act 1977 that health and local authorities must co-operate in order to secure and advance the health and welfare of their residents, and also in general guidance issued by the Department.

NHS Low Income Scheme

Sir John Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the outcome of the review of the national health service low income scheme.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) on Tuesday 15 December at column *184*. I hope to make an announcement soon.

NHS Drugs

Mr. Renton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, (1) pursuant to her answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *321*, what evidence she possesses that the selected list scheme continues to exert a downward pressure on the national health service drugs bill; and in what year it was obtained;

(2) pursuant to her answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *321*, what are the grounds for her belief that measures under the selected list scheme continue to exert a downward pressure on the drugs bill.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Advisory Committee on National Health Service drugs is required to ensure that drugs to meet all real clinical needs in the specified categories can be provided as economically as possible under the NHS. In considering whether to recommend that a particular product should not be prescribed under the NHS, the committee will have regard both to its cost and to the cost of alternative products which are likely to be prescribed in its place. This ensures that the net effect of the committee's recommendations will be to exert a continuing downward pressure on the NHS drugs bill.

Anti-ulcer Products

Mr. Renton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to what degree doctors began prescribing the more expensive anti-ulcer products as an alternative after the selected list scheme was introduced and applied to antacid products in 1985; and if her Department has assessed the total costs to the national health service.

Dr. Mawhinney: Such an estimate, whether relating to the volume or cost of prescriptions, could not be made as information about diagnosis is not included on prescription forms.

Cholera

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many instances of cholera in the United Kingdom by region, have been reported in each year since 1988.

Mr. Sackville: The information requested is given in the table.

The data provided are for England and Wales only. The information relating to Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Number of cholera cases notified for England and Wales by Regional Health Authority, 1988-91

	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
England and Wales	17	13	19	22
Wales	1	—	—	—
Northern	—	—	—	—
Yorkshire	—	—	—	2
Trent	1	2	3	3
East Anglia	—	—	1	2
North West Thames	—	—	—	1
North East Thames	3	1	1	—
South East Thames	—	1	2	4
South West Thames	3	3	3	3
Wessex	—	3	—	1
Oxford	3	1	2	2
South Western	2	—	1	1
West Midlands	2	—	2	—
Mersey	—	2	1	2
North Western	2	—	3	1

Juvenile Offenders (Secure Places)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether she intends to privatise secure accommodation for young people.

Mr. Yeo: We have no plans to do so.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial assistance she proposes to give to local authorities for the staffing and running costs of secure places provided by them so that juvenile offenders are not sent to prison; from what sources such assistance will be provided; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: Financial assistance for the staffing and running costs of additional secure places managed by local authorities will be considered in the appropriate public expenditure surveys. Consideration will be given to seeking a transfer of part of the resources from the Home Office when the courts have power to direct remanded juveniles to secure accommodation.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column 319, what representations she has received that the proposed number of additional secure places for juvenile offenders is insufficient; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: A number of representations have been received from local authorities. We are satisfied that the estimate is based on the best possible information currently available. The position will be kept under review.

Dysentery

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many instances of dysentery have been reported by region in the United Kingdom in each year since 1988.

Mr. Sackville: The information requested is given in the table.

The data provided are for England and Wales only. The information relating to Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Notifications of Dysentery for England and Wales by Regional Health Authority, 1988-1991.

	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
England and Wales	3,692	3,277	2,756	9,935
Wales	91	115	235	972
Northern	50	30	48	606
Yorkshire	572	628	519	3,466
Trent	272	314	145	718
East Anglia	54	159	47	39
North West Thames	360	297	297	284
North East Thames	165	157	209	162
South East Thames	163	146	131	179
South West Thames	399	281	177	214
Wessex	112	66	85	90
Oxford	198	226	171	147
South Western	130	153	188	504
West Midlands	724	370	198	711
Mersey	74	60	35	123
North Western	328	275	271	1,720

Hepatitis

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many instances of hepatitis A and B have been reported, by region, in the United Kingdom in each year since 1988.

Mr. Sackville: The information requested is given in the table.

The data provided are for England and Wales only. The information relating to Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Notifications of Hepatitis (all forms) for England and Wales by Regional Health Authority, 1988-1991

	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
England and Wales	5,062	7,071	9,005	7,917
Wales	194	129	257	260
Northern	383	569	1,232	1,343
Yorkshire	572	1,269	1,585	1,923
Trent	359	474	487	301
East Anglia	125	191	133	124
North West Thames	370	410	303	222
North East Thames	298	321	427	409
South East Thames	263	322	937	645
South West Thames	190	224	242	119
Wessex	249	201	174	94
Oxford	210	487	712	564
South Western	296	191	399	146
West Midlands	325	488	570	484
Mersey	117	151	503	479
North Western	1,111	1,644	1,044	804

Corporate Affairs Intelligence Unit

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what are the main duties and responsibilities of the corporate affairs intelligence unit, NHS ME, based in Leeds; how many people are employed there full-time and part-time; what is the budget for 1993 and estimated budget for each of the next three years; what funding comes from departmental budgets other than her own; and if she will make a statement;

(2) when the corporate affairs intelligence unit, NHS ME in Leeds was established; what consultants and advisers it has used since it was established and what is the total cost of such retention; what is the total cost of entertainment, travel and other facilities to journalists and others since it was established; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The corporate affairs intelligence unit was established on 30 September 1991. Its duties, which were previously undertaken by the Department's regional liaison division, include the preparation of draft replies for Ministers and the national health service management executive on matters concerning the NHS that are not appropriate for referral to NHS authorities and trusts, and the preparation of briefing for parliamentary questions, early-day motions, invitations, etc. It supports Ministers and the management executive in their contact with the NHS in each region. The unit is also responsible for advising Ministers on the appointment of chairmen and members of NHS authorities and trusts.

On 1 February 1993, there were 53 full-time staff in the unit, and three temporary typists. The unit has a manpower budget of about £1 million for 1993-94, the same as that for 1992-93; estimates have not been prepared for future years. All funding comes from Department of Health budgets.

Since its inception, the unit has received advice and guidance from a number of sources including the Department's information division. PA Consulting Group assisted with setting up and running a number of training workshops for the unit staff. The value of the contract with PA Consulting Group is commercially confidential.

The unit is staffed by civil servants, none of whom is authorised to speak to journalists, and does not provide entertainment, travel or other facilities to them. The unit has a hospitality budget of some £1,800 which is used, in the main, to provide refreshments to people from outside the Department attending meetings with the unit.

North East Trust Zone

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the main duties and responsibilities of the north east trust zone, based in Leeds; how many people are employed there full-time and part-time; what is the budget for 1993 and estimated budget for each of the next three years; which part of her Departmental budget supplies the funding; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: The national health service management executive north east outpost is one of six outposts established by the management executive to monitor the performance of NHS trusts. The outpost has responsibility for monitoring NHS trusts within the geographical area covered by the Northern, Yorkshire and Trent regional health authorities. Within the zone there are 31 trusts established as part of the first and second waves and 40 units which will become trusts on 1 April 1993 as part of the third wave. In addition 35 applications are currently being considered from units that wish to become trusts as part of the fourth wave.

The main responsibilities of the outpost are as follows:

Monitoring trusts' financial performance against statutory financial duties;

Reviewing trusts' strategic direction and annual business plans;

Appraising trusts' business cases for capital investment;

Monitoring trusts' annual reports and accounts;

Leading the assessment process for fourth wave trusts;

Providing a channel of communication between trusts and the Management Executive.

The outpost has eight staff, all of whom are full-time. The budget for 1993-94 is £650,000. We expect the budget to reflect inflation in each of the next three years. Funding has been provided from within existing regional health authority allocations.

Hospitals

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 9 February, *Official Report*, column *604*, if she will list those hospitals, in each region that have been notified to her Department as experiencing problems managing their resources to cope with admissions levels.

Mr. Sackville: There is no formal requirement on hospitals to send such a notification to the Department. It is for individual health authorities and trusts to manage their resources and to make arrangements for non-emergency admissions to hospitals when admissions are running at a particularly high level.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 12 February, *Offical Report*, column *828*, if she will place copies of the financial accounts from all first wave self-governing trusts in the Library.

Dr. Mawhinney: The financial accounts information supplied by first wave trusts for 1991-92 is summarised by the Department and presented to Parliament by the Comptroller and Auditor General when he has completed his audit. The summarised accounts will be published as a House of Commons paper copies of which are placed in the Library. Full copies of the accounts of individual trusts are in the public domain and can be obtained locally.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what charge per day per patient is made by secure units for the mentally ill in Yorkshire in *(a)* self-governing trusts and *(b)* other hospitals.

Mr. Yeo: Information on the charges made by secure units to national health service purchasers in respect of normal referrals is not held centrally. Details of daily charges are collected for patients admitted as extra contractual referrals. The latest figures available are for financial year 1991-92 and are as follows:

	£ per day
Newton Lodge medium secure unit (Wakefield)	198
De La Pole Hospital interim secure unit (Hull)	191
High Royds Hospital interim secure unit (Ilkley)	100

72. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations have been received from Yorkshire regional health authority over the past five years about a secure unit for those suffering from mental illness.

Mr. Yeo: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 19 February.

Lynfield Mount Hospital

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will arrange for each response to the consultation carried out concerning a proposal to establish a special care unit at Lynfield Mount hospital, Bradford, to be placed in the Library.

Mr. Yeo: The individual responses will be available at Bradford health authority's headquarters.

Mifepristone/RU486

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment her Department has made of the drug Mifepristone/RU486; what guidance she has issued on its use; and what plans she has to review its usage.

Mr. Sackville: Mifegyne (mifepristone; RU486) was granted a licence in accordance with the Medicines Act 1968 on advice from the Committee on Safety of Medicines (CSM), an independent drug safety committee established under the Act. Following a thorough evaluation of the available data from pre-clinical studies, clinical trials and usage in other countries, both the CSM and the licensing authority were satisfied as to the safety, quality and efficacy of the drug.

The use of Mifegyne for the termination of pregnancy is subject to the Abortion Act 1967 (as amended). Guidance to doctors on its usage is contained in the data sheet and information for patients is given in the patient information Leaflet. These documents were approved by both the CSM and the licensing authority.

As with all marketed drugs, information on the safety of RU486 is collected and investigated by the CSM. The safety, quality and efficacy of RU486 are taken into consideration during reviews of its usage.

Ambulances (Emergency Calls)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list *(a)* for each ambulance authority in England and *(b)* for the financial year 1991-92 and each off the first two quarters of 1992-93 (i) the total number of emergency calls, (ii) the percentage of emergency calls which were reached within 14 minutes in urban areas and (iii) the percentage of emergency calls which were reached within 19 minutes in rural areas.

Mr. Sackville: Information for 1992-93 is not yet available. Final figures for 1991-92 are given in the table.

Emergency calls

Ambulance authority	*Total number of emergency calls*	*Response within 19 minutes Per cent.*
Non-Metropolitan authorities 1991-92		
Cleveland	23,089	94
Cumbria	14,602	87
Durham	29,583	96
Humberside	[1]41,793	99
North Yorkshire	20,904	96
Derbyshire	35,714	[2]97
Leicestershire	31,647	96
Lincolnshire NHS Trust	16,388	[2]96
Nottinghamshire	53,500	[2]97
Cambridgeshire	[1]19,206	84
Norfolk NHS Trust	26,808	91
Suffolk	11,606	[2]91
Bedfordshire	20,471	95
Hertfordshire	38,773	96
Essex	62,577	96
East Sussex	33,338	96
Kent	55,993	96
Surrey	42,565	[2]91
West Sussex	25,048	97
Dorset	[1]25,583	97
Hampshire	[1]37,508	97
Wiltshire	14,383	96
Isle of Wight	[1]3,477	99
Berkshire	[1]27,665	93
Buckinghamshire	17,155	[2]96
Northamptonshire	16,657	[2]98
Oxfordshire	15,614	[2]92
Avon	33,321	[2]99
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	16,306	[2]92
Devon	[1]33,304	94
Gloucestershire	15,696	94
Somerset	11,078	[2]91
Hereford and Worcester	[1]19,867	97
Shropshire	13,732	[2]93
Staffordshire	41,346	[2]99
Warwickshire	[1]13,898	94
Cheshire	37,522	[2]87
Lancashire	71,414	[2]99

[1] Return based on number of emergency patient journeys.

[2] Journeys where response within 20 minutes.

Emergency calls

Ambulance authority	*Total number of emergency calls*	*Response within 14 minutes Per cent.*
Metropolitan authorities 1991-92		
Northumberland Metropolitan NHS Trust	[1]66,098	97
West Yorkshire Metropolitan	101,227	83
South Yorkshire Metropolitan NHS Trust	64,073	76
London Ambulance Service	472,310	64
West Midlands Metropolitan	[1]120,258	92
Mersey Metropolitan NHS Trust	[1]102,096	94
Greater Manchester Metropolitan	[1]157,902	97

[1] Return based on number of emergency patient journeys.

Censuses

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of residents of England and Wales are estimated to have been missed by each census since 1971, taking account of any follow-up surveys.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 17 February 1993]:* Results of the 1981 census post enumeration survey indicated a net undercount of about 0·4 per cent. of people present in private households. This degree of under-enumeration was of the same magnitude as that indicated by the coverage checks following the census of 1971.

The 1981 census did not attempt to enumerate residents of households wholly absent on census night (except as visitors if they were elsewhere in the country). Taking this into account, the total under-coverage of residents in most census statistical tables was about 2·2 per cent. Allowing for residents in wholy absent households who were enumerated as visitors elsewhere in the country (1·3 per cent.), the proportion of residents not counted in the census was 0·9 per cent.

Unlike the earlier censuses, the 1991 census sought to enumerate residents of households wholly absent on census night, either by obtaining the information when people returned to their home address or by imputation, so the analyses of under-enumeration are not directly comparable. The 1991 census validation survey identified sources of error which indicated that about 0·6 per cent. of residents in households had not been counted. From other sources, it is estimated that a further 1·3 per cent. of the resident population was missed for reasons not identified by this survey, giving a total of 1·9 per cent.

Further details for the 1981 and 1991 censuses are given in annex A to the 1991 "Census National Monitor for Great Britain", a copy of which is in the Library.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of infants aged under one year she estimates were missed by the census in *(a)* inner London, *(b)* outer London, *(c)* metropolitan districts, *(d)* urban non-metropolitan districts and *(e)* other non-metropolitan districts in England and Wales.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 17 February 1993]:* The estimated proportions of infants aged under one year missed by the 1991 census were 8·8 per cent. in inner London, 4·1 per cent. in outer London, 3·7 per cent. in metropolitan districts outside London, 2·9 per cent. in non-metropolitan cities, and 1·9 per cent. in other non-metropolitan districts (3·0 per cent. in England and Wales as a whole). Appropriate allowances for these people have been made in compiling the provisional rebased 1991 population estimates.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will conduct a thorough review of the geographical distribution of census undercount for the final mid 1991 population estimates; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 17 February 1993]:* The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys is currently carrying out further geographical analyses of results from the census validation survey, and also of other factors that contributed to the provisional set of mid-1991 population estimates. The outcome of these investigations will be reported in conjuction with the final mid 1991 population estimates, to be published in June 1993.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Rent Deposit Scheme

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 15 December 1992 *Official Report*, columns *155-56*, what conclusions he has drawn from the pilot rent deposit scheme in West London.

Mr. Scott: I am advised by the Department of Environment that the pilot project for a rent deposit fund operated by the Notting Hill Housing Trust is due to end on 30 June 1993. We await the evaluation of this project with interest.

Departmental Report

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide the figures used in constructing figure 10 in the social security departmental report published in February, together with equivalent figures for each year from 1970-71.

Mr. Scott: Information is not available in the form requested for years before 1974-75. The available information is in the tables.

Total Benefit Expenditure by Broad Groups of Beneficiaries £ million 1992-93 prices

	Elderly	Sick and Disabled S/T sick	Sick and Disabled L/T sick and disabled	Total	Family	Unemployed	Widows and others
1974-75	20,045	1,873	3,629	5,502	3,062	1,889	2,101
1975-76	21,305	1,874	3,984	5,859	3,652	3,092	2,138
1976-77	22,923	2,055	4,472	6,527	3,886	3,946	2,097
1977-78	23,707	2,103	4,745	6,848	4,821	4,369	1,959
1978-79	24,789	2,055	5,014	7,088	7,293	3,895	1,944
1979-80	24,614	1,652	5,099	6,751	8,843	3,572	1,846
1980-81	24,924	1,401	5,130	6,530	8,170	6,194	1,745
1981-82	26,834	1,328	5,542	6,870	8,836	7,530	1,779
1982-83	28,179	1,018	6,134	7,152	9,435	8,759	1,742
1983-84	29,503	1,326	6,904	8,229	10,030	9,524	1,739
1984-85	29,889	1,297	7,499	8,796	10,358	10,054	1,729
1985-86	30,811	1,280	7,970	9,250	10,627	10,498	1,683
1986-87	31,953	1,408	9,001	10,408	10,890	10,668	1,645
1987-88	31,916	1,479	9,229	10,708	11,261	9,202	1,565
1988-89	30,558	1,465	9,645	11,109	11,215	6,766	1,480
1989-90	31,152	1,488	10,380	11,869	11,138	5,227	1,380
1990-91	31,961	1,368	11,433	12,800	11,079	5,673	1,368
1991-92	32,837	1,128	13,119	14,247	11,863	7,886	1,442
1992-93	34,484	1,159	14,859	16,017	12,926	9,290	1,418
1993-94	35,203	1,168	15,908	17,076	13,560	10,038	1,399
1994-95	34,754	1,183	16,777	17,960	14,046	10,376	1,371
1995-96	35,430	1,210	17,685	18,894	14,562	10,265	1,372

Disability Allowances

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide a breakdown of *(a)* disability living allowance reviews and *(b)* attendance allowance reviews that have been disallowed to date by whether the original award was for the higher, middle or lower rate in the case of disability allowance and higher or lower in the case of attendance allowance.

Mr. Scott: The information is not available in the form requested.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary fo State for Social Security how many *(a)* disability living allowance awards and *(b)* attendance allowance awards were made between February and December 1992, nationally and by disability benefit centre; and if he will provide a breakdown of these by higher, middle or lower rate.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is in the tables.

Table 1: Awards of Disability Living Allowance between February and December 1992

DCB	Single Awards: Care component Higher Rate	Single Awards: Care component Middle Rate	Single Awards: Care component Lower Rate	Single Awards: Mobility component Higher Rate	Single Awards: Mobility component Lower Rate
Edinburgh	562	991	2,158	5,897	1,466
Newcastle	227	393	1,200	4,130	487
Leeds	604	1,085	2,318	8,487	1,300
Manchester	494	877	1,863	3,455	647
Bootle	335	694	1,670	6,300	589
Birmingham	1,223	1,573	2,829	9,312	1,936
Bristol	436	1,085	1,248	2,643	1,024
Cardiff	392	633	1,244	6,966	857
Wembley	1,100	1,455	2,690	5,073	2,178
Sutton	1,332	1,520	2,014	3,859	2,438
DLA Unit	196	212	231	2,410	374
Great Britain	6,902	10,517	19,464	58,532	13,296

Table 2 (continued)

	Dual awards						
	Higher rate care plus		*Middle rate care plus*		*Lower rate care plus*		
	Higher rate mobility	*Lower rate mobility*	*Higher rate mobility*	*Lower rate mobility*	*Higher rate mobility*	*Lower rate mobility*	*All rates*
Edinburgh	2,415	521	1,511	1,522	2,335	2,031	21,411
Newcastle	1,178	152	474	526	1,283	731	10,794
Leeds	3,096	546	1,631	1,179	3,186	2,135	25,580
Manchester	1,650	319	775	686	1,158	1,240	13,169
Bootle	1,792	421	1,369	819	2,594	1,401	17,993
Birmingham	4,173	827	2,204	1,991	3,519	2,965	32,545
Bristol	2,064	459	1,058	1,266	965	1,122	13,353
Cardiff	1,548	338	1,107	707	2,121	1,039	16,969
Wembley	3,777	840	1,825	1,890	2,469	3,096	26,376
Sutton	2,692	887	1,298	1,873	1,485	2,488	21,862
DLA Unit	593	78	302	158	458	165	5,184
Great Britain	24,979	5,389	13,554	12,616	21,574	18,411	205,236

Table 3

Awards of attendance allowance between April and December 1992

DBC	*Higher rate*	*Lower rate*	*Total*
Edinburgh	11,492	16,206	27,698
Newcastle	4,047	4,256	8,303
Leeds	13,257	18,511	31,768
Manchester	8,548	11,682	20,230
Bootle	7,400	11,428	18,828
Birmingham	17,964	26,073	44,037
Bristol	11,360	19,252	30,612
Cardiff	6,453	13,170	19,623
Wembley	18,925	26,887	45,812
Sutton	16,227	26,657	42,884
AA Unit	352	798	1,150
Total (All DBCs)	116,025	174,920	290,945

Notes:

1. Unrounded figures have been used previously in PQs for DBCs.
2. Monthly figures on AA only available from May 1992 and do not break-down nil awards into higher and lower rates.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total number and percentage of disability working allowance claims that were renewed after the first six months and the number and percentage that were not renewed either because a request for renewal was not submitted or because the applicant did not fulfil the conditions of entitlement; and if he will provide a breakdown of claimants refused benefit at renewal stage on the grounds of failing to meet the disability conditions, the income test, the qualifying benefit conditions or other reasons.

Mr. Scott: It is not possible to say how many claims were not renewed at any one time because there is an eight-week period around the time the disability working allowance award expires in which a person can make a renewal claim. However, an analysis of the 1,502 awards made by 31 July 1992 shows that by the end of January 1993, 1,073 (71·4 per cent.) of these recipients had been given a second award. This figure is likely to increase when late claims are decided.

By 29 January the number of renewal claims refused in each category was as follows:

Reason for refusal	*Number of renewal claims refused*
Failure to meet the disability test	21
Failure to meet the income test	126
No qualifying benefit	8
Other reasons	85

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total number and percentage of requests for reviews of *(a)* disability living allowance and *(b)* attendance allowance that remain outstanding.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is in the table.

	Total number of reviews received	*Reviews outstanding at end of January 1993*	*Percentage of reviews outstanding*
Disability living allowance February 1992-January 1993	67,953	53,681	79
Attendance allowance April 1992-January 1993	109,428	28,812	26

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to produce written information to claimants about their right to ask for a review of departmental decisions not to award compensation in respect of disability living allowance claims.

Mr. Scott: Payments to compensate someone for the lost use of benefit are made on an exgratia basis and there is no right of appeal against these decisions.

However, any customer who believes that they meet the criteria for the award of a compensatory payment and who has had a payment refused may ask the DLA unit if the decision can be looked at again. (The criteria are that the delay has been at least 12 months for new claims or three for renewal claims; the arrears due are more than £50; and there has been clear departmental error which resulted in the delay).

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the total expenditure of his Department on payments of disability living allowance and attendance allowance since the beginning of April 1992, excluding administrative costs; and if he will provide the total expenditure on mobility and attendance allowance for the same period in the previous year.

Mr. Scott: The information is not available in the form requested. However, spending on mobility allowance and attendance allowance for the year 1991-92 together with the estimated spending for disability living allowance, residual mobility allowance and attendance allowance for the year 1992-93 is in the table:

	Actual spending 1991-92 (millions)	*Estimated spending 1992-93 (millions)*
Attendance allowance	1,706	1,458
Mobility allowance	1,062	125
Disability living allowance	—	1,905
Total	2,768	3,488

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he plans to respond to *(a)* the recommendation in the Social Security Advisory Committee's eighth report relating to the severe disability premium and *(b)* the other recommendations.

Mr. Burt: We have, of course, taken careful note of the committee's recommendations, but we are under no obligation to make a formal response and have no plans to do so.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when she expects to reply to the application by Mr. Ernest Peel for his review of the mobility component of the disability living allowance which was sent to her Department on 2 July 1992.

Mr. Scott: The administration of disability living allowance is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from M. Bichard to Mr. Bob Cryer, dated 19 February 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to the points raised in your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security, about when he expects to reply to the application by Mr. Ernest Peel for his review of the mobility component of the disability living allowance which was sent to this Department on 2 July 1992.

A further decision has been given on Mr. Peel's Disability Living Allowance (DLA) mobility component claim and was notified to Mr. Peel on 9 February 1993. I understand that the Disability Living Allowance Unit has already replied to you separately and in greater detail about his matter on 12 February 1993.

The unfortunate delay in dealing with Mr. Peel's review application has resulted from heavy volumes of work following the successful launch of the new benefit. You will be aware from my letter of 19 October 1992 to all MPs of the problems the Benefits Agency has faced since the launch of DLA and the positive steps being taken to improve the situation. Since then further steps have been taken to clear the current backlog of reviews. Measures taken include recruiting additional, and redeploying existing staff and the setting up of four additional processing units.

I offer my sincere apologies to Mr. Peel for the delay in dealing with his claim. He has clearly not received the standard of service that he has every right to expect from the Agency. Such matters are not taken lightly and measures are being taken to improve the quality of service for all our customers.

I hope that you will find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the Official Report. A copy will also be placed in the Library.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when she expects to reply to the application by Mr. K. J. Warring-Davies for a component of the disability living allowance following the medical examination which took place on 24 November 1992.

Mr. Scott: The administration of disability living allowance is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will writ to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from M. Bichard to Mr. Bob Cryer, dated 19 February 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to the points raised in your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about when he expects to reply to the application by Mr. K. J. Warring-Davies for a component of the disability living allowance following the medical examination which took place on 24th November 1992.

A decision has been given on Mr. Warring-Davies' Disability Living Allowance application and notified to him on 11 February 1993. I understand that the Disability Living Allowance Unit has already replied to you separately and in greater detail about this matter on 18 February 1992.

The unfortunate delay in dealing with Mr. Warring-Davies' application has resulted from the heavy volumes of work following the successful launch of the new benefit. You will be aware from my letter of 19 October 1992 to all MPs of the problems the Benefits Agency has faced since the launch of DLA and the positive steps being taken to improve the situation. Since then further steps have been taken to clear the current backlog of reviews. Measures taken include recruiting additional, and redeploying existing, staff and the setting up of four additional processing units.

I apologise for the delay in dealing with Mr. Warring-Davies' case. Such matters are not taken lightly and measures are being taken to improve the quality of Service for all our customers.

I hope that you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the Official Report. A copy will also be placed in the Library.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 23 February 1993

HOME DEPARTMENT

Juvenile Offenders

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultation he has undertaken to date with the Magistrates Association on the way to deal with persistent juvenile offenders aged between 12 and 15 years.

Mr. Jack: We intend to consult widely, including with the Magistrates Association, before bringing detailed legislative proposals before Parliament.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the maximum custodial sentence available to the courts for a persistent juvenile offender aged *(a)* 14 years or under and *(b)* 17 years in (i) 1979 and (ii) 1992.

Mr. Jack: There is no legal definition of a persistent juvenile offender. The information in the table therefore relates to the maximum lengths of custodial sentences available for all juvenile offenders subject to statutory criteria being met. The maximum length of custodial sentences, other than detention under section 53 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933, for the relevant ages in the specified years are as follows:

Date	*Sentence*
1979	
Under 14	No custodial sentence
14 year old (males)	Detention centre—6 months
17 year olds	Borstal training—2 years Imprisonment—maximum term was the same as a court could have imposed for the offence in the case of an adult
Up to 1 October 1992	
Under 14	No custodial sentence
14 year old (males)	Detention in young offender institution—4 months
17 year olds	Detention in young offender institution—maximum term was the same as a court could have imposed for the offence in the case of an adult
After 1 October 1992	
Under 14	No custodial sentence
14 year olds	No custodial sentence
17 year olds	Detention in a young offender institution —12 months

At all relevant times, section 53 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 has permitted courts:

to impose long-term detention on 14 to 17-year-olds for any offence which carries a 14-year maximum sentence for adults; and,

to impose long-term detention on 10 to 13 year olds following their conviction for murder or manslaughter.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent re-assessment he has made of his Department's evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee on the effect of custody in a penal setting on young offenders.

Mr. Jack: At the Committee's request, my Department is preparing a supplementary memorandum of evidence which will deal, inter alia, with the matter to which the hon. Member refers.

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to bring forward firm proposals to tackle juvenile crime.

Mr. Jack: The Government have already introduced a wide range of measures which aim to prevent young people from committing crime. In the Criminal Justice Act 1991, which was implemented on 1 October 1992, we have recently strengthened the powers of the court in relation to defendants under the age of 18.

Both in absolute terms and as a proportion of all known offenders, the number of juvenile offenders has declined in recent years. But the Government are not complacent. We are currently working on additional measures which should enable the courts to deal more effectively with the small number of juveniles who persistently re-offend and for whom existing measures appear not to be working. My right hon. and learned Friend will be announcing his proposals about this shortly.

Sentencing

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effect of the restrictions on taking previous convictions into account when sentencing offenders.

Mr. Jack: The Criminal Justice Act 1991 introduced new provisions relating to previous convictions which reflected existing Court of Appeal guidance. It is too early yet to make a meaningful assessment of the effect of the Act, which came into force on 1 October 1992. However, we will be monitoring closely the effects of this new Act.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to revise upwards the minimum value of the sentencing unit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The principle of the unit fine scheme, which applies to offences committed on or after 1 October 1992, is that fines should cause equal hardship for the well-off and less well-off by depriving an offender of a number of units of his disposable weekly income. One unit is intended to represent a third of the sum left to an offender after essential living expenses have been deducted from his take-home weekly income. For those with very low incomes, who have £12 a week or less after essential living expenses are deducted, there is normally a minimum unit value of £4.

The operation of the unit fine scheme is being carefully monitored. It is too early to say whether any aspect of it will need to be revised.

European Forum on Refugees

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on matters discussed and decisions taken at the European forum on refugees held in Budapest on 15 and 16 February.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My right hon. and learned Friend attended the European conference on uncontrolled migration in Budapest on 15 and 16 February, which approved a series of recommendations for tackling illegal immigration from and through central and eastern Europe. I have placed a copy of the agreed document in the Library of the House. The conference also agreed, among other things, that an informal working party drawn from a small group of participating states should be established to monitor implementation of the recommendations and in particular to carry forward work on promoting readmission agreements.

Football Grounds (Policing)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will meet the chairman of Port Vale football club to discuss consistency and clarity in police charging policy for attending football matches.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My right hon. and learned Friend has not received a request for such a meeting. Charges for policing football matches are a matter for the police authority concerned.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when and on what basis police charges were introduced for policing inside football league grounds.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Charging for additional police services is a long-standing principle, authorised by statutes going back at least to the 19th century. It is not known precisely when charging for policing football matches began, although the practice predated the Police Act 1964, section 15 of which provides the current authority for such charges.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review the guidelines to ensure consistency and clarity in police charges for policing league football matches.

Mr. Charles Wardle: A guidance circular on the subject was issued to all police authorities and forces in May 1991. That guidance recommended a basis for calculating police costs suggested by the Audit Commission and one of its main aims was to promote the consistency of practice recommended by Lord Justice Taylor.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the cost per spectator of policing football matches for each team in the second division.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I will write to the hon. Member.

Gloucestershire Constabulary

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of whether the level of the Gloucestershire constabulary's establishment takes sufficient account of the residence of members of the royal family in the county of Gloucestershire; and if he will make a statement on the criteria used in making his assessment.

Mr. Charles Wardle: It is for the chief constable to assess the level of officers needed to police royal residences in Gloucestershire. My right hon. and learned Friend looks to Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary for advice when considering applications for increases in police establishments. That advice takes account of any protection responsibilities which a force may have.

Immigration Detention Centres

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) at which United Kingdom airports and sea ports his Department is extending current immigration detention facilities;

(2) what plans his Department has for detention centres to house detainees under the Immigration Act 1971; and what construction is currently taking place.

Mr. Charles Wardle: A vacant prison service establishment at Campsfield house, Kidlington, near Oxford will be redeveloped during 1993 to provide at least 120 additional places for Immigration Act detainees. Other possible sites, including sites close to Heathrow and Gatwick airports, are under consideration, but no final decision has yet been taken.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all detention centres or prisons in the United Kingdom in which people are currently detained under the Immigration Act 1971.

Mr. Charles Wardle: In addition to immigration service places of detention at Harmondsworth, the Queen's building at Heathrow, the Beehive at Gatwick, Stansted airport and Manchester airport, the following prison establishments currently hold persons detained under the Immigration Act 1971:

Northern Ireland (as at 18 February 1993)
Crumlin Road

Scotland (as at 18 February 1993)
Gateside
Barlinnie
Craiginches
Saughton

England and Wales (as at 31 December 1992)
Bedford
Belmarsh
Birmingham
Brixton
Dorchester
Durham
Exeter
Gloucester
Haslar
Holloway
Holme House
Leeds
Leicester
Lewes
Lincoln
Pentonville
Woodhill
Wormwood Scrubs

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people are currently detained under the Immigration Act 1971; and what was the total number of people detained in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1991, *(c)* 1992 and *(d)* for the first month of the current year.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Information is not available in the form requested, but on 18 February there were 558 people detained under the Immigration Act 1971, including those detained temporarily in police cells. The total number of such people initially detained during 1992 and January 1993 was as shown in the table. Equivalent figures are not available for 1990 or 1991.

Initially detained	*Number*
In 1992	[1]6,413
In January 1993	[1]510

[1] These figures exclude those detained at ports of entry who did not claim asylum and who were detained for fewer than seven days. Records of such cases are not kept centrally.

Relate

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what financial support he will give to enable Relate to evaluate the effectiveness of its work in preventing marital breakdowns and in reducing the damaging consequences therefrom.

Mr. Jack: I have recently offered Relate a sum of £33,000 towards the cost of extending the evaluative work so far undertaken.

Publicity

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 2 June 1992 to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), *Official Report,* column *406,* what is his Department's *(a)* current outturn estimate for publicity expenditure for 1992-93 and *(b)* budgeted publicity expenditure for 1993-94.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: (a) The current outturn estimate for 1992-93 is £12,395; (b) The proposed publicity budget for 1993-94 is £8,962.

Unemployed Offenders

Mr. Purchase: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of offenders appearing before the courts in Wolverhampton was unemployed in 1990 and 1991.

Mr. Jack: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) on 15 January 1993, *Official Report,* column *826.*

Fraud Trials

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will reconsider the recommendations of the Roskill report about fraud trials following the conclusion of the case of R. *v.* Ward.

Mr. Jack: The Government have already accepted and implemented most of the recommendations of the Roskill report, in the Criminal Justice Acts of 1987 and 1988.

Nevertheless, in the light of continuing concern about length and expense of some trials, on 3 December 1992, the Lord Chancellor's Department, the Home Office and the legal secretariat to the Law Officers issued a consultation paper seeking views on a number of proposals for the reform of practice and procedure in long criminal trials, particularly those involving fraud. The consultation paper asks for responses by 28 February 1993.

Any further reforms in this area will also need to take account of relevant conclusions or recommendations from the Royal Commission on Criminal Justice, which is due to report later this year.

Prison Staff (Assaults)

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many assaults, major and minor, on prison staff have taken place at each prison establishment in England and Wales between April 1992 and February 1993.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The available information relates to offences of assault on prison officers, or other members of staff, which were punished under the prison discipline system and is given in the table. Data for offences punished in January and February are not yet available.

Offences[1] of assaulting a member of Prison Service staff[2] proved at adjudications in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales in April to December 1992: by establishment at which punished.

Establishment at which punished	*Assault*	*Offence Attempted Assault[3]*	*Total*
All establishments	1,554	153	1,707
All male establishments	1,388	148	1,536
Remand Centres	168	30	198
Brinsford	15	3	18
Cardiff	4	—	4
Dorchester	1	—	1
Exeter	1	1	2
Feltham	37	6	43
Glen Parva	19	2	21
Hindley	13	6	19
Holme House	1	—	1
Low Newton	2	—	2
Moorland	43	4	47
Norwich	1	—	1
Rochester	20	7	27
Stoke Heath	8	1	9
Swansea	3	—	3
Total Local Prisons	557	63	620
Bedford	6	—	6
Balmarsh	74	12	86
Birmingham	35	6	41
Bristol	5	2	7
Brixton	26	5	31
Bullingdon	16	1	17
Canterbury	6	1	7
Cardiff	13	2	15
Chelmsford	12	1	13
Durham	26	4	30
Exeter	10	2	12
Elmley	26	1	27
Gloucester	3	—	3
Highdown	13	—	13
Holme House	15	2	17
Hull	8	—	8
Leeds	40	4	44
Leicester	6	3	9
Lewes	11	—	11
Total short sentenced YOIs	4	1	5
Hollesley Bay	2	—	2
Werrington	2	—	2
Wetherby	—	1	1
Total Juvenile YOIs	6	1	7
Feltham	2	1	3
Onley	3	—	3
Werrington	1	—	1
Total Female establishments	166	5	171
Total Local Prisons	118	5	123
Holloway	47	2	49
Low Newton	6	—	6
New Hall	15	—	15
Pucklechurch	8	2	10
Risley	42	1	43

Establishment at which punished	*Assault*	*Offence Attempted Assault*[3]	*Total*
Total Closed Training Prisons	27	—	27
Bullwood Hall	7	—	7
Cookham Wood	5	—	5
Styal	15	—	15
Total Closed YOIs	21	—	21
Bullwood Hall	14	—	14
New Hall	1	—	1
Styal	6	—	6
Parkhurst	7	2	9
Portsmouth (Kingston)	1	—	1
Ranby	3	—	3
Risley	1	—	1
Rochester	1	—	1
Shepton Mallett	5	—	5
Stafford	34	2	36
Stocken	9	—	9
Swaleside	28	3	31
The Verne	5	—	5
Wakefield	8	3	11
Wayland	14	—	14
Wellingborough	1	—	1
Whitemoor	36	9	45
Wymott	7	—	7
Total Open Prisons	13	1	14
Ford	2	—	2
Hewell Grange	1	—	1
Kirkham	2	—	2
North Sea Camp	2	—	2
Rudgate	1	—	1
Standford Hill	1	1	2
Sudbury	4	—	4
Total all YOIs	167	19	186
Total Closed YOIs	157	16	173
Aylesbury	31	3	34
Castington	18	1	19
Deerbolt	9	5	14
Dover	15	—	15
Feltham	18	3	21
Glen Parva	9	1	10
Hollesley Bay	5	—	5
Huntercombe	2	—	2
Moorland	12	1	13
Northallerton	6	—	6
Onley	12	1	13
Portland	6	—	6
Stoke Heath	11	1	12
Swinfen Hall	3	—	3
Total Open YOIs	—	1	1
Hatfield	—	1	1
Lincoln	13	—	13
Liverpool	11	—	11
Manchester	7	1	8
Norwich	15	1	16
Pentonville	25	2	27
Preston	7	1	8
Reading	15	—	15
Shrewsbury	5	—	5
Swansea	2	—	2
Wandsworth	26	5	31
Winchester	27	—	27
Wolds	16	—	16
Wood Hill	1	—	1
Wormwood Scrubs	36	7	43
Total Closed Training Prisons	483	35	518
Acklington	18	—	18
Albany	9	1	10
Aldington	1	—	1
Brockhill	4	—	4
Blundeston	30	1	31
Camp Hill	8	—	8
Channings Wood	3	—	3
Coldingley	9	—	9
Dartmoor	21	3	24
Erlestoke	3	—	3
Everthorpe	3	—	3
Elmley	1	—	1
Featherstone	5	2	7
Frankland	19	2	21
Full Sutton	66	1	67
Garth	33	1	34
Gartree	3	—	3
Grendon	3	—	3
Haverigg	3	—	3
Highpoint	7	—	7
Lancaster	4	—	4
Lindholme	10	1	11
Littlehey	7	—	7
Long Lartin	25	3	28
Maidstone	8	—	8
Mount (The)	9	1	10
Norwich	1	—	1
Nottingham	10	—	10

[1] Provisional figures.

[2] Includes prison officers and prison staff other than of prisoner officer grade.

[3] Including attempting, inciting or assisting.

Wolds Prison (Escape)

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the circumstances which led to the escape of an inmate from the Wolds prison on 23 January.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The prisoner was unaccounted for at a routine security check at 17.00 on 23 January. In accordance with standard procedures, the police were informed as soon as it was suspected that an inmate might be missing and an extensive search of the entire prison was undertaken, including roof spaces and roof tops. The prisoner appears to have used some items of women's clothing in order to leave in the guise of a female visitor. In this way he would avoid the security procedures to which all male visitors were subjected. The prisoner gave himself up to the prison two days later. An internal review of the incident and procedures has taken place and all the recommendations for immediate action to prevent a recurrence have been put in place. The Home Office deputy controller monitored the incident from the outset.

Consultants

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the contracts awarded by his Department to *(a)* Coopers and Lybrand management consultants, *(b)* Touche Ross management consultants, *(c)* Price Waterhouse management consultants, *(d)* Ernst and Young management consultants, *(e)* Chrichton Roberts Ltd., *(f)* KPMG management consultants and *(g)* Leopold Joseph management consultants, with the total cost of the contracts with each contractor, for (i) the past 12 months and (ii) 1991-92.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Details of the contracts awarded by my Department during the past 12 months and for 1991-92 to the specified companies are as follows:

Consultant	*1991-92*	*1992-93*	*Total value*
Coopers and Lybrand	Restructuring of HMIC Matrix Market Testing Review PSIF MIS Project	Triple CJS Pilots Project	£420,000
Touche Ross	Consultancy work for catering contract Study into effective shift systems for the Police Service Survey into motivation amongst police constables	Consultancy work for catering contract Immigration service survey of staff attitudes Review of shiftworking patterns in the Immigration Service Spectrum sizing survey TAC Project	£332,713
Price Waterhouse	Systems Review Systems Review Marketing Survey: Police activity sampling Mass software project	—	£2,758,387
Ernst and Young	Validation of IT Strategy Court Escort: area survey Consultancy assistance in ensuring VFM from the Court Escort Service PROMIS Spits Survey Holmes Project	Police roles and responsibilities Value and vision for the Prison Service ICL Domain Review	—
Chrichton Roberts Ltd.	—	—	—
KPMG	Review of financial arrangements for the funding of Regional Crime Squad in England and Wales	Study for PNCO	£81,250
Leopold Joseph	—	—	—

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many contracts for consultancies were awarded to his Department over *(a)* the last 12 months and *(b)* 1991-92.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The number of contracts for consultancies awarded by my Department for the last 12 months was 113 and for 1991-92 the number was 202.

Rule 43 Prisoners

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women were on rule 43 in prisons in (i) England and Wales, (ii) Scotland and (iii) Northern Ireland on 12 February.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The following table shows the number of males and females, both adults and young persons, removed from association under rule 43 of the prison rules and rule 46 of the young offender institution rules on 12 February, in prison service establishments in England and Wales.

	Rule 43/46 own protection	*Rule 43/46 Good order and discipline*	*Total*
Males	1,570	241	1,811
Females	22	7	29
Total	1,592	248	1,840

The table does not include inmates in designated vulnerable prisoner units where rule 43 and 46 restrictions do not apply.

Responsibility for prisons elsewhere in the United Kingdom rests with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Winchester Prison

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date X-ray and metal detection devices were installed at Winchester prison; and on what date they became fully operational.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: X-ray machines were delivered to Winchester on 1 May 1992 and 29 June 1992. One became operational on 20 October 1992. The second will be installed and brought into operation once the necessary alterations to the gate lodge building have been completed. These alterations are scheduled to commence in 1993-94.

A metal detector portal has been operational at Winchester since 1980.

Criminal Justice Act 1991

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to review the working of the Criminal Justice Act 1991 and its effectiveness in deterring crime; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The Criminal Justice Act which came into force on 1 October last year contained a range of provisions designed to establish a coherent sentencing framework based on the principle that the sentence should match the seriousness of the offence. The effects of the Act are being carefully monitored and evaluated as information becomes available.

Mr. Maurice Bland

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when Mr. Maurice Bland will be transferred from Lindholme to an open prison.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Secretary of State has accepted the recommendation by a discretionary lifer panel of the Parole Board that Mr. Bland should be transferred to an open prison. A decision on the most suitable location for Mr. Bland will be made within the next few days and he will be moved as soon as possible thereafter.

Small Firms (Regulations)

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all those regulations affecting small firms which have been abolished by his Department in each year since 1979.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Such statistics have never been assembled before. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade is finalising a centralised record of Government regulations against which progress on deregulation will be monitored in future. The Home Office will contribute to this record.

Vehicle Clamping

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement concerning the immobilisation of vehicles improperly parked on private land.

Mr. Jack: The Government are today publishing a consultation document on wheel-clamping on private land in England and Wales. It describes the current legal position as we understand it and canvasses a number of options for tackling the problems which have been brought to our attention. It indicates no preference for any of the options listed, but rather solicits as wide a range of opinions as possible, so that a proper balance my be struck between the interests of the landowner and those of the motorist. The document also seeks information on the extent and nature of wheel-clamping on private property and the problems associated with it.

Copies of the paper have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses and are being sent direct to right hon. and hon. Members, individuals and groups that have already expressed an interest, and to others with an identifiable interest in any of the options. Copies of the document may also be obtained free of charge by writing to C4 Division, Home Office, Room 339, 50 Queen Anne's gate, London SW1A 9AT.

The document requests that observations of both fact and opinion should reach the Home Office no later than the end of May.

WALES

Commons

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many areas are designated as commons in each local authority area of Wales; and what were the equivalent numbers in *(a)* 1975, *(b)* 1980, *(c)* 1985 and *(d)* 1990.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information is not held centrally. However, the project "The Common Lands of Wales", undertaken for the Countryside Commission by the rural surveys research unit at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth in 1988 indicated that the number of areas shown as common land in that year in each local authority area was:

County	*Number of commons*
Clwyd	323
Dyfed	488
Gwent	70
Gwynedd	279
Mid Glamorgan	53
Powys	290
South Glamorgan	24
West Glamorgan	67

At the time of the survey some of the areas may not have been finally registered or may have been subject to deregistration.

Consultants

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many contracts for consultancies were awarded by his Department *(a)* over the last 12 months and *(b)* in 1991-92.

Mr. David Hunt: My Department has awarded 88 consultancy contracts over the last 12 months and 75 in 1991-92.

One-stop Shops

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to establish a series of one-stop shops to advise and support local community initiatives in each of the current district council areas in the south Wales valleys.

Sir Wyn Roberts: A working group has been established to consider how to improve the delivery of enterprise and business support services across Wales. The group will report to the Department in May.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish figures showing the estimated amounts to be collected in community charge within each local authority area in Wales for *(a)* 1991-92 and *(b)* 1992-93; and what are the estimates for the collection of council tax in each local authority area in the first year of its operation.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested for 1991-92 and 1992-93 is given in the following table. Comparable information is not available for 1993-94 since local authorities are still in the process of setting their budgets.

Amount of community charge budgeted to be collected by local authorities when the charge was set[1]

£ million

	1991-92	*1992-93*[2]
Alyn and Deeside	5·8	8·0
Colwyn	4·6	5·4
Delyn	5·1	6·7
Glyndwr	2·6	3·4
Rhuddlan	4·8	5·4
Wrexham Maelor	6·8	10·5
Carmarthen	2·2	4·6
Ceredigion	2·9	6·2
Dinefwr	1·6	2·9
Llanelli	3·8	7·4
Preseli Pembrokeshire	3·1	6·2
South Pembrokeshire	2·1	3·5
Blaenau Gwent	2·7	2·8
Islwyn	3·2	4·6
Monmouth	5·8	8·3
Newport	9·9	11·7
Torfaen	6·2	7·7
Aberconwy	4·1	5·4
Arfon	2·7	3·5
Dwyfor	2·1	2·7
Meirionnydd	2·8	3·6
Ynys Môn	4·7	6·7
Cynon Valley	2·3	4·2
Merthyr Tydfil	2·4	4·6
Ogwr	6·3	9·7
Rhondda	1·3	3·6
Rhymney Valley	5·4	8·0
Taff Ely	5·6	8·8
Brecknock	2·5	3·5
Montgomeryshire	2·7	4·4
Radnorshire	1·4	2·1
Cardiff	18·6	22·9
Vale of Glamorgan	7·8	10·0
Port Talbot	2·1	3·8
Lliw Valley	2·5	4·9
Neath	3·2	5·4
Swansea	12·4	17·4
Total Wales	166·4	240·3

[1] Net of deductions on community charge bills: ie community charge reduction scheme (CCRS), community charge benefit (CCB) and community charge grant (1991-92). Excludes arrears for earlier year(s).

[2] As reported by local authorities on form DAP3, but after deduction of CCRS and estimated CCB.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the estimated standard spending assessment levels for *(a)* 1992-93 and *(b)* 1993-94 in each local authority area in Wales (i) prior to and (ii) following the announcement of capping criteria.

Mr. David Hunt: The standard spending assessment for 1992-93 for each local authority in Wales is shown in tables 1.3 and 1.6 of the Welsh Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (No. 4) (HC 241). Assessments for 1993-94 are shown in tables 1.3 and 1.6 of the Local Government Finance Report (Wales) 1993-94 (HC 412). Copies of both reports are available in the Library of the House. Standard spending assessments are not altered by capping criteria.

Community Development

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to issue guidelines to *(a)* the private sector and *(b)* the voluntary sector concerning their involvement in community development work in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: We have no plans to do so at present. The Welsh Office supports community development work through a variety of grant schemes; guidance to potential applicants is issued on each of these schemes.

County Council Assets

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish figures showing the worth of assets in pounds sterling held by each county council in Wales in each year since 1988.

Mr. David Hunt: This information is not held centrally.

National Curriculum

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what measures he proposes to improve work in the foundation subjects of the national curriculum;

(2) if he will make a statement on standards in the national curriculum in foundation subjects.

Sir Wyn Roberts: In its review of educational provision in Wales for 1991-92, HMI (Wales) reported that teachers have responded to the challenge of the national curriculum with resilience, personal effort and commitment. HMI found that in 1991-92—a year in which two of the foundation subjects were introduced for the first time—work in the core subjects was satisfactory or better in three quarters of classes and there was satisfactory work in the foundation subjects in two thirds of classes. I congratulate teachers on this substantial achievement. I am also naturally concerned by those classes where performance needs to improve. As teachers become more familiar with the requirements of the orders and planning appropriate schemes of work, I have every confidence that standards will improve further.

Reading Skills

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how he proposes to improve the progressive development of reading skills.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The teaching of English under the national curriculum places considerable emphasis on the development of reading skills. There is already evidence of improvement. Last year's national curriculum tests for seven-year-olds showed a higher proportion of pupils had achieved level 2 or above—77 per cent.—in reading compared with the previous year—74 per cent. Level 2 is the level expected of a typical seven-year-old. In July last year I approved specific grant expenditure of £348,000 for innovative projects which are designed to improve primary reading standards in five local education authorities. The projects are being closely monitored and there will be a full evaluation in order that the gains can be passed to other LEAs in Wales.

Pharmacists

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how much his Department owes community pharmacists for periods of up to *(a)* 60 days and *(b)* 90 days;

(2) on how many occasions, and to what extent, in each year since 1990-91 community pharmacists received payment in respect of NHS pharmacy services within *(a)* 30 days, *(b)* 60 days or *(c)* 90 days of the provision of these services.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Pharmacists receive some 80 per cent. of their NHS fees and payments within a month of submitting the prescriptions they have dispensed to the prescription pricing division. The balance is paid a month later when the authority has calculated the exact payment due.

Anthrax

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases of anthrax were treated in each of the health authorities in Wales in each year since 1980; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: There were no notifications of anthrax in Wales in the years 1980 to 1992. This information remains subject to verification for 1991 and 1992.

Hepatitis

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases of hepatitis B were treated in each of the health authorities of Wales in each year since 1980; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information available from hospital activity analysis data, given in the following table, relates to the number of discharges and deaths from NHS hospitals in each health authority with a recorded diagnosis of hepatitis B. These data relate only to cases for which patients were treated as in-patients or day cases in hospital. Most cases of hepatitis B, however, are managed in the community and do not involve an admission to hospital. Information on the number of cases managed in the community is not identifiable from centrally held data.

Deaths and Discharges with a diagnosis of Hepatitis B (ICD9 70.2 70.3): Hospital Activity Analysis 1980-90[1]

						Year					
DHA of treatment	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Clwyd	4	2	2	20	8	12	10	7	1	10	12
East Dyfed	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	4	2	3
Gwent	4	4	2	0	5	16	10	5	6	3	5
Gwynedd	0	0	0	5	1	3	1	2	1	2	1
Mid Glamorgan	2	1	1	1	0	1	1	2	0	2	1
Powys	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
South Glamorgan	2	3	4	10	3	5	2	5	2	3	6
West Glamorgan	3	3	3	3	4	7	1	2	4	7	3
Pembrokeshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Not known	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	2
TOTAL	17	14	13	40	21	45	26	25	19	30	33

[1] The figures may understate the true position in that not all hospitals provide medical details relating to patient discharges and deaths. A patient admitted more than once in a year will be recorded each time he or she is admitted. Data for years after 1990 are not yet complete.

Rural Roads

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much has been spent on the maintenance of rural roads in Wales in each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Expenditure on the maintenance of roads is given in the following table. It is not possible to show separately spending relating to rural roads.

Current expenditure on roads maintenance

£ million

Financial Year	*Local Authorities*[1]	*Central Government*[2]
1979-80	62·9	6·5
1980-81	70·0	6·1
1981-82	89·3	12·6
1982-83	83·0	10·9
1983-84	88·1	11·7
1984-85	89·0	11·9
1985-86	89·7	13·6
1986-87	96·8	14·6
1987-88	109·1	13·6
1988-89	115·7	15·0
1989-90	123·8	15·3
1990-91	[3]134·4	18·6
1991-92	n.a.	20·9

[1] Includes all highways and bridge maintenance, street cleaning for highways purposes, lighting and associated professional and technical services. Includes net expenditure incurred on behalf of other local authorities under agency agreements.

[2] Expenditure on trunk roads and motorways. Figures from 1979-80 to 1982-83 are estimates.

[3] A new definition of current expenditure was introduced in 1990-91 and this figure is not therefore strictly comparable to those for earlier years.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people were employed in the maintenance of rural roads in Wales in each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information requested is not available centrally.

EDUCATION

Business Names

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to his answer of 15 February, *Official Report*, column *51*, (1) what steps he took, before approving the name Somerset University under the Business Names Act 1985, to satisfy himself that the degree-level courses provided met levels of educational quality recognised through validation by universities, the Council for National Academic Awards or other educational institutions;

(2) what consultations he had with the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, or other educational interests, before approving the name Somerset University under the Business Names Act 1985;

(3) when he responded to the owner of the business wishing to trade under the name Somerset University under the Business Names Act 1985; what British

educational bodies or public representatives supported the application; and if he will publish his response to the request from the owner.

Mr. Boswell: The President of the Board of Trade approves names under the Business Names Act 1985. The appropriate regulations, requiring consent under the Act, do not apply to names in use before 1 January 1983. Since there was evidence that "Somerset University" was in use before that date, the opinion of the Secretary of State for Education and Science was not sought.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to his answer of 15 February, *Official Report*, column *51*, if he will list those business names, including either of the words university or polytechnic on the use of which his opinion is currently being sought.

Mr. Boswell: The opinion of my right hon. Friend is currently being sought on "Eastern International/Huron University, Inc." and "EIEA/Huron University, Inc." as the proposed business name of Lansdowne University Ltd., a South Dakota corporation.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to his answer of 15 February, *Official Report*, column *51*, if he will publish his criteria for approving the use of the word university under the Business Names Act 1985.

Mr. Boswell: The President of the Board of Trade, who approves names under the Business Names Act 1985, consults the Privy Council where it is proposed that "university" is included in a business name. The Privy Council normally seeks the advice of my right hon. Friend, who is concerned to protect the status of United Kingdom universities and their interests and to avoid any confusion which might arise in the minds of the public.

Autism

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will give an estimate of the number of children classified as autistic in the United Kingdom who attend schools run by *(a)* local education authorities and *(b)* voluntary or charitable organisations.

Mr. Forth: I refer the hon. Member to the replies that I gave to him on 8 February, *Official Report*, column *454*. Under the Education Act 1981 it is the responsibility of LEAs to identify and make provision for children with special educational needs, including those with autism. The Department for Education and the Department of Health are currently sponsoring a research project into the education and treatment of children with autism in England and Wales. The researchers, applying European prevalence rates to this country, estimate that there are in the region of 7,800 children with autism in England and Wales. Of these, approximately 1,000 children attend schools or units which specialise in teaching children with autism. About 400 specialist places are provided by the voluntary sector. I have today placed a copy of the report of stage 1 of the research in the Library.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the amount of resources and manpower that has been made available for the education and treatment of children with autism.

Mr. Forth: This information is not available centrally. It is the responsibility of LEAs and schools to ensure that individual autistic pupils receive the special education they require. The Department for Education and the Department of Health are currently sponsoring a research project into the education and treatment of children with autism in England and Wales. The second stage of the research aims to evaluate the main types of provision for young autistic children.

School Meals

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list the local education authorities who have contracted out their school meals service to private companies; and what has been the change in employment as a result.

Mr. Forth: The Department does not collect this information. It is up to LEAs to decide whether they wish to delegate the funds for this service to schools. LEAs providing school meals directly are subject to the competition provisions of the Local Government Act 1988. A survey by the Local Government Management Board, published in November 1992, showed that local authorities' direct service organisations have won 91·6 per cent. by number of school catering contracts and 97·2 per cent. by value.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Consultants

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many contracts for consultancies were awarded by his Department over *(a)* the last 12 months and *(b)* 1991-92.

Mr. Key: *(a)* My Department, which was formed in April 1992, has funded 25 contracts for consultancies awarded in the last 12 months; its executive agency, the Historic Royal Palaces Agency, has awarded 29 contracts.

(b) As my Department was not in existence in 1991-92, this part of the question does not apply.

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list the contracts awarded by his Department to *(a)* Coopers and Lybrand management consultants, *(b)* Touche Ross management consultants, *(c)* Price Waterhouse management consultants, *(d)* Ernst and Young management consultants, *(e)* Chrichton Roberts Ltd., *(f)* KPMG management consultants and *(g)* Leopold Joseph management consultants, with the total cost of the contracts with each contractor, for (i) the past 12 months and (ii) 1991-92.

Mr. Key: (i) My Department which was formed in April 1992, has funded the following contracts in the past 12 months:

(a) Coopers and Lybrand Management Consultants: nil.

(b) Touche-Ross Management Consultants: two contracts have been awarded, one for a management review of the National Film and Television School and one for a market testing consultancy for catering operations at the British Film Institute. Total cost: £24,720.

(c) Price Waterhouse Management Consultants: two contracts have been awarded, one to look at financial systems and controls for the British Library St. Pancras project, and one to undertake an investment appraisal for my Department's headquarters project. Total cost: £120,000.

- *(d)* Ernst and Young Management Consultants: four contracts have been awarded; a report on market testing in the British Library, a feasibility study into the computerisation of the listing of historic buildings, which is ongoing, and two consultancies for the BFI, to look at computer facilities management and front-of house security at the National Film Theatre and Museum of the Moving Image. Total cost: £105,915.
- *(e)* Chrichton Roberts: nil.
- *(f)* KPMG Management Consultants: a contract was awarded to review British Screen Finance Ltd. Total cost: £38,000.
- *(g)* Leopold Management Consultants: nil.

(ii) As my Department was not in existence in 1991-92, this part of the question does not apply.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Nuclear Reprocessing

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will place in the Library an example of the contract signed by British Nuclear Fuels and its foreign customers for the reprocessing of irradiated spent fuel at the thermal oxide reprocessing plant at Sellafield.

Mr. Eggar: No. The reprocessing contracts in question are a commercial matter for British Nuclear Fuels plc and its customers.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will place in the Library a copy of the Touche Ross report on the economic feasibility of the thermal oxide reprocessing plant commissioned by British Nuclear Fuels plc.

Mr. Eggar: This is a commercial matter for the company.

Small Firms

Mr. Steen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what amount of funding his Department provided in each of the last three years for development work which aimed to benefit small firms and individual traders.

Mr. Leigh: The Department funded small firms development schemes at a cost of £89·3 million in 1990-91 and £90·8 million in 1991-92 with a forecast cost of £91·2 million for 1992-93.

Other small firms guarantee and support schemnes costing approximately £24·2 million in 1990-91, £34·4 million in 1991-92 and an expected £29·4 million in 1992-93 were, prior to their transfer to this Department in May 1992, funded by the Department of Employment.

The training and enterprise councils provide business counselling and advice to small businesses from funds provided by the Department of Employment. These TEC activities will be funded by this Department from 1993-94.

Misleading Prices

Mr. McFall: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when his Department intends to legislate against misleading price indications.

Mr. Leigh: Part III of the Consumer Protection Act 1987 makes it an offence to give a misleading price indication to consumers by any means.

Fridges

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the production of domestic fridges by United Kingdom manufacturers, for both national and overseas markets, from 1986 to 1991.

Mr. Sainsbury: Figures for United Kingdom manufacturers' production of domestic fridges are not available separately for the United Kingdom and overseas markets. Figures for manufacturers' sales of these items in total may be found in Business Monitor PAS3460 (Domestic Electrical Appliances), a copy of which is available in the Library.

Insolvencies

Ms. Harman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the number of *(a)* personal insolvencies and *(b)* company insolvencies in 1992 and in 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The relevant information was published on my Department's behalf by the Association of British Chambers of Commerce in the 5 February issue of "Business Briefing", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who regulates insolvency practitioners in Britain.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Under the Insolvency Act 1986 only authorised persons may act as insolvency practitioners. Authorisation may be granted either by a professional body recognised by the Secretary of State or by the Secretary of State himself. The professional conduct of a person so authorised is regulated by the professional body or by the Secretary of State.

In addition, the insolvency legislation contains a number of provisions under which those interested in a particular insolvency may have control over the actions of an insolvency practitioner, including power to make application to court for relief where there is dissatisfaction with any act, omission or decision of the practitioner.

Company Inspectors

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on which dates inspectors were appointed for investigation into Maxwell, BCCI, Polly Peck and Levitt Group of companies.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Apart from the inspections into the Maxwell companies in the early 1970s, the only appointment of inspectors in respect of the cases mentioned by the hon. Member is the appointment of inspectors announced on 8 June 1992 to investigate and report on the affairs and on the membership of Mirror Group Newspapers plc.

Auditor Regulation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will invite the public to submit evidence before completing his review of the auditor regulation regime introduced by part II of the Companies Act 1989.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: I will bear in mind the hon. Member's suggestion.

Department of Trade Inspectors

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what checks he makes on the fitness of individuals to act as inspectors for his Department before appointing such individuals.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: My Department makes such checks as are necessary and takes all relevant information into account.

Auditing Practices Board

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when his Department was first informed of the plans to form the Auditing Practices Board.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: In November 1990.

Auditing Firms

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will propose legislation under which the recognised supervisory bodies would be required to publish the names and addresses of all auditing firms whose standards are considered to be low.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: No.

Batteries

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will include reference to the possibility of recycling batteries by using chargers in his Department's planned consultation document on the safe disposal of batteries.

Mr. Eggar: Rechargeable batteries, or accumulators, are among those covered by directive 91/157/EEC—batteries and accumulators containing certain dangerous substances—the implementation of which will be the subject of public consultation by my Department in due course. The directive encourages the separate collection, for controlled disposal or recycling, of batteries and accumulators which contain specified amounts of lead, mercury and cadmium. Implementation of the directive in the Community has been delayed by the lack of an agreed marking system for batteries caught by the directive, but resolution of this matter is expected shortly, and a United Kingdom implementation date of 1 January 1994 for the directive is now planned.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many documents from Government Departments which have been asked for by the Scott inquiry have yet to be delivered.

Mr. Heseltine: The inquiry team has already received a great volume of documentation from Government Departments. It would be extremely difficult to quantify documents yet to be delivered since Departments are continuing to supply documents in response to ongoing requests from Lord Justice Scott.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he has yet received from the Lord Justice Scott inquiry a timetable for oral evidence to the inquiry.

Mr. Heseltine: Lord Justice Scott has not yet announced dates for the taking of oral evidence. He has, however, made it clear that he wishes to report as soon as possible.

Vietnam

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the Export Credits Guarantee Department's cover for Vietnam.

Mr. Needham: ECGD is willing to consider applications for insurance of United Kingdom investments in Vietnam. Medium-term export credit cover has not been available since the early 1980s when Vietnam defaulted on her trade debts, giving rise to claims on ECGD which remain unrecovered. The availability of further cover will be dependent upon ECGD's assessment of the risks and payment performance.

Package Travel Industry

Mr. Dickens: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he has decided whether the Airtours bid for Owners Abroad raises questions of consumer choice which should be examined by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Mr. Heseltine: I shall take a decision on whether or not to refer this proposed acquisition to the MMC in due course, following advice from the Director General of Fair Trading. When taking that decision I shall take into account all relevant factors.

Microwave Transmitters

Mr. Purchase: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what evidence he has identified from published and as yet unpublished reports available to him pointing to ill effects on human and other life forms from the siting of microwave transmitters on multi-storey domestic premises.

Mr. Leigh: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answers I gave to earlier questions on 14 December 1992, *Official Report*, columns *26-27* and 22 January 1993, column *497*. I am not aware of any unpublished information which would lead me to alter the terms of those answers.

Company Accounts

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consultations he has had on proposals to require the declarations of payment practices in company accounts and reports; and what conclusions he has reached.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: My Department issued on 25 January a consultative document on the options for taking forward our commitment that in future large companies will be required to state in their report and accounts how quickly they pay. The deadline for comments in 27 March. A copy of the document has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the working of the current requirements for disclosure of research and development expenditure in company accounts; and what plans he has to extend disclosure.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: I have no reason to believe that the current requirements, which are contained in the Companies Act 1985 and Statement of Standard Accounting Practice No. 13, are not being generally complied with. I have no plans to extend the statutory requirements.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the membership of the Association of Authorised Public Accountants; and who performs the monitoring arrangements required by the Companies Act 1989.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the association's first annual report under section 37 of the Companies Act 1989, a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

Textiles

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what information he has on the current Turkish import regime for textiles.

Mr. Needham: A new Turkish tariff was introduced on 1 January 1993 which takes account of the latest reductions in duty granted to EC products under the EC/Turkey association agreement and the abolition of all additional levies equivalent to customs duties, except the mass housing fund. A preliminary analysis of the new tariff regime for textiles has been produced by the European Commission delegation office in Ankara; this notes EC preferences for all textile chapters and a general reduction in overall levels of protection.

Small Firms (Regulations)

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list all those regulations affecting small firms which have been abolished by his Department in each year since 1979.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Such statistics have never been assembled before. I am completing a centralised record of Government regulations against which progress on deregulation will be monitored in future.

Coal and Energy Issues

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the counties he and his ministerial colleagues have visited to discuss coal and energy issues since taking office; how many days each visit took; and if he will name the collieries visited.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 17 February 1993]:* As regards visits to collieries, I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) on 4 November 1992, *Official Report*, column *314*. No further visits have taken place since.

Coal and energy are among the many issues my ministerial colleagues and I discuss in the course of the frequent visits we undertake. For example, I discussed these matters during my visits to the north-east on 27 July, 16 October and 10 December last year, in my role as sponsoring Minister for that region.

Foam-filled Furniture

Ms. Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what changes he has made to his advice given to charities and voluntary organisations in respect of the sale and distribution of non-compliant foam-filled furniture; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 18 February 1993]:* The Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988, as amended, which were made under the Consumer Protection Act 1987, apply to transactions involving the "supply" of furniture which takes place

"in the course of business"

within the meaning of section 46 of that Act. My Department's view of the general position is that the simple distribution of furniture by a charity, in pursuance of its charitable objectives, either free of charge or at a nominal cost only, would be unlikely to constitute a business activity. Shops selling furniture to raise funds for charitable purposes would, in the Department's view, constitute a business activity.

As charities may engage in a variety of activities which could have a bearing on the application of the regulations, my Department strongly recommends to inquirers that they should seek legal advice in the light of all the circumstances of the operation of the charity.

EC Steel Industry

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what plans he has to consult *(a)* the British Independent Steel Producers Association, *(b)* the British Steel Corporation and *(c)* the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation on the Government's response to the Braun report on the restructuring of the European Community steel industry;

(2) if he will make a statement on the Government's response to the European Commission report by Fernand Braun on the restructuring of the EC steel industry.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 18 February 1993]:* I and my officials have discussed the Braun report and the Government's reaction with the British Iron and Steel Producers Association of which British Steel is now a member. There is broad agreement between Government and industry on the need for restructuring and permanent closures in other EC countries. The United Kingdom has alredy taken such steps. I have no plans to consult the Iron and Steel Traders Confederation, which is, however, represented on the European Coal and Steel Community's consultative committee. I am meeting my EC colleagues on 25 February to consider proposals for restructuring the EC steel industry.

Post Office

Mr. Hain: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the cost of providing Post Office staff support to the royal family.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 22 February 1993]:* The estimated annual cost of Post Office staff employed on a permanent or seconded basis on postal duties for the royal family is £200,000.

Mr. Hain: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many Post Office staff are seconded *(a)* full-time and (*b*) part-time from Howick place sorting office to the royal family at Buckingham palace and when the Queen is in residence elsewhere or aboard the royal yacht in harbour; and if he will make a statement on the arrangements.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 22 February 1993]*: Five Post Office staff are seconded full time from Howick place sorting office for postal duties at Buckingham palace. When Her Majesty the Queen is in residence elsewhere, locally based post office staff are seconded on a temporary basis, as appropriate. No Post Office staff are seconded to the royal yacht.

Mr. Hain: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what account his review of the Post Office is taking of the services provided to the royal family by the allocation of staff to process their mail.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 22 February 1993]*: The Post Office review is considering all matters relating to the future organisation and structure of the Post Office.

Power Stations

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the criteria presently employed by his Department in considering whether or not to grant section 36 consents to new power stations.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 22 February 1993]*: It has been my right hon. Friend's policy in considering applications for his consent under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989, as a general rule, to treat matters such as the need for a generating station, its capacity, choice of fuel to be used and type of plant as commercial matters for the applicant concerned.

My right hon. Friend announced to the House on 26 October 1992 that he was reviewing the use of his consent powers under section 36. The outcome of this review will be included in the White Paper, which is to be published shortly.

TRANSPORT

London Cycle Routes

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if his Department will help fund the proposed 1,000-mile strategic cycle route network for London; and if he will make a statement;

(2) when he expects work to start on the proposed 1,000-mile strategic route network for London;

(3) what discussions his Department is having to ensure that each of the 32 London borough councils implement their part in the proposed 1,000-mile strategic cycle route network for London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The 1,000-mile strategic cycle network for London was developed by, and is the responsibility of, the London Cycling Forum, a working party of the London Planning Advisory Committee. The Department is an active member.

The strategic network has the full support of the Department. The majority of routes in London—about 96 per cent.—are on local roads and cycle facilities there will be for the London boroughs to provide. Cycle routes identified on trunk roads and crossing points on the trunk road network will either be provided as part of the trunk road improvement programme or through the trunk road priority route local plans.

From information available from LCF, approximately 125 miles of the cycle network is already in existence with 220 miles in preparation.

Expenditure on the provision of cycle facilities on local roads is eligible for transport supplementary grant, although it is not separately identified in the annual settlement. The traffic director for London will also fund the development and introduction of cycle facilities which he approves as part of the priority—red—route local plan process.

My Department and the traffic director for London participate in meetings of the borough cycling officer group, which was set up to discuss provision of the strategic cycle network and cycle matters in general.

Roads Programme

Mr. Channon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the priority given in his national roads programme to the widening and improvement of existing motorways and trunk roads as compared to the construction of completely new trunk roads and motorways; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: My right hon. Friend believes it right to continue the policy of his distinguished predecessors which placed the emphasis in the national roads programme upon upgrading the existing network.

Exhaust Emissions

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he proposes to introduce to prevent motorists readjusting the exhaust systems of their vehicles after the annual vehicle test in such a way as to increase emissions.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: None. The primary purpose of the annual test is to encourage motorists to maintain their vehicles in a good state of tune. Having done so, there should be little incentive for the motorist to readjust the vehicle away from this optimum setting. Those owners who nevertheless might be so inclined would be committing an offence under regulation 61(7) of the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986.

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration was given to the inclusion of a test for levels of oxides of nitrogen in exhaust emissions in the annual vehicle test; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The MOT test measures emissions of carbon monoxide and hydrocarbons at idle speed. This simple "no load" test is designed for non-catalyst cars and is quite adequate to check the correct tune state of these vehicles. To carry out a meaningful check on the emissions of oxides of nitrogen, which occur only when the engine is under load, would require every MOT station to be equipped with very expensive chassis dynamometer and associated control equipment. A modified test for catalyst cars will be introduced before 1997 in accordance with EC directive 92/55/EEC. This modified test will check the correct functioning of the catalyst to ensure that NOx controls are operating.

Speed Limiters

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to introduce speed limiters for privately owned motor cars.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: None. Speed limiters work at one preset maximum speed and most accidents involving cars occur in built-up areas where the speed limit is well below the maximum of 70 mph.

Rail Freight

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the extra traffic flows carried by Trainload Freight and Railfreight Distribution since July 1992.

Mr. Freeman: This is a commercial matter for British Rail.

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will set new financial objectives for British Rail's freight businesses; how long those objectives will apply; and if they will be disaggregated by freight market.

Mr. Freeman: Shortly. We are currently considering fresh objectives to cover the interim period until our proposals in the Railways Bill take effect.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce measures to ensure that the transport of goods by rail in Wales is and remains commercially competitive.

Mr. Freeman: It is for BR to take whatever steps it feels appropriate in the light of prevailing market conditions. For the future, privatisation of BR's freight businesses and liberalisation of access to the rail freight network offer the best prospect for a rail freight industry keenly attuned to the needs of customers.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to introduce a subsidy in respect of the transport of oil by rail in Wales.

Mr. Freeman: My right hon. Friend recently announced our intention to introduce a new grant scheme to assist rail freight operators to pay their track charges, in cases where there is genuine need and where there are environmental and other wider benefits sufficient to justify it.

Rail Privatisation

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the cost to British Rail of establishing shadow franchises along the lines announced by him on 2 February.

Mr. Freeman: This is a matter for British Rail. I expect most of the work to be carried out by existing British Rail employees.

Footpaths

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidelines his Department follows in effecting temporary diversions of footpaths as a consequence of the construction of trunk roads and motorways; and if he will place a copy in the Library.

Mr. Carlisle: My right hon. Friend does not rely upon guidelines. He follows the statutory procedures laid down in the Highways Act 1980. Section 14 empowers him to deal in various ways with affected footpaths by stopping them up, by altering or diverting them, and by providing new ones. On occasion the local highway authority exercise these powers on his behalf. The statutory procedures for making and confirming the requisite orders are set out in the first schedule to the Act; they require the publishing of draft orders, the consideration of objections and the holding as necessary of a local inquiry.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Vietnam

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to establish the British Council in Vietnam.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: None at present. The British Council has decided that, whilst Vietnam remains a priority, it cannot establish a presence in Hanoi for budgetary reasons.

Thailand

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action has been taken to put to the Burmese authorities the plight of Burmese women and children who are trafficked to Thailand for prostitution.

Mr. Goodlad: The trafficking of women and children into Thailand for prostitution is a matter of serious concern.

The Burmese authorities appear to be well aware of the problem and to be co-operating with UNICEF and WHO in tackling it. The embassy in Rangoon monitors the situation and is in regular contact with Burmese health officials and UN agencies based in Rangoon.

Correspondence

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish the penultimate paragraph of the letter of 4 February, ref. GV100/17123, from the migration and visa correspondence unit to the hon. Member for Ilford, South in a form which does not identify the individuals concerned.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The penultimate paragraph of the migration and visa correspondence unit letter of 4 February, ref. GV100/17123, was intended as background information only to the handling of a specific application within the requirements of the immigration rules.

Immigration control policy, as implemented by entry clearance officers overseas, is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department.

BBC World Service

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how his Department monitors the performance of the BBC world service and its effectiveness in promoting Britain throughout the world.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the world service regularly review the performance and cost-effectiveness of world service broadcasts in meeting agreed objectives and targets, taking into account the audibility of broadcasts, the size and profile of their audiences and the impact and influence of programmes. Information comes principally from internationally recognised audience research data, reports from our diplomatic missions, and correspondence received by the world service.

AIDS (Burma)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action has been taken to call for an investigation into the whereabouts of AIDS-infected Burmese prostitutes who have disappeared.

Mr. Goodlad: We are aware of allegations that HIV-positive Burmese prostitutes returned from Thailand have disappeared but we have seen no evidence to support these allegations. According to the Burmese authorities, prostitutes who are found to be HIV-positive are counselled, and treated for sexually transmitted diseases if appropriate, before being returned to their families.

PRIME MINISTER

Mordechai Vanunu

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to raise the case of Mordechai Vanunu with President Herzog of Israel during his visit to the United Kingdom.

The Prime Minister: This matter has been raised informally with the Israeli Government. I do not plan to raise it formally with the President.

Road Casualties

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister if he will publish a table to show comparable data on road casualty rates for *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* England and Wales.

The Prime Minister: The latest comparable rates for these countries is published in tables 1, 4 and 8 of "Road Accident Statistics English Regions 1991", a copy of which is in the Library.

Manufacturing Initiatives

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Prime Minister what further initiatives he is planning to rebuild the United Kingdom manufacturing base.

The Prime Minister: The Government fully appreciate the part played by manufacturing industry in securing the United Kingdom's long-term prosperity. I, and my Cabinet colleagues, will continue to pay close attention to manufacturing industry's concerns across the full range of the Government's decisions.

Nuclear Weapons (Discussions)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to discuss with President Clinton *(a)* collaboration on the safety of nuclear weapons, *(b)* the negotiation of a competitive test ban treaty and *(c)* article 6 of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: There will be no formal agenda, but I expect to have wide-ranging discussions with President Clinton and members of his administration.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 23 February.

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 23 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having meetings with ministerial colleagues and others later today.

ENVIRONMENT

Property Values

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the number of households where the value of the property is less than the value of the mortgage.

Sir George Young: The number of owner-occupiers with mortgages larger than the value of their houses in the fourth quarter of 1992 is estimated at about 1 million, excluding any that have increased their mortgage indebtedness since buying their dwellings. There is insufficient information to estimate their number. The figure of 1 million is subject to considerable uncertainty, due to the very limited amount of information about house purchase loans from lenders other than building societies.

LAMSAC

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what cost has been apportioned to each local authority association, and each local authority, to meet the debts of the Local Authorities Management Services and Computer Committee consequent upon its wind-up;

(2) what contribution his Department made to the Local Authority Conditions of Service Advisory Board and the Local Government Management Board since 1988 to meet the costs of LAMSAC prior and subsequent to its wind-up;

(3) what proportion of the top-slicing of rate support grant, made available to the local authority associations, was devoted in each year since 1989 to meet the debts of LAMSAC;

(4) what involvement his Department has in the winding-up of LAMSAC.

Mr. Robin Squire: I will write to the hon. Member.

Tourism

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps his Department has taken to implement the recommendations of "Tourism in the UK: Realising the Potential" as it applies to his Department's responsibilities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: Together with the Department of National Heritage, we have commissioned research into the feasibility of obtaining better information on the numbers of day visitors, to assist the calculation of standard spending assessments. It is hoped that the results of this research will be available for incorporation into SSAs for 1994-95.

Urban Needs

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what factors he proposes to take into account in his analysis of urban needs based on the 1991 census data; what weighting he proposes to give to each factor; and what additional data not contained in the census he will be seeking.

Mr. Robin Squire: A report on this subject by the Centre for Urban Policy Studies will shortly be circulated to local authority associations and voluntary organisations. The report will consider the factors which might be taken into account in analysing urban needs in the light of the 1991 census and other data. A copy will be placed in the Library of the House.

Water and Sewerage Services

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what response he has made to the Ofwat report regarding discrepancies in the cost of water and sewerage services.

Mr. Maclean: None. The system established under the 1989 legislation is designed to encourage companies to become as efficient as possible. Some variation in unit costs between companies will result from their differing circumstances. The Director General of Water Services is continuing to examine differences in unit costs.

Rent Rebates

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what payment of rent rebates on housing revenue account tenancies was paid to Lambeth council for February, March and April 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: A housing authority's expenditure on the rent rebates it grants to its housing revenue account tenants is one of several factors which are taken into account when determining its entitlement to housing revenue account subsidy. For each financial year, on-account payments of HRA subsidy are made to housing authorities by my Department in 10 instalments, from May to February. Payments are not made in March or April.

Details of on-account payments of HRA subsidy to Lambeth borough council in respect of HRA rent rebate expenditure throughout 1992, were included in the answer given to the hon. Member by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security on 15 February, *Hansard*, Vol. 219, cols *100-01.*

British Waterways Bill

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what assessment he has made of the effect of the British Waterways Bill on commercial shipping;

(2) if he will list the British waterways docks planned to be closed as a result of the British Waterways Bill.

Mr. Maclean: The British Waterways Bill removes the statutory duty to make the Weston Points docks available to commercial traffic, but does not prevent navigation through the docks or their operation by another party. I understand that for some years there has been no such traffic through Weston Point docks. There should be no effect on commercial shipping. More generally the Bill seeks to enable the British Waterways Board to carry out its functions more efficiently to the benefit of all users, including commercial shipping.

Ozone Depletion

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to inform the public about ozone depletion levels over the United Kingdom and the northern hemisphere for the winter and spring of 1992-93.

Mr. Maclean: Details of ozone levels over the United Kingdom and the northern hemisphere this winter and spring will be published in the autumn in the next report by the Department's stratospheric ozone review group. Dobson spectrophotomer data would be made available through the Meteorological Office in the event of significant deviations from the normal range of winter and spring ozone levels.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research his Department is funding to monitor the rate of ozone depletion over the United Kingdom for the winter and spring of 1992-93.

Mr. Maclean: The Department has supported atmospheric ozone measurements at Lerwick since 1991 and will continue to do so throughout the winter and spring of 1992-93 and beyond. In addition, the Department also supports the development of methods for monitoring ground level UVB irradiation at Reading university.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the latest available information on ozone depletion over the United Kingdom and northern hemisphere for the winter of 1992-93.

Mr. Maclean: The latest estimate of the average depletion of the ozone layer at British latitudes, based on the 1992 WMO/UNEP scientific assessment of ozone depletion, is 8 per cent. per decade in winter and early spring. I am advised by the Cambridge ozone research co-ordinating unit and the Meteorological Office that the levels of ozone measured over the United Kingdom during the current winter are consistent with the WMO/UNEP assessment of long-term depletion, but still within the previously observed ranges for the time of year.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the current ozone depletion levels for the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) earlier today.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how often the levels of ozone depletion are measured over the United Kingdom; and how the figures are made publicly available.

Mr. Maclean: Total ozone measurements are made daily when meteorological conditions permit by the United Kingdom Meteorological Office and the results submitted to the provisional centre for the World Meteorological Organisation's ozone mapping project. The Department supports two ozone profile measurements per week at Lerwick and the results are disseminated through the scientific literature and by the reports of the Department's stratospheric ozone review group. I would also refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) earlier today.

Business Rate Appeals

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many business rate appeals are currently outstanding.

Mr. Robin Squire: At the end of December 1992 valuation tribunals in England had outstanding some 460,000 non-domestic rating appeals.

Following the revaluation on 1 April 1990, English tribunals initially received some 600,000 appeals, mostly towards the end of that financial year. Since then around 470,000 appeals have been resolved, and a further 330,000 received.

Nitrous Oxide Emissions

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 15 February, *Official Report*, column *106*, when he expects to publish estimates of nitrous oxide emissions in the United Kingdom during 1991 and 1992.

Mr. Maclean: The best current estimate for emissions of nitrous oxide in the United Kingdom will be reported in my Department's Digest of Environmental Protection and Water Statistics No. 15, which is due for release in April 1993.

An estimate of emissions during 1992 will be released in Digest No. 16, which is due for publication in spring 1994.

Water Disconnections

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people in England had their water supplies disconnected in 1992 for non-payment of bills; and what percentage were pensioners.

Mr. Maclean: Information on disconnections of water supplies to pensioners is not available. Total numbers of domestic disconnections for 1991-92 were given in my answer to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) on 4 November 1992, *Official Report*, columns *234-35*. Information on domestic disconnections for the six-month period from 1 April to 30 September 1992 was given in my answer to the hon. Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms. Gordon) on 18 November 1992, *Official Report*, columns *204-5*.

Local Authority Tenants

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he intends to take to give local authority tenants, living in homes in serious disrepair, the same protection as is afforded to private sector tenants under the Housing Act 1985; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: None. I have seen no evidence to suggest that the law as it stands is in practice giving rise to any unfairness to council tenants.

Capital Receipts

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the value of local authorities' capital receipts resulting from *(a)* sales of council housing and *(b)* sales of other assets made subsequent to the autumn statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: Local authorities provide quarterly returns to the Department, giving their current estimates of capital receipts received to date. The first available information on cumulative receipts received up to 31 December 1992 is expected to be available during April.

Water Metering

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many EC member countries currently have some system of water metering; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Some system of water metering exists in all EC countries. In England and Wales it is for water companies to decide on their preferred method of charging in the light of the circumstances in their operating area.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will order an inquiry into the Isle of Wight water metering project when it finishes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: No. Information on setting up and running the Isle of Wight water metering trial and the small-scale trials is contained in two interim reports, copies of which are in the Library. A final report is expected to be published in the spring. I will ensure that copies of this report are also placed in the Library.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from the people of the Isle of Wight regarding the water metering project; if he will publish them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: I have received a small number of letters about meter installation and billing issues. I do not intend to make these public. For details of reports on the metering trial on the Isle of Wight I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him earlier.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the present extent of *(a)* volumetric and *(b)* pre-payment metering consumption in domestic properties in England and Wales, region by region.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer Monday 22 February]*: The information requested is not held centrally. However, I understand that about 3 per cent. of households receive a metered water supply and that several small-scale trials of prepayment meters are being conducted. The second interim report of the water metering trials indicates that in the small-scale trials the average annual consumption per property was 137 cu m.

Environment Agency

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made towards the establishment of the proposed environment agency.

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment announced the Government's plans for the environment agency on 15 July 1992. Consideration is now being given to the detailed provisions which would be necessary to establish such an agency and legislation will be introduced at the earliest opportunity.

Packaging

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to introduce legislation to reduce levels of packaging in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maclean: We have no such plans at present. We have been discussing with the packaging industry ways in which the environmental impact of packaging can be reduced and are currently considering whether to introduce economic instruments to encourage the recovery of resources from waste.

Small Firms (Regulations)

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all those regulations affecting small firms which have been abolished by his Department in each year since 1979.

Mr. Robin Squire: Since 1979 a series of measures has been taken to reduce and simplify the amount of regulation. All my Department's regulations which impact on business are currently being reviewed to ensure that, where they are necessary, they impose the minimum burden.

Sellafield

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what the alpha discharges were from the B204 stack at Sellafield for the last five years.

Mr. Maclean: Using the latest calibration factors the alpha releases from the B204 stack and for comparison the total for all schedule 1 stacks were:

	B204 stack *MBq*	*All schedule 1 stacks* *MBq*
[1]1992	113	169
1991	158	274
1990	193	263
1989	262	338
1988	376	459

[1] The 1992 figures do not yet include the December returns.

The present annual limit for all schedule 1 stacks is 4,300 MBq.

These should be compared with the range in my answer to the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), on 15 February, at column 21.

Ward Boundaries, Brent

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce his decision regarding the Local Government Boundary Commission's recommendations for changes in the local ward boundaries of Brent.

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 22 February 1993]:* My right hon. and learned Friend has not yet reached his decision on the Local Government Boundary Commission proposals for changes to the local government boundaries around Brent. When a decision is reached on boundary changes, he will consult the Home Secretary on any electoral consequences.

Disused Canals

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy on the protection of the lines of disused canals within local planning procedures.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 22 February 1993]:* Our policy is set out in our planning policy guidance notes—PPG4, paragraph 11, and more generally in PPG12. We will consult shortly on more detailed guidance in a revised PPG13, "Transport".

Office of Water Services

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the cost of the administration of OFWAT in each year from 1990-91, and projected for 1993-94.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 22 February 1993]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) on 1 December 1992, *Official Report,* column 144. The Director General's "Annual Report 1990", a copy of which is in the Library, records OFWAT's expenditure in 1990-91 as £4·3 million. £9·7 million has been voted in estimates, class VII, vote 9, to cover the expenditure of OFWAT for 1993-94.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Veal

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee what steps he is taking to ensure that veal used by parliamentary caterers is produced by the Quantock method rather than by crating; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: The Director of Catering Services informs me that the veal used in the Refreshment Department is purchased only from suppliers who use the Quantock method of rearing veal calves.

Sitting Hours

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will report progress on the reform of the sitting hours of the House.

Mr. Newton: I refer my hon. Friend to the oral answer I gave on Monday 22 February, at column 679, to my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs).

NORTHERN IRELAND

Training and Employment Agency

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the assistance and programmes the Training and Employment Agency makes available to assist unemployed people look for work; what changes are planned in these programmes in 1993-94; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. J. S. Crozier. I have asked him for a reply to be given.

Letter from J. S. Crozier to Ms. Clare Short, dated 22 February 1993:

You asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he would make a statement about the assistance and programmes the Training and Employment Agency makes available to assist unemployed people look for work and what changes are planned in these programmes in 1993-94. The Secretary of State has passed your questions to me, as Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency, for reply.

The Agency has a network of 31 local offices, linked by central computer, which delivers an all-age guidance and placement service. The full range of employment and training services is available through the network of "one stop shops" which, since April 1992, have helped around 35,000 adults to find jobs or a place on an Agency scheme.

For those out of work for a lengthy period the Agency runs a Restart programme which is specifically designed to provide help and encouragement to those who have been unemployed for more than six months. In the course of the programme everyone in this category is invited to attend an interview in their local Agency office. During the interview each person is given advice on job vacancies or offered a place on an Action for Community Employment (ACE) Scheme, Jobclub or training course. Responsibility for the Restart Programme will transfer to the Social Security Agency from April 1993.

The Training and Employment Agency also provides practical help with job-hunting for the long-term unemployed, through a network of 28 Jobclubs. Members are given advice on aspects such as the completion of application forms, CVs, preparation for interviews etc and the Jobclub provides photocopying, typing, telephone, stationery and postage facilities.

In addition the Agency also provides training programmes for the unemployed. The Youth Training Programme (YTP) and the Job Training Programme (JTP) provide all entrants to the labour market and the adult unemployed respectively with the opportunity to obtain skills and qualifications to help them compete for suitable jobs.

YTP offers 16 and 17 year olds a structured programme of directed and workplace training of up to 2 years' duration. JTP offers those aged 18 and under 60 an individually tailored programme of up to one year of directed training and practical workplace-based experience.

The Action for Community Employment (ACE) Scheme provides temporary employment, with training, of up to one year's duration for long-term unemployed adults in a wide range of projects of benefit to the community. Each programme provides an element of jobsearch skills/interview techniques for participants.

There are no changes planned for YTP/JTP and ACE during 1993-94. However the Agency is currently piloting a single, integrated scheme which may replace both YTP and JTP and which will offer training to entrants to the labour market and to the unemployed.

I hope that this information is of help.

Youth Training

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the most recent information he has on the destination of youth training programme leavers; and of those who found employment, how many were with the employer who provided their training.

Mr. Atkins: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. J. S. Crozier. I have asked him for a reply to be given.

Letter from J. S. Crozier to Ms. Clare Short, dated 22 February 1993:

You asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the most recent information he has on the destination of Youth Training Programme leavers; and of those who found employment, how many were with the employer who provided the training.

As the Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency which has Executive responsibility for these matters I have been asked to reply.

The most recent information available on the destinations of participants leaving the Youth Training Programme is for the period 1 April 1992 to 31 January 1993. This shows that 6,264 (56%) leavers went into employment, 1,335 (12%) went into full time education and 3,651 (32%) became unemployed.

Figures for YTP leavers who found employment with the employer who provided their training are not available.

Job Plan Workshops

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to introduce job plan workshops for the long-term unemployed; what effect this will have on entitlement to benefit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. J. S. Crozier. I have asked him for a reply to be given.

Letter from J. S. Crozier to Ms. Clare Short, dated 19 February 1993:

You asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to introduce Jobplan Workshops for the long-term unemployed in Northern Ireland, what effect this would have on entitlement benefit and if he will make a statement.

As Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency I have been asked to reply.

The Training and Employment Agency currently provides practical help for long-term unemployed jobseekers through a network of 28 Jobclubs. Members are given advice on the completion of application forms and CVs and preparation for interviews etc. Jobclubs provide photocopying, typing, telephone, stationery and postage facilities.

In addition assistance towards finding work or suitable training is provided to the long term unemployed through counselling under the Restart Programme.

At present there are no plans in Northern Ireland to introduce Jobplan Workshops but consideration will be given to what action should be taken to be of further help to the long term unemployed in the light of developments in Great Britain and local circumstances.

Action for Community Employment

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland at the latest available date how many people were employed on action for community employment; how many of them were employed *(a)* part time and *(b)* full time; and if he will divide the figures into males and females.

Mr. Atkins: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. J. S. Crozier. I have asked him for a reply to be given.

Letter from J. S. Crozier to Ms. Clare Short, dated 19 February 1993:

You asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland at the latest available date how many people were employed on Action for Community Employment; how many of them were employed *(a)* Part time, *(b)* Full time; and if he will divide the figure into males and females. As Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency which has executive responsibility for this matter in Northern Ireland I have been asked to reply.

At 31 January there was a total of 9,660 people employed on the Action for Community Employment (ACE) programme. This figure was made up of 7,245 full time (4,347 males and 2,898 females) and 2,415 part time (676 males and 1,739 females).

Training

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the eligibility rules for the job training programme and action for community employment schemes and on the training and income participants are entitled to when they participate in the programme; and what changes are planned in these schemes for 1993-94.

Mr. Atkins: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. J. S. Crozier. I have asked him for a reply to be given.

Letter from J. S. Crozier to Ms. Clare Short, dated 22 February 1993:

You asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he would make a statement about the eligibility rules for the Job Training Programme and Action for Community Employment Schemes; the training and income participants are entitled to when they participate in the programme; and what changes are planned in these schemes for 1993-94.

The Secretary of State has passed your questions to me, as Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency, for reply.

Applicants for the Job Training Programme (JTP) are eligible if they

(a) are aged 18 and under 60; and
(b) have been continuously unemployed for at least 26 weeks.

The Programme is also open to certain other groups who are not registered as unemployed. A full list of those other groups is attached at Annex A.

Participants in JTP follow individually tailored programmes of training and practical workplace based experience and have the opportunity to acquire vocational qualifications.

Participants on JTP receive a training allowance equivalent to their normal Social Security benefit plus a premium of £10·00 per week.

To be eligible for the Action for Community Employment (ACE) Scheme applicants must satisfy the following three conditions:

(i) be at least 18 and under 64 years;
(ii) have been unemployed without a break for at least 3 months immediately before starting on an ACE project; and
(iii) have been unemployed for at least 12 months out of the last 15 months.

Exceptions to condition (iii) are listed in Annex B.

Each ACE employee will spend on average 20 per cent. of their time in training. Training seeks to address two levels of need—training for the ACE job and training for future employment.

All ACE workers are paid the local rate for the job, subject to normal deductions such as National Insurance and income tax.

There are no substantive changes planned for either JTP or ACE during 1993-94. However the Agency is currently piloting a single integrated scheme called Jobskills which could eventually replace both the Job Training Programme and the Youth Training Programme.

I hope that this information is of help.

Annex A

Eligibility for job training programme

Special groups of unemployed people for whom exemptions to the normal 6 months unemployment conditions are applicable:

(a) People with disabilities (registered or unregistered).
(b) Single (lone) parents.
(c) Ex-regular members of HM Forces.
(d) Returners to the labour market.
(e) People interested in business start-up or other enterprise training.
(f) People wishing to train in skills that are in short supply.
(g) Employees who have been made redundant.
(h) People who need literacy and/or numeracy training.

Annex B

Eligibility for action for community employment (ACE) scheme

Exceptions to the conditions that a person must have been unemployed for at least 12 months out of the last 15 months.

(a) Unemployed 18-24 year olds who have been unemployed for over 6 months.
(b) Young people who have been recently on the Youth Training Programme may count up to a maximum: of 3 months full time training on the programme as unemployment with the balance of the 6 months to be made up of normal unemployment.
(c) Adults who have recently been on the Job Training Programme or at a course at a Training Centre or in Enterprise Ulster may count all of the time spent as unemployment.
(d) Registered disabled people need only have been unemployed for at least 6 out of the last 12 months. They are also permitted to remain in ACE for 18 months instead of the usual 12 months.

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the most recent information he has on the destination of people who leave action for community employment and the job training programme; how many leavers got jobs, became unemployed or went on to further training; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. J. S. Crozier. I have asked him for a reply to be given.

Letter from J. S. Crozier to Ms Clare Short, dated 22 February 1993:

You asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for information on the destination of people who leave Action for Community Employment and the Job Training Programme; and how many leavers got jobs, became unemployed or went on to further training.

As the Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency which has executive responsibility for these matters I have been asked to reply.

The most recent information available on the destination of people who left the Action for Community Employment scheme is based on a sample survey for the period 1 April 1992 to 31 January 1993. This shows that 28 per cent. moved into employment, 2 per cent. into further education or training, and 70 per cent. into unemployment. A full survey in 1991 showed 35 per cent. moving into employment, 4 per cent. into education and training and 61 per cent. into unemployment.

Over the period 1 April 1992 to 31 January 1993 in the Job Training Programme 29 per cent. of leavers moved into employment, 16 per cent. into further education or training and 55 per cent. into unemployment.

Electricity Works

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give details of the nature and cost of major works carried out by Northern Ireland Electricity in the constituency of Newry and Armagh within the last 12 months.

Mr. Atkins: Major works carried out by Northern Ireland Electricity in the constituency of Newry and Armagh in the last 12 months were:

(i) New substation adjacent to Drumalane Playing Fields—£347,000.
(ii) Strengthening of system to substation at Carnbane Industrial Estate—£50,000.
(iii) System improvements in Camlough area (continuing)—£195,000)

Newry and Armagh

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the unemployment rates in each ward within the constituency of Newry and Armagh, or such relevant statistics as are available, for each of the last 12 months.

Mr. Atkins: Whilst unemployment rates are not available at ward level, current and historical information on the actual number of unemployed by age and duration of unemployment for each ward within the constituency of Newry and Armagh is available from the NOMIS database, which can be accessed on-line by House of Commons Library staff.

Travellers

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the cost to public funds of the "With Not For" conference for travelling people on Monday 30 March 1992; and how many civil servants, district council officers, area health board officers, area education board officers and housing executive officers attended this conference.

Mr. Atkins: The total cost to public funds of the "With Not For" conference for travelling people was £18,604·87.

A total of 160 delegates attended the conference, including 13 civil servants, 18 district council officers, 13 area health board officers, three area education board officers and two Northern Ireland Housing Executive officers.

Motoring Offences

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table showing the number of motoring offences, by category, which incur a fixed penalty and the amount of the penalty in each case.

Mr. Atkins: At present there are 153 offences which may be discharged by the payment of a fixed penalty. These have been broadly grouped in the table.

Category	*Number of offences*
1. Speeding	2
Obstruction—waiting—parking	21
Pedestrian crossings	8
Lighting	19
Others	10
2. Vehicle or parts—dangerous condition	46
Noise	6
Neglect traffic directions	5
Miscellaneous	9
3. Driving licence—vehicle test certificate	4
Goods vehicle—PSV offences	6
Motor cycles	5
Length and width	3
Weight and load	9

Each offence currently carries a penalty of £20.

Disabled Employees

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consideration he has given to the report from the Comptroller and Auditor-General for Northern Ireland on the training and employment of disabled people; what action he will be taking; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. J. S. Crozier. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from J. S. Crozier to Mr. Alfred Morris, dated 18 February 1993:

You asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what consideration he has given to the report from the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland on the Training and Employment of disabled people, what action he will be taking and if he will make a statement.

As Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency (Northern Ireland) (T and EA), I have responsibility for the services on which the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland has reported.

We have carefully considered the report. We have noted, amongst other things, the acknowledgement of the improvements made since the Agency reorganised its services to people with disabilities in January 1991.

The Agency is determined to maintain this improvement in its services available to disabled people and is drawing up a programme of further action to this end.

Employment Statistics

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the current percentage employment in the Belfast Education and Library board of Protestants and Roman Catholics in the various grades; and what are the corresponding figures in the 1981 and 1991 census returns covering the Belfast travel-to-work area.

Mr. Hanley: The information is as follows:

1. Belfast Education and Library Board Staff—1 January 1992
(extracted from the Belfast Education and Library Board's Fair Employment review.)

(a) Headquarters

Job Title	*Total number of staff*	*Protestant*		*Roman Catholic*		*Non-Determined*	
		Number	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*
Chief Executive Head of Department Senior Assistant Education Officer Education Officer Assistant Advisory Officer Adviser	24	17	70·84	5	20·83	2	8·33
Principal Psychologist Senior Psychologist Psychologist	13	6	46·16	5	38·46	2	15·38
Professional Architectural Posts	31	18	58·06	11	35·49	2	6·45
Chief Education Welfare Officer Divisional Education Welfare Officer Education Welfare Officer	25	12	48·00	13	52·00	—	—
Senior School Meals Organiser School Meals Organiser Peripatetic School Meals Organiser	7	5	71·43	—	—	2	28·57
Youth Officer Divisional Youth Officer	6	3	50·00	3	50·00	—	—
Principal Officer Assistant Principal Officer	7	5	71·42	1	14·29	1	14·29
Senior Administrative Officer	6	4	66·67	2	33·33	—	—
Administrative Officer	8	7	87·50	1	12·50	—	—
Senior Executive Officer	12	6	50·00	4	33·33	2	16·67
Executive Officer	33	20	60·61	12	36·36	1	3·03
Senior Clerical Officer	56	18	32·14	34	60·71	4	7·15
Clerical Officer Clerk Typist Telephonist/Receptionist Comptometer Operator Technician/Assistant Technician	61	33	54·1	23	37·7	5	8·2

(b) Library Headquarters

Grade	*Total number of staff*	*Protestant*		*Roman Catholic*		*Non-Determined*	
		Number	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*
Chief Librarian Assistant Chief Librarian Senior Librarian PO1-7	6	3	50·00	1	16·67	2	33·33
Librarian PO1 2-5 Librarian AP5 Assistant Librarian AP3/4	22	13	59·09	8	36·36	1	4·55
Senior Library Assistant (i) Senior Library Assistant (ii) Library Assistant	76	41	53·95	30	39·47	5	6·58
Administration/Technical	8	5	62·5	3	37·5	—	—

(C) Library – Branches

Grade	Total number of staff	Protestant Number	Protestant Per cent.	Roman Catholic Number	Roman Catholic Per cent.	Non-determined Number	Non-determined Per cent.
Librarian PO1 2-5 Librarian AP5/SO1	2	1	50·00	1	50·00	—	—
Assistant Librarian	14	5	35·72	8	57·14	1	7·14
Senior Library Assistant II	18	6	33·33	9	50·00	3	16·67
Library Assistant	54	29	53·70	21	38·89	4	7·41

(D) School-based Staff

Grade	Total number of staff	Protestant Number	Protestant Per cent.	Roman Catholic Number	Roman Catholic Per cent.	Non-Determined Number	Non-Determined Per cent.
AECP and T; includes nursery assistant clerical and technical grades	470	196	41·70	232	49·36	42	8·94
A and G staff, IE Caretakers/cleaners Security posts Porter	1,552	634	40·85	755	48·65	163	10·50
School meals	616	268	43·51	302	49·02	46	7·47

(E) Further education (non-teaching)

Grade	Total number of staff	Protestant Number	Protestant Per cent.	Roman Catholic Number	Roman Catholic Per cent.	Non-determined Number	Non-determined Per cent.
Ancillary (eg cleaners, porters, tradesmen etc)	144	103	71·53	29	20·14	12	8·33
Administration/technical	166	92	55·42	64	38·56	10	6·02
Typist Telephonist Receptionist Clerical	50	28	56·00	16	32·00	6	12·00

(F) Further Education (Teaching Permanent)

Grade	Total number of staff	Protestant Number	Protestant Per cent.	Roman Catholic Number	Roman Catholic Per cent.	Non-Determined Number	Non-Determined Per cent.
Lecturer	395	204	51·64	140	35·44	51	12·92
Senior Lecturer	150	89	59·33	46	30·67	15	10·00
Principal Lecturer	27	15	55·56	7	25·92	5	18·52
Head of School	18	11	61·11	5	27·78	2	11·11
Vice-Principal	4	2	50·00	—	—	2	50·00

2. *Economically active population (aged 16 and over) in the Belfast travel-to-work area*

(Supplied by the Census Office, Department of Health and Social Services)

	1981 Per cent.	1991 Per cent.
Roman Catholic	18·05	24·80
Protestant and others[1]	63·78	60·00
Answered 'none'[2]	—	6·79
Did not answer religion question	18·17	8·41

[1] A very small proportion of this category were members of non-Christian religions.

[2] This was a new category introduced in the 1991 Census.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the percentages of the working population in Northern Ireland of Protestants and Roman Catholics and others derived from the 1981 and 1991 census returns.

Mr. Hanley: The information, in relation to the economically active population aged 16 and over, is as follows:

	1981 per cent.	1991 per cent.
Roman Catholic	25·70	35·00
Protestant and Others[1]	56·28	53·02
Answered "None"[2]	—	4·69
Did not answer religion question	18·02	7·29

[1] A very small proportion of this category represented members of non-Christian religions.

[2] This was a new category introduced in the 1991 Census.

HEALTH

GP Fund Holders

13. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress is being made in spreading the effects of the GP fund-holding initiative in Dorset to patients of GPs who are not fund holders.

Dr. Mawhinney: General practitioner fund holders are achieving real benefits for their patients by innovative and sensitive purchasing of health care. District health authorities can reflect the standards set by fund holders in contracting for the patients of other GPs. In Dorset this is being achieved through the Dorset Health Commission, set up by the Wessex regional health authority, which is taking account of all GP's views, including fund holders, in developing purchasing plans.

18. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to extend the GP fund-holding scheme to smaller practices.

Dr. Mawhinney: The minimum list size criteria for general practitioner fund holders is being lowered from 9,000 to 7,000 from 1 April 1993. We are enabling smaller practices to join either by linking with another practice, or through an agency arrangement with their local family health services authority or district health authority.

21. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she is taking to ensure that patients on waiting lists of fund-holding and non-fundholding GPs are treated equally.

Dr. Mawhinney: Guidance agreed with the joint consultants committee was issued to hospital consultants in June 1991. It set out the criteria for contracts between general practitioner fund holders and all national health service hospitals, and clearly states that common waiting lists should be used and the fund holders should not be offered contracts which would disadvantage other patients.

23. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment has been made of how GPs' interest in the fund-holding initiative has changed since the scheme began.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Sir R. Moate) earlier today.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the 1992-93 budget allocation by region and family health service authority for hospital costs generated by general practitioner non-fund holders for those parts of the hospital and community health services that a general practitioner fund holder would have had allocated funds.

Dr. Mawhinney: Regions give allocations to district health authorities on the basis of their resident population and not in relation to the number of non-fundholding general practitioners within the district. Furthermore district health authorities and family health services authorities are not usually coterminous. Information is not therefore available in the form requested.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 11 February, *Official Report*, column *752*, what steps she has taken to ensure that the joint guidance issued to hospital consultants on general practitioner fund holding is being properly enforced; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: We remain committed to the principles set out in the guidance. Providers should not offer contracts to one purchaser which would disadvantage the patients of another, and common waiting lists should apply for urgent and serious conditions. Equally, we stand by the principle that purchasers, both fund holders and district health authorities, should be able to purchase spare capacity if this becomes available. Regional health authorities are responsible for monitoring compliance with the guidance.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health further to her answer of 17 February, *Official Report*, column *203*, what reasons underlie the different treatment of general practitioner fund holders and non-fund holders for sessions for tests and minor surgery.

Dr. Mawhinney: Fundholding and non-fundholding general practitioners are not being treated differently. Regulations have been changed to allow fund holders to receive remuneration from the fund for treating their own patients, putting them in the same position as non-fund holders, who may already provide these services under contract to district health authorities.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list by region the allocation, for general practitioner fund holders in 1992-93, for prescribing.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested is in the table.

GP fund holder prescribing budgets, England 1992-93
First and second wave fundholders combined, in actual cost

Region	*£ Million*
Northern	26·1
Yorkshire	40·1
Trent	33·5
East Anglian	9·2
North West Thames	21·9
North East Thames	10·4
South East Thames	15·7
South West Thames	20·1
Wessex	21·8
Oxford	26·6
South Western	22·3
West Midlands	34·6
Mersey	26·7
North Western	19·3

Tomlinson Report

14. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies she has instituted on the effects on health care in London of implementing the Tomlinson report.

Dr. Mawhinney: We have announced our response to the Tomlinson report in the policy document "Making

London Better", after fully considering the evidence both in the report and in other studies. We have accepted the need for radical change and our policy will deliver the high-quality health service Londoners need.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the recommendations in the Tomlinson report which were not accepted.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Government have accepted the key principles of the Tomlinson report and 96 of its 106 recommendations. The Government's full proposals for improving London's health services are set out in "Making London Better".

Hospitals (Costs)

15. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received suggesting national health service hospitals will be taking action to cut costs by reducing patient care during the current financial year.

Mr. Sackville: My colleagues and I have received and responded to correspondence from a range of sources concerning this.

There is no reason why hospitals should not be able to plan their activity over the whole year, without cost cutting. We are spending more on health and treating more patients than ever before.

Removal of Children (Essex)

16. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions she has had with Essex social services regarding their actions in removing children from their natural parents; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: I have been in contact with the chairman of Essex social services committee and discussions have taken place between the chief inspector of the social services inspectorate and the director of social services about two cases in which children in Essex were removed from their natural parents, one in 1989, the other last year. The local authority were asked to review current child care cases and consider what other action is necessary for the future.

Primary Health Care (London)

17. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on her proposals for improving primary health care in London.

Mr. Sackville: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced the Government's proposals for London's health services, including primary care, on 17 February. We are setting in place a major programme to develop higher-quality, more accessible primary health services at local level. Our aim is to bring primary care in London up to the high standards found elsewhere in the country and to equip it to face the challenges and opportunities of health care provision in the 21st century.

Children Act 1989

19. **Mr. Sims:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to issue further guidance to local authorities on the operation of the Children Act 1989 in the light of the report on the first year of the Act's implementation.

Mr. Yeo: We have no immediate plans to do so, but we are keeping under review the Children Act guidance and will issue more as and when the need arises.

International Adoption

20. **Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what further discussions she intends to have with adoption agencies about international adoption, and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: We will continue to discuss international adoption issues with adoption agencies as necessary, as part of our normal contact with them.

Out-patient Appointments

22. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made towards reaching patients charter targets for waiting times for out-patient appointments.

Mr. Sackville: Under the patients charter, health authorities have already set and published local charter standards for first out-patient appointments. We shall develop these standards further in 1993-94.

Community Treatment Orders

24. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations she has received regarding the possibility of introducing community treatment orders.

Mr. Yeo: We have received views from many organisations and individuals. They will be taken fully into account by the departmental team which, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State stated in her reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) on 13 January at column *731*, is reviewing the legal powers in this field. The team will be seeking further views as its work proceeds.

Ambulance Service

25. **Mr. Nigel Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies her Department has made of the effect of the closure of Leyland-DAF on the ambulance service.

Mr. Sackville: Leyland-DAF has entered into administrative receivership with a view to operating the business as a going concern. National Health Service Supplies is currently in daily contact with the company to monitor the situation in respect of the placement of future orders for vehicles for the ambulance service.

Community Care

26. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provisions are being made for the new community care programme to ensure that improvements are introduced into the care of the elderly and the disabled; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: The introduction of assessment of individuals' care needs will ensure that services are increasingly tailored to need rather than need to services. Improved responsiveness to need will lead to a wider choice of services being delivered by an increasing variety of providers. A total of £565 million is being made available to local authorities in 1993-94 through a ring-fenced special transitional grant to enable them to implement the new arrangements.

27. **Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she last met representatives of the British Association of Social Workers to discuss the implementation of the community care proposals.

Mr. Yeo: I met representatives of the British Association of Social Workers on 11 November 1992. A number of issues were discussed including the implementation of community care.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been released into the community from psychiatric institutions in each of the past three years; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: The table shows the estimated number of discharges into the community from national health service hospitals in England from 1987-88 to 1989-90. The figures do not reflect the number of patients leaving hospitals, as a person can be discharged more than once during the year.

Discharges from national health service hospitals and units in England

Year	Number
1987-88	175,910
1988-89	182,903
1989-90	177,752

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations she has received about the continuing closure of psychiatric hospitals and the finding of community care.

Mr. Yeo: We have received seven representations from interested organisations and 57 from individuals since 1 January 1993 about the closure of psychiatric hospitals and the funding of community care.

28. **Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 8 February, *Official Report*, column *474*, what information she has on the number of times permission was granted by the Secretary of State for the emigration of a child in care between 1967 and 14 October 1991.

Mr. Yeo: Archive papers are stored under the name of the individual child. As I explained in my answer of 8 February at column *474*, information regarding the numbers involved could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Hospital Beds (London)

29. **Ms. Abbott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the need to increase or reduce the supply of hospital beds in London.

Dr. Mawhinney: The demand for hospital beds in London in the future will depend both on improvements in efficiency and primary services, and on how many patients are treated locally rather than being referred to London. While it is impossible to predict precisely the speed of these changes, in our policy document "Making London Better" we made a cautious estimate of 2,000 to 2,500 fewer acute beds in four to five years' time.

Mental Health Services (Ethnic Minorities)

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research is being funded by her Department into the provision of mental health services to meet the needs of ethnic minority communities.

Mr. Yeo: The Department is currently funding two research projects in respect of black and ethnic minorities. Both relate to aspects of psychosis in Afro-Caribbean people. The Medical Research Council is, however, the main route for funding research in psychiatry.

Folic Acid

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the folic acid supplements recommended for women intending to have children in the recent report of the Chief Medical Officer's expert advisory group will be available without a prescription; and what charge will be made.

Mr. Sackville: The report recommended that to prevent a recurrence of neural tube defects women should be prescribed folic acid supplements until the 12th week of pregnancy at a dose of 5mg per day. As there are rare but potentially serious hazards of folic acid therapy at these levels in particular groups of people there are no plans to make this dose available without a prescription.

To prevent a first occurrence of neural tube defect women planning a pregnancy are advised to take a supplement of 0·4mg folic acid from the start of trying to conceive until the 12th week of pregnancy. These supplements are available over the counter at many health food stores and chemists at a cost of around £1 for a month's supply.

Consultants

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will list the contracts awarded by her Department to *(a)* Coopers and Lybrand management consultants, *(b)* Touche Ross management consultants, *(c)* Price Waterhouse management consultants, *(d)* Ernst and Young management consultants, *(e)* Chrichton Roberts Ltd., *(f)* KPMG management consultants and *(g)* Leopold Joseph management consultants, with the total cost of the contracts with each contractor, for (i) the past 12 months and (ii) 1991-92;

(2) how many contracts for consultancies were awarded by his Department over *(a)* the last 12 months and *(b)* 1991-92.

Mr. Sackville: The information has been placed in the Library.

Hartley Hospital, Colne

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Hartley hospital in Colne ceased to be used as an NHS hospital; what amount has since been spent on its maintenance; what valuation has been made of it; and what plans there are for an open market sale.

Mr. Sackville: Hartley hospital was vacated in December 1989. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir Bruce Martin, chairman of North Western regional health authority, for further details.

Publicity

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 2 June 1992 to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), *Official Report*, column *463*, what is her Department's *(a)* current outturn estimate for publicity expenditure for 1992-93 and *(b)* budgeted publicity expenditure for 1993-94.

Mr. Sackville: Estimated expenditure on communications and publicity for 1992-93 is £22 million.

The budget for 1993-94 is £23·7 million.

"Caring for People"

Mr. Thomason: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she intends to issue further guidance to local authorities on charges to users of social services provided under "Caring for People".

Mr. Yeo: As envisaged in "Caring for People" we have issued guidance and made regulations about charges to people in residential and nursing homes from April 1993. Local social services authorities also have powers to charge users of day and domiciliary services where this is reasonable. The Government's long-established policy on the use of these powers is well known. we consider that further guidance will be more useful if it can reflect early experience of implementing "Caring for People". We plan to issue such guidance once that has been assessed.

Disabled People

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what further consideration she has given to calls from disability organisations for the implementation of sections 1, 2 and 3 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: Most of the major provisions of the Act have now been implemented, bringing substantial benefits to disabled people and their carers. The requirements of the non-implemented sections of the Act are now, to a very large extent, reflected in the new and wide-ranging reforms of community care, which demonstrate our commitment to high-quality care responsive to the needs and wishes of service users and carers. The need to implement these sections will therefore be reviewed in the light of several years' experience of the community care arrangements.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of state for Health what representations she has received on the need to empower local authorities to enable them to make direct cash payments to disabled people to make their own personal assistance arrangements.

Mr. Yeo: I have received a number of representations. I have, however, no plans to amend long-standing legislation in this way.

District Health Authorities (Funding)

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of state for Health how many district health authorities will receive less funding through the transfer to weighted capitation in 1993-94.

Mr. Sackville: In 1993-94 the following 24 district health authorities, all of which are currently receiving more than their share of their region's resources, will receive less funding, at constant prices, than in 1992-93.

DHA's which will have their funding reduced in 1993-94

Regional health authority and district health authority	*Amount £'s*
Northern RHA	
Newcastle	1,000,000
Yorkshire RHA	
None	n/a
Trent RHA	
None	n/a
East Anglian RHA	
None	n/a
North West Thames RHA	
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	500,000
Brent	500,000
Barnet	1,500,000
North East Thames RHA	
Hampstead	400,000
Bloomsbury and Islington	900,000
Haringey	750,000
Redbridge	350,000
Waltham Forest	600,000
South East Thames RHA	
Dartford and Gravesham	463,000
Tunbridge Wells	59,000
Greenwich	452,000
Bromley	722,000
South East London[1]	6,000,000
South West Thames RHA	
Wandsworth	1,032,000
East Surrey	85,000
Kingston and Esher	50,000
Wessex RHA	
None	n/a
Oxford RHA	
Aylesbury Vale	1,069,000
Wycombe	499,000
Oxfordshire	44,000
South Western RHA	
None	n/a
West Midlands RHA	
West Birmingham	250,000
South Warwickshire	250,000
Mersey RHA	
Liverpool	2,000,000
Macclesfield	500,000
North Western RHA	
None	n/a

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[1] New authority containing Camberwell, Lewisham/north Southwark and west Lambeth DHAs.

Fluoridation

Ms. Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which health authorities in England and Wales have requested fluoridation of water supplies in their region; and in which health authorities water is currently fluoridated.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not held centrally.

Patients (Protection)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what quality assurance mechanisms she is considering to protect vulnerable groups of patients; and what assessment she has made of the appropriateness of BS5750 accreditation.

Mr. Yeo: Purchasers are required to set standards of quality in the contracts they place with providers.

The Department is funding an evaluation of major accreditation and organisational audit schemes, including BS5750, to establish the benefits relevant to the national health service.

Mental Illness

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what policy advice or guidelines she has issued concerning the treatment of those suffering from mental illness in secure units; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: The treatment of mental illness is the responsibility of the professionals involved. The code of practice issued under the Mental Health Act 1983 provides guidance on the operation of that Act. Current needs for treatment in secure conditions are among the issues considered in the reports of the joint Department of Health/Home Office review of services for mentally disordered offenders (Cm. 2088, 1992). In the light of the review's recommendations we have increased capital funding for medium secure services from £3 million in 1991-92 to £17 million in 1992-93 and £22·4 million in 1993-94.

Health Advisory Service

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent changes there have been in the strategic brief, method of operation and independence of the health advisory service; and what announcements she has made of them.

Mr Yeo: Following a ministerial review in 1991, the national health service health advisory service now has a new remit compatible with the NHS reforms and the Government's new policies for care in the community. The HAS will continue to undertake reviews of local services, but a proportion of its resources will be allocated to examinations of particular aspects of the management of care and quality standards. These changes were announced in January 1992. The HAS remains independent and it retains the status of a non-departmental public body.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements are made for the publication of annual reports by the health advisory service.

Mr. Yeo: Following the review of the national health service health advisory service and the appointment of the new director, all future annual reports will be published as soon as possible after receipt.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in discussions between the health advisory service and other monitoring bodies concerned with health and social services care.

Mr. Yeo: During his first months in office, the present director met many other monitoring bodies whose views have been taken into account in the formulation of the national health service health advisory service's forward programme.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many visits were completed by the health advisory service other than in respect of drug services; how many reports were published in each quarter since 1991; how many person/days were employed on these visits and subsequent report writing, for each quarter, in respect of *(a)* psychiatrists, psychogeriatricians and geriatricians, *(b)* nurses, *(c)* therapists representing the professions allied to medicine, *(d)* managers and *(e)* social service inspectors; how many visits are planned for the period 1 January to 31 March; and how many person/days of each of the professional groups it is planned to employ.

Mr. Yeo: No visits to review services for mentally ill and elderly people have taken place since 1991. Twelve reports were published during January-March 1992 and six during April-May 1992, relating to the final 18 of the 40 visits undertaken during 1991. No visits have been planned for the period January-March 1993.

Nurses

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many enrolled nurses, working within the national health service, underwent professional development training *(a)* prior to and *(b)* following the implementation of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance has been issued to *(a)* directly managed hospitals and *(b)* national health service trusts with regard to funding for conversion courses for enrolled nurses; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Regional health authorities and employing authorities are aware of their responsibilities regarding enrolled nurse conversion.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps her Department is taking to ensure that opportunities for professional development are open to all enrolled nurses irrespective of ethnic origin.

Mr. Sackville: We are committed to a policy of equal opportunity for all staff in the national health service. It is an employer responsibility to ensure that professional development opportunities are made available irrespective of ethnic origin.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps her Department is taking to encourage enrolled nurses who are not in employment back into the nursing profession; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Responsibility for the recruitment of qualified nurses rests with employers.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans her Department has *(a)* to increase and *(b)* to standardise professional development opportunities for enrolled nurses working within the national health service; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: We are committed to increasing the number of places available for level two to level one conversion as part of the Project 2000 reforms. Central funding has been made available to facilitate this and on 12 February we announced additional funding for Project 2000 in 1993-94. However, it is for regional health authorities, in consultation with employers, to plan for enrolled nurse conversion.

Chemists

Mr. Hawksley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will arrange a meeting with the pharmaceutical industry to discuss whether chemists will check, in return for a small fee, the eligibility of those claiming free prescriptions.

Dr. Mawhinney: Mechanisms already exist to check eligibility for prescription charge exemption and charge remission under the national health service low income scheme. The adequacy and operation of these arrangements is kept under review.

"Making London Better"

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate she has of the cost of implementation of "Making London Better" for 1993-94.

Dr. Mawhinney: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced in the House on 16 February, there will be some £158·5 million funding for changes in London in 1993-94. An additional £43·5 million will be available for investment on improving primary and community health services, together with £105 million for changes in secondary care. We will also provide £10 million to ease waiting times in London.

Thames Regional Health Authority

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the total activity levels in the Thames regional health authority for 1991-92 and 1992-93.

Mr. Sackville: The number of finished consultant episodes in the general and acute specialties purchased in the four Thames regions in 1991-92 was 1,958,681. The corresponding number forecast for 1992-93 is 2,025,474.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 2 February, *Official Report*, column 153, if she will show for each trust into which band the chairman's salary falls.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 12 February 1993]*: This information is not held centrally for national health service trusts in the first wave. These details can be obtained from the individual trusts. Remuneration bands for the second and third wave are as follows:

SECOND WAVE TRUSTS
Northern Region
BAND 1
South Tees Acute Hospitals NHS Trust
The RVI Infirmary and Associated Hospitals Trust
BAND 2
North Tees Health NHS Trust
BAND 3
Cleveland Ambulance NHS Trust
Gateshead Community Health NHS Trust
Northgate NHS Trust

Yorkshire Region
BAND 1
York Hospitals and Community Services
BAND 2
Airedale NHS Trust
Harrogate Health Care NHS Trust
Bradford Community Health NHS Trust
Scarborough and North East Yorkshire Healthcare NHS Trust
Northallerton Health Services NHS Trust

Trent Region
BAND 1
Central Sheffield University Hospitals NHS Trust
Nottingham City Hospital NHS Trust
BAND 2
Bassetlaw Hospital and Community Health Services
Doncaster Healthcare NHS Trust
BAND 3
Mulberry South Lincolnshire Mental Handicap
Nottingham Community Unit
Weston Park Hospital NHS Trust
Sheffield Children's Hospital NHS Trust
South Yorkshire Metropolitan Ambulance Service
Barnsley Community and Priority Services NHS Trust

East Anglian Region
BAND 2
Hinchingbrooke Health Care NHS Trust
Kings Lynn and Wisbech Hospitals NHS Trust
BAND 3
Allington

North West Thames Region
BAND 1
Parkside Health NHS Trust
Wellhouse NHS Trust (Barnet and Edgware)
St. Mary's NHS Trust
East Hertfordshire Health NHS Trust
BAND 2
Ashford Hospital NHS Trust
Ealing Hospital NHS Trust
South Bedfordshire Community Healthcare NHS Trust
Bedford Hospital NHS Trust (Formerly North Bedfordshire General Hospital)
Luton and Dunstable Hospital NHS Trust
Dacorum and St. Albans Community NHS Trust (Formerly North West Hertfordshire Priority)
Horizon NHS Trust (Formerly North West Hertfordshire Mental Health)
Barnet Community Healthcare NHS Trust
BAND 3
Harrow Community Health Services NHS Trust
Hillingdon Community Health NHS Trust
Harefield Hospital NHS Trust

North East Thames Region
BAND 1
The Bart's NHS Trust
Forest Healthcare NHS Trust
Essex Rivers Healthcare NHS Trust (North East Essex Acute)
BAND 2
Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust
Southend Community Care NHS Trust
Basildon and Thurrock General Hospitals NHS Trust
BAND 3
Essex Ambulance Service NHS Trust
North East Essex Mental Health NHS Trust
New Possibilities NHS Trust (formerly Turner Village)

South East Thames Region
BAND 2
South Downs Health NHS Trust (Brighton Community)
Hastings and Rother NHS Trust
West Lambeth Community Care NHS Trust

Ravensbourne Priority Health NHS Trust
Optimum Health Services NHS Trust (Lewisham and North Southwark Community)
Eastbourne Hospitals NHS Trust
Band 3
Thameslink Healthcare Services NHS Trust (Dartford and Gravesham Priority)
Maidstone Priority Care NHS Trust

South West Thames Region
Band 2
Frimley Park Hospital NHS Trust
St. Peters Hospital NHS Trust (North West Surrey Acute)
Band 3
Weybourne Community NHS Trust (North West Surrey Community)

Wessex Region
Band 2
The Poole Hospital NHS Trust
Wiltshire Healthcare NHS Trust
Royal United Hospital, Bath NHS Trust
Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch Hospitals NHS Trust
Band 3
Dorset Healthcare NHS Trust (East Dorset Community)
Bath Mental Health Care NHS Trust
The Bath And West Community NHS Trust (Avon and Somerset)

Oxford Region
Band 2
Milton Keynes General Hospital NHS Trust
Heatherwood and Wexham Park Hospitals NHS Trust

Band 3
Milton Keynes Community Health NHS Trust
East Berkshire NHS Trust for People With Learning Disabilities
Aylesbury Vale Community Healthcare NHS Trust

South Western Region
Band 1
Frenchay Healthcare NHS Trust
The Royal Cornwall Hospitals and West Cornwall Hospital NHS Trust
Southmead Health Services NHS Trust

Band 2
Avon Ambulance Service NHS Trust
Plymouth Community Services NHS Trust
Exeter and District Community Health Service NHS Trust
Phoenix NHS Trust

Band 3
Devon Ambulance Service NHS Trust
Gloucestershire Ambulance Service NHS Trust

West Midlands Region
Band 2
Premier Health NHS Trust (South East Staffordshire Community)
Herefordshire Community Health NHS Trust
East Birmingham Hospital NHS Trust
Walsgrave Hospital NHS Trust

Band 3
South Warwickshire Health Care NHS Trust
Staffordshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust

Mersey Region
Band 1
Aintree Hospitals NHS Trust
The North Mersey Community NHS Trust (Liverpool Community and Priority)

Band 2
Mersey Regional Ambulance Service NHS Trust
Liverpool Obstetrics and Gynaecology Services NHS Trust
Southport and Formby NHS Trust
Band 3
The Walton Centre for Neurology and Neurosurgery NHS Trust
Clatterbridge Centre for Oncology NHS Trust
St. Helens and Knowsley Community Health NHS Trust

North Western Region
Band 1
Burnley Health Care NHS Trust
Band 2
The Oldham NHS Trust
Rochdale Healthcare NHS Trust
Lancaster Priority Services NHS Trust
Lancaster Acute Hospitals Trust
Band 3
Wrightington Hospital NHS Trust

THIRD WAVE TRUSTS

Northern Region
Band 2
Gateshead Hospitals NHS Trust
South Tees Community and Mental Health NHS Trust
South Tyneside Health Care NHS Trust
Band 3
Cumbria Ambulance Service NHS Trust
Durham County Ambulance Service NHS Trust
Northumberland Mental Health NHS Trust
South Cumbria Community and Mental Health NHS Trust
South West Durham Mental Health NHS Trust
Westmorland Hospitals NHS Trust
West Cumbria Health Care NHS Trust

Yorkshire Region
Band 1
Calderdale Health Care NHS Trust
Huddersfield NHS Trust
Grimsby Health NHS Trust
Royal Hull Hospitals NHS Trust
Leeds Community and Mental Health Services Teaching NHS Trust
Band 2
East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust
Pinderfields Hospitals NHS Trust
Pontefract Hospitals NHS Trust
Wakefield and Pontefract Health NHS Trust
Scunthorpe and Goole Hospitals NHS Trust
West Yorkshire Metropolitan Ambulance Service NHS Trust
Band 3
Humberside Ambulance Service NHS Trust
North Yorkshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust
Scunthorpe Community Health Unit NHS Trust

Trent Region
Band 1
Fosse Health, Leicestershire Community NHS Trust
Leicester Royal Infirmary NHS Trust
Queen's Medical Centre, Nottingham University Hospital NHS Trust
Band 2
Glenfield Hospital NHS Trust
Chesterfield and North Derbyshire Royal Hospital NHS Trust
South Lincolnshire Community and Mental Health Services NHS Trust
Rotherham General Hospitals NHS Trust
Derby City General Hospital NHS Trust
Leicester General Hospital NHS Trust
Barnsley District General Hospital NHS Trust
Central Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust
Community Health Services, Southern Derbyshire NHS Trust
Band 3
Gainsborough and District Health Care NHS Trust
Nottinghamshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust
Rotherham Priority Health Services NHS Trust
Southern Derbyshire Mental Health NHS Trust

East Anglian Region
BAND 1
Ipswich Hospital NHS Trust
Addenbrookes NHS Trust
BAND 2
James Paget Hospital NHS Trust
Northwest Anglia Healthcare NHS Trust
West Suffolk Hospitals NHS Trust
Peterborough Hospitals NHS Trust
Lifespan Health Care Cambridge NHS Trust
BAND 3
Mid Anglia Community Health NHS Trust
East Suffolk Local Health Services NHS Trust
Papworth Hospital NHS Trust

North West Thames Region
BAND 1
Northwick Park Hospital NHS Trust
BAND 2
Riverside Mental Health NHS Trust
West London Healthcare NHS Trust
Hounslow and Spelthorne Community and Mental Health NHS Trust
West Middlesex University Hospital NHS Trust
BAND 3
Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Ambulance Services NHS Trust
North West London Mental Health NHS Trust (Parkside)

North East Thames Region
BAND 1
Redbridge Healthcare NHS Trust
Camden and Islington Community Health Services Trust
Barking Havering and Brentwood Community Health Care NHS Trust
Havering Hospitals NHS Trust
BAND 2
Enfield Community Care NHS Trust
Chase Farm Hospitals NHS Trust
Thameside Community Healthcare NHS Trust
Whittington Hospital NHS Trust
BAND 3
Mid Essex Community Health NHS Trust
Bedford and Shires Health and Care NHS Trust
Royal London Homeopathic Hospital NHS Trust

South West Thames Region
BAND 2
Crawley and Horsham NHS Trust
Merton and Sutton Community Healthcare NHS Trust
Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton Healthcare NHS Trust
East Surrey Hospital and Community Healthcare NHS Trust
BAND 3
Worthing Priority Care NHS Trust
Mayday Healthcare NHS Trust

South East Thames Region
BAND 1
Bromley Hospitals NHS Trust
Brighton Healthcare NHS Trust
Greenwich Healthcare NHS Trust
BAND 2
Thanet Healthcare NHS Trust
Mid Kent Healthcare NHS Trust
Kent and Canterbury Hospitals NHS Trust
Eastbourne and County Healthcare NHS Trust
Canterbury and Thanet Community Healthcare NHS Trust
Queen Mary's Sidcup NHS Trust

Wessex Region
BAND 1
Southampton University Hospitals NHS Trust
Southampton Community Health Services NHS Trust
Portsmouth Acute NHS Trust
BAND 2
St. Mary's Hospital NHS Trust (Isle of Wight Acute)
North Hampshire, Loddon Community NHS Trust
BAND 3
Isle of Wight Community Healthcare NHS Trust
Andover District Community Health Care NHS Trust
Dorset Ambulance Service NHS Trust
Hampshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust
Wiltshire Ambulance Services NHS Trust

Oxford Region
BAND 1
Royal Berkshire and Battle Hospitals NHS Trust
South Buckinghamshire NHS Trust
BAND 2
East Berkshire Community Health NHS Trust
West Berkshire Priority Care Service NHS Trust
BAND 3
Horton General Hospital NHS Trust
Oxford Learning Disability NHS Trust
Radcliffe Infirmary NHS Trust
Royal Berkshire Ambulance NHS Trust
Two Shires Ambulance NHS Trust

South Western Region
BAND 1
Gloucestershire Royal NHS Trust
Royal Devon and Exeter NHS Trust
BAND 2
Severn NHS Trust
BAND 3
Avalon NHS Trust

West Midlands Region
BAND 1
North Staffordshire Hospital Centre NHS Trust
BAND 2
North East Worcestershire Community Health Care NHS Trust
Burton Hospitals NHS Trust
Good Hope Hospital NHS Trust
North Warwickshire Healthcare NHS Trust
Mid Staffordshire General Hospital NHS Trust
Walsall Community Health Services NHS Trust
The Princess Royal NHS Trust
Kidderminster Healthcare NHS Trust
BAND 3
Shropshire Mental Health NHS Trust
South Warwickshire General NHS Trust
South Worcestershire Community NHS Trust
Wolverley NHS Trust

Mersey Region
BAND 1
East Cheshire NHS Trust
BAND 2
Warrington Community NHS Trust
Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Trust
Cheshire Community Healthcare NHS Trust
BAND 3
Halton General Hospital NHS Trust
Southport and Formby Community Health Services NHS Trust
Warrington Acute Hospital NHS Trust

North Western Region
BAND 1
Wigan and Leigh Health Services NHS Trust
BAND 2
Calderstone NHS Trust
West Lancashire NHS Trust
BAND 3
Mancunian Community Health NHS Trust
Chorley and South Ribble NHS Trust

Private Hospitals

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money has been spent in the last five years by district health authorities and regional health authorities on purchasing services from private hospitals.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money was spent on the purchase of private health care for NHS patients in 1991-92 and the first three quarters of the financial year 1992-93; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 15 February 1993]:* The annual accounts and financial returns of health authorities do not separately identify expenditure incurred specifically on the purchase of private health care. However, the summarised accounts of health authorities in England for 1991-92 show that the total of health care and related services purchased from all non-national health service providers was some £182·3 million.

This figure will include expenditure incurred under contracts with variously constituted nursing homes and hospices, voluntary organisations, local authorities and military hospitals in addition to those with private hospitals as such. Similar information is not collected on a quarterly basis.

Optometry

Dame Jill Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what Government funding is made available annually towards the cost of the training course for optometry.

Mr. Boswell: I have been asked to reply.

Funding for subjects and professions allied to medicine, including optometry, is the responsibility of the Universities Funding Council and the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council. The UFC's teaching unit of resource for funded places in subjects allied to medicine is £4,614 in 1992-93. The PCFC's mean funding per full-time funded place in its health and social services programme is £3,079 in 1992-93. These categories cover different subjects and are not directly comparable. Funded places for optometry are not separately identified. It is for institutions to decide actual spending on each subject.

Radiation

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration she has given to appointing a replacement chairman for the study on the links between the development of cancer and exposure to occupational radiation.

Mr. Robert Jackson: I have been asked to reply.

The study in question is funded by the Medical Research Council (MRC) which receives its grant in aid from my Department.

The MRC's environmental epidemiology unit is conducting a programme of research on occupational and environmental hazards. Included in this programme is the study to follow up the findings of an association between the risk of leukaemia and lymphoma and the father's occupational exposure to radiation. The director of the unit is Professor David Barker.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Infrastructure (Private Investment)

Ms. Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what response he has had from private business to his invitation on 9 December 1992 to come forward with proposals for private sector investment in Britain's infrastructure.

Mr. Dorrell: Numerous firms in the financial and construction sectors have put ideas to the Treasury, either in writing or in discussion with Ministers or officials.

Beer Duty

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what representations he has had about the compliance costs for small brewers of the new collection system for beer duty; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what estimate he has of the compliance costs to the United Kingdom brewing industry arising from the requirements proposed in the Customs and Excise draft notice 226 on a new collection system for beer duty.

Sir John Cope: Studies when the change was under consideration indicated that end product duty would reduce compliance costs for brewers. A study of the costs of the new system has been commissioned but it is too early to estimate the results. Small brewers have generally welcomed the changeover to an end product duty and none has made representations about the cost of compliance.

Windfall Tax

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of a windfall tax on United Kingdom companies on employment and on prices.

Mr. Dorrell: The precise impact of such a tax would depend on what form it took, but any increase in business taxation would be likely to impede job creation. Furthermore, the Government believe that excess profits should be avoided by encouraging competition and providing effective regulation of monopolies. We do not believe that excess profits should be tolerated in order to provide extra taxable capacity.

Inland Revenue (Privatisation)

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will continue to require Inland Revenue staff to sign the Official Secrets Act when the work is put into private agencies.

Mr. Dorrell: All Inland Revenue staff and staff of contractors working for the Department who have access to information about taxpayers are, and will continue to be, required to sign an acknowledgement that improper disclosure may lead to imprisonment for up to two years, or a fine or both.

Privatisation

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to arrange the sales of British Coal, Caledonian MacBrayne, Channel Four Television Company, Commonwealth Development Corporation, Covent Garden Market Authority, English Industrial Estates Corporation and Welsh Fourth Channel Authority.

Mr. Dorrell: The Government remain committed to the privatisation of British Coal. However, no decisions on the form or timing of privatisation will be taken until after the coal review White Paper has been debated. The future status of the Commonwealth Development Corporation is currently under review. Ministers have announced their intention to dispose of the assets of the Covent Garden market authority as soon as practicable. There are no current plans to privatise Caledonian MacBrayne or English Industrial Estates Corporation. Channel Four and Welsh Channel Four are private sector bodies.

Value Added Tax

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement setting out the nature and extent of the obligations taken on by the United Kingdom in respect of its zero rates for VAT on 24 June 1991, and on 27 June 1992.

Sir John Cope: At the meeting of the Economic and Finance Ministers Council on 24 June 1991 the member states including the United Kingdom agreed that under transitional arrangements member states which at 1 January 1991 applied for zero rates for VAT to particular goods and services in accordance with the provisions of Community law in force, would have the option of retaining them.

The transitional period will continue at least until the end of the 1996 and thereafter until there is unanimous agreement on the definitive (origin) VAT system to operate after that. The United Kingdom has made clear that such agreement will not be forthcoming unless, among other conditions, our right to continue with our zero rates is fully protected.

No obligations were taken on by the United Kingdom in respect of its zero rates for VAT on 27 June 1992.

Drug Smuggling

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consideration he has given to the information concerned with drug smuggling sent to the Attorney-General since 7 February by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Cope *[holding answer 19 February 1993]:* I understand from the Attorney-General's Department that it has no record of having received any such correspondence.

Friendly Societies Commission

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the criteria he applies when appointing members of the Friendly Societies Commission; and if he will list the relevant experience and professional qualifications of its current members.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 22 February 1993]:* The factors which the Treasury takes into account in making appointments to the Friendly Societies Commission include: the requirement for a mix of relevant skills and experience; the need to ensure that there are no conflicts of interest which might prevent prospective commissioners from carrying out their statutory duties; the importance of having a commission which can work as a team; and the need for enough commissioners to carry out the commission's statutory functions.

The relevant experience and professional qualifications of the current commissioners is:

Mr. D. W. Lee (Chairman)

Full-time civil servant for last four years. Registrar of Friendly societies since December 1989. Formerly with Lloyds Bank and Barclays; Director of various companies in financial services and other sectors. Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Bankers, with a degree in law, LL.B (Hons.) London.

Mr. P. E. Couse, FCA

Retired Chartered Accountant. Formerly partner, Coopers and Lybrand and President of the Institute of Chartered Accountants.

Mr. F. da Rocha

Civil servant for 24 years (18 years in the Registry of Friendly Societies).

Dr. J. Dine

Barrister. Reader in Law at Essex University, with a doctorate in law.

Mr. J. A. Geddes

Actuary—Fellow of the Institute of Actuaries (retired). Formerly partner, R. Watson and Sons.

Mr. A. Wilson

Retired Civil Servant—formerly Registrar of Friendly Societies—and a qualified solicitor.

Brian Charrington

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the circumstances surrounding the release of Brian Charrington, arrested on a charge connected to the illegal import of cocaine, at the Manchester magistrates court in January.

Sir John Cope *[holding answer 19 February 1993]* On counsel's advice the Commissioners of Customs and Excise agreed that the proper course of action was to drop the prosecution against Mr. Charrington on the basis that the evidence against him would not secure a conviction.

SCOTLAND

Legal Aid

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many of the claims made by solicitors for payment by the legal aid fund in 1991-92 were settled within one month.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The numbers of accounts submitted under each category of legal aid in 1991-92, and the percentage paid within one month, are as follows:

	Number	*Per cent. paid within one month*
Civil legal aid	21,015	35·4
Criminal legal aid	61,777	61·0
Advice and assistance	209,043	47·4
TOTAL	291,835	49·5

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many persons received help under the legal aid advice and assistance scheme with a nil contribution in the latest year for which figures are available; what percentage this was of the total number receiving advice under the scheme; and what he estimates that percentage would have been if the changes in eligibility for civil legal aid had been in effect in that year.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 8 February 1993]:* In 1991-92, 271,759 grants were made under the advice and assistance scheme. Of these, approximately 980 per cent. (244,000) had no contribution to pay.

Since there would have been no contributory band, the number of grants would have been smaller had the proposed changes in legal aid eligibility announced on 16 November been in force in 1991-92. All of those who qualified for assistance would have received it free of contributions.

Fishermen

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many deep sea and inshore fishermen were employed full time in Scotland in *(a)* 1972, *(b)* 1982 and *(c)* 1992.

Sir Hector Monro: The number of fishermen regularly employed in Scotland in each of the years requested are as follows. Separate figures for inshore and deep sea fishermen are not available. Part-time fishermen and crofters are excluded from the figures.

Fishermen regularly employed in Scotland

Year	*Number*
1972	8,110
1982	7,24[illegible]
1992	[1]7,1[illegible]

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[1] Provisional.

Nurse Gradings

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases of appeals against nurse clinical grading are outstanding in each of the health boards and at the national level.

Mr. Stewart: I understand that virtually no nurse clinical grading appeals submitted under section 32 of the General Whitley Council conditions of service are outstanding at health board level. On 1 February 1993 there were 729 appeals to the Scottish Appeals Committee outstanding. On the same date 586 appeals at national level remitted by the Nursing and Midwifery Staffs Negotiating Council to the Scottish appeal team secretariat were outstanding; the breakdown of these by health board is given in the table.

Health board	*Appeals outstanding*
Argyll and Clyde	37
Ayrshire and Arran	47
Borders	14
Dumfries and Galloway	8
Fife	35
Forth Valley	70
Grampian	39
Greater Glasgow	77
Highland	25

Health board	Appeals outstanding
Lanarkshire	72
Lothian	58
Orkney	—
Shetland	3
Tayside	81
Western Isles	8
CSA	12
State Hospital	—
TOTAL	586

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to designate further areas within Scotland as environmentally sensitive areas; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 19 February 1993]:* Five areas selected for further designation as environmentally sensitive areas in Scotland were announced by my hon. Friend, Lord Strathclyde, on 6 March 1992 and will be introduced during 1993. They are the Argyll Islands, the Cairngorms Straths, the Central Southern Uplands, the Shetland Islands and the Western Southern Uplands. There are, at present, no plans to designate any further areas in Scotland.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total area within Scotland currently designated as environmentally sensitive areas; and what is the total size of the additional areas whose designation comes into effect on 1 April.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 19 February 1993]:* The total area currently designated in Scotland as environmentally sensitive area is 288,000 hectares. This area will be increased by a further 1,098,000 hectares when the third round of environmentally sensitive areas is implemented during 1993.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland by what percentage his Department's budget for payments to farmers in environmentally sensitive areas is due to change in 1993-94.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 19 February 1993]:* The provision for environmentally sensitive areas in Scotland for the financial year 1993-94 is £5·3 million. This is an increase of approximately 36 per cent. over that for 1992-93.

Ambulance Service

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland by what date he expects all contracted-status ambulances to be phased out within the Highlands; and how much money has been made available for such purposes since such a policy was instituted.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 19 February 1993]:* It is the policy of the Scottish ambulance service to phase out the use of ambulance contractors where demand justifies such a change and where it would be economical to do so. No specific date has been set, but the position is kept under review.

Mineral Rights

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all the sites owned or formerly owned by the Forestry Commission where mineral rights have been sold in each of the last 10 years, giving the name of the site, the country in which it is located, and the amount received for the sale of those rights; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 22 February 1993]:* The Forestry Commission does not sell mineral rights; it grants licences and leases permitting the extraction of minerals, subject to the licensee or lessee obtaining planning permission. Details of individual licences and leases are not kept centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The Forestry Commission has received over £5 million from these licences and leases in the last 10 years.

Scottish Students

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many Scottish students are in *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time education within the United Kingdom.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 18 February 1993]:* The available information is given in the table. Full information is available for Scottish students in Scotland. No information is available for Scottish students on courses of further education outside Scotland, nor for those on part-time courses of higher education outside Scotland. The figures for Scottish students on full-time courses outside Scotland include only those studying in the traditional university sector in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and those studying part-time in Scotland are assumed to be Scots-domiciled.

Scottish Domiciled Students in 1991-92

	Full-time	Part-time
Higher education in Scotland	80,036	43,010
Higher education elsewhere in United Kingdom	3,462	n.a.
Further education in Scotland (provisional)	35,895	188,645
Further education elsewhere in United Kingdom	n.a.	n.a.

Higher Education

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many students have been in *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time higher education in Scotland in each year since 1985.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 18 February 1993]:* The information requested is given in the table. The table includes figures for all higher education institutions which will be funded by the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council from April this year. The figures given are for students on courses of higher education; in addition, some of the institutions have some students undertaking courses of further education.

Students on higher education courses at higher education institutes in Scotland
1985-86 to 1991-92

Name	*1985-86*		*1986-87*		*1987-88*		*1988-89*		*1989-90*		*1990-91*		*1991-92*	
	Full time	*Part time*	*Full time*	*Part time*	*Full time*	*Part time*	*Full time*	*Part time*	*Full time*	*Part time*	*Full time*	*Part time*	*Full time*	*Part time*
Aberdeen University	5,482	411	5,629	549	5,690	575	5,681	570	6,087	631	6,374	687	7,180	728
Dundee University	3,222	161	3,300	180	3,444	203	3,613	213	3,762	214	4,166	285	4,482	357
Edinburgh University	10,039	707	10,127	764	10,162	775	10,403	922	10,862	971	11,395	1,016	12,550	1,115
Glasgow University	10,412	2,505	10,521	2,587	10,810	2,533	11,049	2,097	11,523	1,970	12,226	1,632	12,798	1,485
Heriot-Watt University	3,319	444	3,487	508	3,798	450	4,108	512	4,396	547	3,570	512	3,733	517
St. Andrews University	3,560	112	3,627	116	3,619	144	3,782	121	3,939	108	4,187	106	4,225	80
Stirling University	2,589	335	2,897	432	3,059	410	3,207	525	3,416	577	3,472	507	3,972	618
Strathclyde University	7,586	943	7,642	1,291	7,759	1,226	7,936	1,355	8,368	1,558	8,652	1,666	9.588	1,948
Duncan of Jordanstone	1,006	26	1,026	41	1,059	9	1,073	12	1,188	10	1,272	9	1,312	11
Dundee Institute	2,022	199	2,041	179	2,009	198	1,983	199	2,088	290	2,194	343	2,498	498
Edinburgh College of Art	968	142	970	139	973	165	978	180	1,062	152	1,236	35	1,308	77
Glasgow Polytechnic	3,370	3,513	3,376	3,310	3,352	2,700	3,535	2,542	3,749	2,657	4,503	2,855	5,013	2,681
Glasgow School of Art	848	120	865	268	776	270	816	162	920	202	990	211	1,084	174
Napier	4,301	3,346	4,572	3,622	4,741	3,794	5,221	3,807	4,905	3,510	5,091	3,512	5,595	3,392
Paisley	2,861	291	2,860	1,507	2,870	1,386	2,971	1,345	3,072	1,902	3,242	2,000	3,899	2,017
Queen Margaret College	1,225	91	1,263	96	1,283	60	1,376	88	1,522	204	1,588	233	1,712	279
Queens College	837	20	851	0	884	32	981	47	1,260	116	1,369	115	1,679	197
Robert Gordons	3,197	475	3,261	450	3,284	442	3,444	437	3,906	622	4,213	825	4,519	1,008
Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama	360	0	347	0	364	0	375	0	425	0	378	0	402	0
Scottish College of Textiles	597	63	625	48	640	100	665	52	642	41	679	31	755	30
Craigie	226	37	244	47	286	0	278	0	327	0	406	0	453	0
Jordanhill	1,372	757	1,447	698	1,321	658	1,286	675	1,518	669	1,813	673	1,976	653
Moray House	1,390	257	1,387	197	1,539	9	1,388	150	1,563	60	1,833	55	1,925	42
Northern	872	146	929	228	883	81	866	104	1,055	73	1,318	43	1,438	59
St. Andrews	573	182	608	134	581	0	555	0	669	0	858	0	1,005	0
Total	72,234	15,283	73,902	17,391	75,186	16,220	77,570	16,115	82,224	17,084	87,025	17,351	95,101	17,966

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time students have attended each separate higher education institute in Scotland in each year since 1985.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 18 February 1993]:* The information requested is given in the table. 1991-92 is the latest year for which figures are available. The figures exclude students studying with the Open university. Sandwich students are included in the full-time figures. Part-time in-service teacher training students are excluded from the part-time figures.

Year	*Full-time*	*Part-time*
1985-86	79,761	39,192
1986-87	81,640	40,022
1987-88	83,551	40,136
1988-89	84,968	39,757
1989-90	90,712	40,886
1990-91	96,844	41,084
1991-92	108,079	43,010

Student Grants

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many Scottish students receive a full grant for *(a)* living at home and *(b)* living away from home.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 18 February 1993]:* As at 17 February 1993, the number of Scottish students who had been offered a full grant at the home rate for session 1992-93 was 10,775, of whom 469 subsequently withdrew. A further 27,162 were offered a full grant at the away from home rate, of whom 1,087 subsequently withdrew.

GP Fund Holders

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many general practitioner fund holders within Lanarkshire health board have applied for and been granted fund holding status.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 29 January 1993]:* Latest information received from Lanarkshire health board indicates that 14 practices have applied to become fund holders and have been granted formal approval by the board. Eight of these practices will commence fund holding from 1 April 1993. The other six will commence as soon as practicable.

Overseas Trade

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to encourage trade between Scotland and *(a)* Australia, *(b)* Canada, *(c)* New Zealand and *(d)* the United States of America; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 5 February 1993]:* My right hon. Friend established Scottish Trade International in December 1991 in order to offer Scottish companies one-door access to the wide range of export services and assistance available from the Scottish Office and Scottish Enterprise. These include the Government's overseas trade services (OTS) which STI promote and administer in Scotland on behalf of the Department of Trade and Industry. OTS can assist companies enter the markets of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the USA. Complementing OTS, STI has its own north American business development programme.

In addition, particular events and promotions are planned. This month STI is co-operating with the Australia and New Zealand Trade Advisory Committee in the organisation of a seminar on the Australian and New

Zealand markets. STI will also participate in a campaign to be launched in March which will aim to increase sales into the north American market.

Competitive Tendering

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidance is given to health boards on the European Acquired Rights directive 77/187 in relation to compulsory competitive tendering; and what plans he has to issue further guidance.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 5 February 1993]:* The existing guidance to health boards on competitive tendering does not specifically refer to the 1977 directive. However health boards have been advised to consult the central legal office where they are uncertain about the application of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 which are derived from this directive.

Further guidance on best practice and procedures for market testing will be issued to health boards in the near future in line with the Government's White Paper "Competing for Quality" (Cmnd. 1730).

Fish Landings

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the total landings of *(a)* haddock, *(b)* whiting, *(c)* cod and *(d)* monkfish at each Scottish port in January; and if he will list the corresponding figures for the same month for each of the past five years.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 10 February 1993]:* Figures for January 1993 are still too incomplete to alow meaningful comparisons with earlier years. Reasonably firm figures should be available by 25 February. As soon as possible thereafter I will arrange for copies of all the figures to be placed in the Library and I will send a set to the hon. Member.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* burglaries of a dwelling, *(b)* burglaries other than of a dwelling and *(c)* burglaries in total were reported (i) in each police force area and (ii) in total for Scotland in each calendar year since 1979, and in the 12 months ended June 1992.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 4 February 1993]:* The available information collected centrally for calendar years 1979-1991, was given in my reply to the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) on 3 February 1993 at column *231*.

The available information collected centrally, for the 12 months ended June 1992, is given in the table.

Number of cases of housebreaking[1] recorded by the police in Scotland, 12 months ended June 1992

Police Force	*12 months to June 1992[2]*
Central	4,517
Dumfries and Galloway	2,254
Fife	8,710
Grampian	7,132
Lothian and Borders	17,837
Northern	[3]1,531
Strathclyde	69,802
Tayside	9,183
Scotland	[3]120,966

Notes:

[1] Includes cases of attempted housebreaking and housebreaking with intent to steal.

[2] Provisional.

[3] Estimated.

Police Overtime

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the expenditure on overtime for the police force in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland as a whole in each of the past four years; and what is the estimated expenditure for overtime in 1992-93.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 4 February 1993]:* The information requested is set out in the following table:

Year	*Strathclyde* £	*Scotland* £
1988-89	12,819,000	21,588,000
1989-90	14,407,000	24,517,000
1990-91	12,897,000	23,166,000
1991-92	[1]12,923,000	[1]23,679,000
1992-93	[2]14,737,000	[2]27,336,000

[1] Provisional.

[2] Estimated.

Private Roads

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the ways by which individuals may challenge, or seek to change, the status of a road which is held by the local roads authority to be a private road in terms of the the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984 in circumstances where there is evidence that the road in question should be a public road in terms of the 1984 Act.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 9 February 1993]:* The procedures by which individuals may seek to change the status of a private road to a public road, for which a local roads authority would have responsibility, is set out in section 16 of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984. Briefly this obliges the local roads authority to adopt a private road, on request, where the road is of a satisfactory standard in accordance with that authority's requirements. This section of the Act makes provision for any disputes to be determined by arbitration by a single arbiter, appointed in default of agreement by the sheriff on application by either party.

Additionally section 1(4) of the 1984 Act gives authorities a discretionary power to add roads to their list of public roads. An individual with sufficient title and interest in the matter may challenge the acts or omissions of a local roads authority in the discharge of its functions, with respect to the inclusion or exclusion of a road in its list of public roads, by means of an application to the Court of Session for judicial review.

Forestry Commission

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will outline the aims and duties of each branch of the Forestry Commission; and what plans he has to split the two branches of the Forestry Commission into separate organisations.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 9 February 1993]:* The Forestry Commission carried out an internal reorganisation in April 1992 to distinguish clearly between its functions as a Government Department (the Department of Forestry) and its role in managing publicly owned forests (Forest Enterprise). The Department of Forestry comprises a policy and resources group and the Forestry Authority.

The policy and resources group is responsible for providing support to forestry Ministers on parliamentary matters, developing and monitoring forestry policy, dealing with European and international forestry matters, and providing central services for the commission as a whole.

The Forestry Authority is responsible for administering the commission's grant schemes for private woodlands, controlling the felling of trees and woods, administering regulations to prevent the introduction of potentially harmful forest pests and diseases, and conducting research. These functions are carried out with the aim of ensuring that trees, woodlands and forests in Great Britain are protected, managed, extended and promoted in ways which best serve the public interest in accordance with Government policy.

Forest Enterprise is responsible for managing the commission's estate in Great Britain as a multi-use resource for recreation, wildlife, landscape and conservation, as well as for timber production. This is done with the aim of creating and maintaining attractive and productive woodlands and managing them for public benefits.

The Government have no plans at present to split the two parts of the Forestry Commission into separate organisations.

Potatoes

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any details on the number of times other EC member states' Governments have intervened in their domestic potato market in each year since 1988; and what was the tonnage and cost.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 9 February 1993]:* The information is not available.

Mitsubishi

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the negotiations taking place with Mitsubishi in respect of its proposed semi-conductor plant; and what account is being taken of offers of assistance being made by other countries.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 9 February 1993]:* Discussions that my officials may have with individual companies are held on a commercial in confidence basis.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disability Allowances

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington can expect a reply to his letter of 21 December 1992 about the operations of the Benefits Agency attenance allowance unit at Norcross, Blackpool, the disability benefits centre, Birmingham and the disability living allowance unit at Warbeck house, Blackpool.

Mr. Scott: A reply was sent to my hon. Friend on 22 February 1993.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to advertise his Department's policy on compensation and to take steps to identify and inform claimants who might be entitled to compensation, either because they have waited over 12 months to hear the outcome of a disability living allowance or attendance allowance claim or because an existing award has been interrupted for longer than three months; and what is the total number of cases where compensation has already been awarded by his Department on either of these grounds.

Mr. Scott: The administration of disability living allowance is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 22 February 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to the points raised in your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security, about his plans to advertise his Department's policy on compensation, and to take steps to identify and inform claimants of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or attendance Allowance (AA) who might be entitled to compensation and the total number of cases where compensation has been awarded.

There are no plans for specific advertising of the Department's policy on compensation. The Benefits Agency Customer Charter informs people that a payment can be considered if someone suffers financial loss as a result of our mistake and it guides customers to make contact with their local customer service manager.

The staff at the DLA Unit are aware of the compensation arrangements and we regularly remind staff about the procedure for identifying and referring cases for compensation.

Up to the 18 February 1993, one hundred and forty-two (142) DLA customers and two (2) AA customers received such compensation payments.

I hope you find this rreply helpful. A copy will appear in the *Official Report*. A copy will also be placed in the Library.

Consultants

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the contracts awarded by his Department to *(a)* Coopers and Lybrand management consultants, *(b)* Touche Ross management consultants, *(c)* Price Waterhouse management consultants, *(d)* Ernst and Young management consultants, *(e)* Chrichton Roberts Ltd., *(f)* KPMG management consultants and (*g*) Leopold Joseph management consultants, with the total cost of the contracts with each contractor, for (i) the past 12 months and (ii) 1991-92.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested for the years 1992-93 and 1991-92 can be obtained from the DSS management consultancy contracts, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many contracts for consultancies were awarded by his Department over (*a*) the last 12 months and (*b*) 1991-92.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department of Social Security has awarded 127 management consultancy contracts in 1991-92 and 126 to date in 1992-93.

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to amend the regulations regarding availability for work and actively seeking work in the social security regulations so as to encourage those on unemployment benefit to seek work experience in the voluntary sector; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: Unemployed people can take part in voluntary work as long as they are available for, and actively seeking, work. Within these conditions there are no set limits on the amount of voluntary work that they can do.

These conditions also include easements for volunteers whereby volunteers may be allowed 24 hours' notice in which to make the necessary arrangements to give up or rearrange voluntary responsibilities before taking up an offer of employment. Voluntary workers attending work camps away from their home area may be deemed to be available for work for a period of 14 days in any year.

The adjudicating authorities will look positively at the time spent on voluntary work when deciding whether a person has taken reasonable steps to find work.

We are considering measures to help the long-term unemployed to use their time constructively in a range of activities including voluntary work.

EMPLOYMENT

Construction Industry Training Board

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when she will make a statement on the future of the construction industry training board.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am pleased to announce that the review of the construction industry training board has now been completed.

While it remains Government policy that sector training arrangements should normally be non-statutory, the Government are persuaded that different considerations apply in the building and civil engineering industries. My right hon. Friend has therefore decided that the CITB will be reconstituted as a statutory training board for a five-year period with effect from 1 May 1993.

Disabled People (Special Schemes)

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many places will be available in 1993-94 in the special schemes provided by the Employment Service for people with disabilities; what changes are planned in those programmes; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Employment Service's special assistance schemes for people with disabilities provide a wide range of help to overcome different kinds of problems faced by disabled people in obtaining and retaining employment. It is not possible to predict with precision the numbers of people with disabilities who will be helped or the kind of help they will need. However, in 1993-94, it is forecast that 13,140 grants to people with disabilities will be made under the main three schemes—special aids to employment, adaptations to premises and equipment and help with fares to work.

The Employment Service's planned expenditure for 1993-94 on special schemes for people with disabilities is £14·8 million.

The special schemes for people with disabilities are currently under review; an announcement about their future development will be made as soon as possible.

Trade Unions (Training)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much money is paid to trade unions for training.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 16 December 1992, *Official Report*, columns *254-55*.

Chemical Manufacturing Sites

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans she has to review the regulations and guidance on the design and location of control rooms and office accommodation at chemical manufacturing sites in the light of the explosion in September 1992 at Hickson and Welch of Castleford.

Mr. McLoughlin: On 22 September 1992 the Health and Safety Commission directed the Health and Safety Executive, under section 14(2) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, to hold a formal investigation into the incident at Hickson and Welch and to make a report. Once this has been concluded, the Health and Safety Executive will decide what action may then be appropriate.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many non-manual workers are unemployed on the basis used in the answer given on 30 October 1992, *Official Report*, column *911*; and what percentage of the work force this represents.

Mr. McLoughlin: The most recent figures from the summer, June to August, 1992 Labour Force Survey show 822,000—not seasonally adjusted—non-manual workers unemployed on the internationally agreed ILO definition. This represented 5·4 per cent. of all economically active non-manual workers in Great Britain.

Jobcentres

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many (*a*) casual staff, (*b*) temporary staff and (*c*) permanent staff she plans to shed from jobcentres; and if she will list the locations of the jobcentres affected.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 22 February 1993]:* Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Richard Burden, dated 23 February 1993:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to write to you direct to respond to your Parliamentary Question to her about the adjustment of staffing levels in Job Centres. This is something which falls within responsibilities she has delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

I must point out that the level of our workforce regularly fluctuates during the year to reflect local circumstances and seasonal trends in unemployment. Casual and temporary employees are always told that their appointments may be terminated at short notice, according to the local needs of the Employment Service.

We have no plans to cut the overall annual number of people employed to provide our services. Indeed, next year will see an increase in the number of people employed to provide our customers with a range of services to help them return to work. In 1993-94, we are funding our regions to employ some 47,800 people compared with some 44,500 at the start of 1992-93. This illustrates our firm commitment to meeting our clients needs.

I hope this is helpful.

As decided by the Administration Committee of the House of Commons, the Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary Questions will now be published in the *Official Report*. I will also place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Workers (Social Rights)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans she has to improve the availability in the United Kingdom of the second report of the European Commission on the application of the Community charter on fundamental social rights for workers; and what is the current price of the document.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 22 February 1993]:* The report in question is a Commission publication. In the United Kingdom the main agent for Commission documents is HMSO. The price of the report is £49·60. A copy of the report is available in the Library. The report can also be consulted free of charge at any of the four Commission offices, 47 European documentation centres or 26 European information centres in the United Kingdom.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Publicity

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 2 June 1992 to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), *Official Report*, column *430*, what is his Department's *(a)* current outturn estimate for publicity expenditure for 1992-93 and *(b)* budgeted publicity expenditure for 1993-94.

Mr. Curry: This Department's forecast outturn for paid publicity for 1992-93 is £4·5 million. Planned paid publicity expenditure for 1993-94 has been set at £4·8 million.

Pay Rates

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to retain the statutory basis for the system for determining pay in agriculture.

Mr. Curry: The agricultural minimum pay arrangements are scheduled for review later this year. On the basis of the outcome of the review, Agriculture Ministers will decide on the future of these arrangements, including their statutory basis.

Pesticides

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make available a freephone line for complaints and inquiries about toxic incidents involving pesticides.

Mr. Soames: The Health and Safety Executive is preparing a free leaflet for the general public explaining how to report incidents involving pesticides. The draft will be issued for external consultation shortly with a view to publication by the summer.

A freephone is available for reporting wildlife-related incidents. There are at present no plans to extend this facility.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what guidelines he has given to the Health and Safety Executive concerning dealing with complaints of ill effects stemming from pesticide handling.

Mr. Soames: The Department has not given the Health and Safety Executive any guidelines concerning dealing with complaints of ill effects stemming from pesticide handling. Procedures for dealing with such complaints are a matter for the Health and Safety Executive.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his latest estimate of the number of staff and contracted consultants that will be required in the United Kingdom to administer schemes under the reformed common agricultural policy.

Mr. Curry: Information on administration—staff numbers and running costs—for MAFF and the Intervention Board is set out in the departmental report on the Government's expenditure plans 1993-94 to 1995-96 which was published earlier this month. A copy has been placed in the Library. It is not possible to allocate a figure to the number of departmental staff purely working on duties connected with the common agricultural policy, including the reformed schemes, as the work of the Department is not recorded in a way which would enable the extraction of this figure without disproportionate cost. Almost all the staff in the Intervention Board executive agency, approximately 1,000, are directly involved in administering schemes under the CAP. Furthermore the Agriculture Departments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland also have responsibilities for certain CAP schemes. It is possible that contracted consultants may be employed to deal with some of the work involved with the CAP. The extent of such involvement has not yet been decided.

Sheep Annual Premium

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what would be the effect on the level of sheep annual premium of movements in the pound sterling/ecu exchange rate in the coming year to *(a)* 1·20 ecu, *(b)* 1·25 ecu or *(c)* 1·30 ecu.

Mr. Curry: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 22 February, *Official Report*, columns *472-73*.

Contracting Out

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will provide figures for the reduction in numbers of posts as a result of contracting out since 1979 in his Department and agencies for which he has responsibility.

Mr. Curry: In considering the effect on staff numbers a distinction has to be made between contracting out work previously carried out in-house and the contracting out of new work for which in-house staff would otherwise have had to be employed. Moreover, changes in workload in other areas may mean that staff from a contracted-out area are redeployed elsewhere without any overall reduction in numbers.

Since 1979 it is estimated that some 240 posts have been lost as a direct result of contracting out, but that potential increases of several hundred staff have also been avoided.

Abattoirs

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate his Department has made of the number of abattoirs that cannot afford to meet current meat hygiene regulations which will cease business in the next two years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: Any premises which could not comply with the structural requirements of the regulations on 1 January was able to apply for aid temporary derogation to enable it to continue to operate whilst it upgraded. These derogations may last until 31 December 1995, some four and a half years after the EC directive was published. My right hon. Friend the Minister and I have ensured that the regulations have been interpreted as flexibly and sensibly as possible without compromising hygiene.

So far some 544 slaughterhouses in the United Kingdom have applied for temporary derogations for varying times. We believe the applicants are committed to upgrading their structure and would expect them to have made adequate financial provision to finance the work. We have not been advised by any of them that they intended ceasing business in the next two years.

Levels of veterinary inspection are now considerably less than abattoirs would have expected them to be when they were drawing up their temporary derogation applications. We would expect the associated costs to have been a significant consideration in their financial projections.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will apply the criteria of the deregulation initiative to hygiene regulations governing abattoirs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: My right hon. Friend the Minister and I have sought always to ensure that the EC red meat directive has not been interpreted in Great Britain in an over-zealous or over-regulatory manner. We are both well seized of the need to apply the Fresh Meat Regulations pragmatically and sensitively; balancing the essential requirement of maintaining public confidence in the integrity of the food supply against the equally important responsibility to ensure that excessive burdens are not imposed on industry.

Departmental Fishery Vessels

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the vessels and tonnage of vessel owned or operated by his Department; and which are registered on the United Kingdom fishery register.

Mr. Curry: There are two vessels owned, and operated, by this Ministry on the fishing vessels register, namely research vessels Corystes of 1,280 gross registered tonnes and Cirolana of 1,759 gross registered tonnes, both engaged in fishery research and monitoring work.

Flooding

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food pursuant to his answer of 11 February, *Official Report*, column *783*, to the hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) on high tides in March, if he will now reconsider his policy on an evacuation exercise in the eastern counties set out in his answer of 8 February, *Official Report*, column *509*.

Mr. Curry: No. The points made in my answer of 8 February, *Official Report*, column *509*, remain valid.

DEFENCE

Ozone-depleting Chemicals

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which current uses of ozone-depleting chemicals by his Department are considered essential.

Mr. Aitken: Only a few critical applications of the ozone depleting substances within the Department are considered essential. These applications were rigorously selected in accordance with international criteria.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence by what date his Department's use of ozone-depleting chemicals will conform to EC Regulations on limits on these chemicals.

Mr. Aitken: Current EC regulations govern the supply of ozone-depleting substances, through production and consumption controls, to the market. No constraints are placed, other than by supply, on users such as the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what guidance has been sought and received on alternatives or substitutes to the ozone-depleting chemicals in use by his Department.

Mr. Aitken: The Department has sought and received guidance on alternatives or substitutes to the ozone-depleting substances it employs from a wide range of sources both at home and abroad. These include commercial specialists, Government Departments and agencies, consultants and British and foreign service users.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the Department's consumption of ozone-depleting substances become controlled waste in terms of section 33 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Mr. Aitken: All those ozone-depleting substances consumed by this Department, once removed from their existing systems, become Controlled Waste under Section 33 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what targets have been set for the recycling of ozone-depleting chemicals within departmental buildings.

Mr. Aitken: Most of the applications using such chemicals will be converted to use non-ozone-depleting alternatives. Any material withdrawn will be recycled.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the quantity of ozone-depleting substances recycled within his Department and returned to the manufacturer.

Mr. Aitken: The Department returns ozone-depleting substances to suppliers for recycling under a number of individual supply and maintenance contracts. Information on the quantities transferred could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much funding has been allocated or spent to specifically deal with measures to reduce his Department's consumption of ozone-depleting substances.

Mr. Aitken: The cost of our programme to phase out usage of ozone-depleting substances is being evaluated. However, £10 million has already been allocated for recycling and banking.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many catastrophic leaks of ozone-depleting substances have occurred within his Department's buildings in the last five years.

Mr. Aitken: Releases of ozone-depleting substances to the atmosphere have been monitored by my Department for the past three years. No major releases have been reported over that period.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures have been taken to ensure that ozone-destroying substances in use by his Department identified as controlled waste under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 do not reach the atmosphere.

Mr. Aitken: It is this Department's policy to prevent emissions of ozone-depleting substances to the atmosphere during maintenance, servicing, decommissioning and disposal. This is achieved through a wide range of measures, including the use of reclamation equipment and the provision of secondary seals.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide details from the maintenance and servicing record of the quantity and type of ozone-destroying chemicals used annually in the Department's refrigeration and air conditioning equipment for servicing and in leakages; and what proportion is removed for recycling.

Mr. Aitken: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action has been taken to ensure that ozone-destroying substances consumed by the Department are identified as controlled wastes when they are no longer in use.

Mr. Aitken: It is my Department's policy that all ozone-depleting substances when no longer required are treated as controlled waste, and disposed of in an environmentally acceptable manner.

Fire Extinguishers

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many portable halon fire extinguishers are contained within departmental buildings; and what measures are being taken to ensure their recycling and replacement.

Mr. Aitken: It would require a disproportionate cost and effort to establish the number of hand held Halon fire extinguishers currently in my Department's buildings. My Department has a programme to replace these fire extinguishers with non-ozone-depleting alternatives; withdrawn material will be recycled.

Ozone Layer (Protection)

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how the Departmental Green Minister has promoted protection of the ozone layer with specific policy measures; and which possible measures have been considered and rejected, and on what grounds.

Mr. Aitken: This Department's major protection initiatives include the cessation of venting to atmosphere and a programme to phase out uses of ozone-depleting substances. Only those critical uses which cannot be substituted will continue to be supported for a limited period.

Refrigerators

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many CFC domestic fridges are contained within his Department's buildings.

Mr. Aitken: There is no central register of domestic fridges held in departmental buildings. The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give an undertaking to purchase only ozone-friendly fridges that do not contain CFCs or HCFCs for his Department.

Mr. Aitken: Domestic fridges are replaced on an individual basis to the prevailing commercial standards. Bulk food storage facilities are to be redesigned to comply with the latest EC food storage requirements, and use of a non-ozone-depleting substance will be specified.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many refrigeration and air conditioning systems in his Department are equipped with automatic leak detection systems.

Mr. Aitken: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

CFCs and HCFCs

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the latest available figures are for his Department's total purchase of CFCs and HCFCs.

Mr. Aitken: The information requested is not held centrally and could not be provided without disproportionate cost and effort. However, a total of 114,300 kgs of CFCs and HCFCs have been procured through contracts let by my Department since January 1992.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many CFC and HCFC installations are contained within his Department's buildings.

Mr. Aitken: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Asbestos (Compensation Claims)

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many personnel who served with the Royal Navy during the second world war have made successful claims for compensation as a result of exposure to asbestos.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None.

Submarines

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to extend the subfacts scheme into the Minches; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is planned to extend the subfacts scheme to cover the Minches and the Sea of Hebrides. At present, we are considering, in consultation with the chief coastguard and others, the detailed practical arrangements for the operation of the scheme in these areas. An announcement will be made as soon as these arrangements have been decided.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to alter the code of conduct for submarines following the Lupina incident in September 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We shall consider whether changes to the arrangements governing the conduct of dived submarine operations in waters frequented by fishing vessels are warranted once the report by the United States authorities into the incident has been received and studied.

Armaments Exports

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the amount of military armaments exported by the United Kingdom in each year since 1979; what percentage was exported to *(a)* Africa, *(b)* Asia, *(c)* central America and *(d)* south America in each year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: A breakdown of the total value of defence exports by geographical region for 1975, 1980 and between 1985 and 1991 is given in the "Defence Statistics 1992 Edition", table 1.12, copies of which are in the Library of the House.

Military Land Byelaws

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many persons have been prosecuted under military land byelaws at *(a)* Fylingdales, *(b)* Molesworth, *(c)* Lakenheath, *(d)* Mildenhall, *(e)* Burghfield and *(f)* Aldermaston in (i) 1990, (ii) 1991 and (iii) 1992; what signs are displayed on this land warning citizens that byelaws will be enforced; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many persons were arrested under Her Majesty's Forest Moor and Menwith Hill station byelaws 1986 in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1991 and *(c)* 1992; how many such persons were convicted; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State will write to the hon. Member.

Surplus Equipment

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the current arrangements for disposal of his Department's equipment which is surplus to requirements; how decisions about which equipment is surplus are arrived at; who decides on the arrangements for disposal; what procedures there are for fixing reserve prices; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: Decisions on whether equipment is surplus to my Department's requirements take into account the required levels of spares holdings and the defence equipment programme. Authority for day-to-day decisions rests with the appropriate service commodity and supply manager in consultation with the technical and engineering authorities and operational sponsors. The directorate of sales (disposals) arrange sales of surplus equipment through Government-to-Government and Government-to-industry contracts, competitive tenders and public auctions. These take into account the type and condition of the equipment and the available market opportunities. Sales prices are determined by competition. Auction reserve prices are based on a technical assessment by the directorate's staff of expected saleability. Unsold and unsellable items are disposed of under waste contract arrangements.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 24 February 1993

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

High Court Judges

Mr. Ottaway: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he received a copy of the Kennedy working party report on High Court judges; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The report was received by the Lord Chancellor on 10 February 1993.

Legal Aid

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department whether he will publish the advice given to the Lord Chancellor by the Legal Aid Advisory Committee on his proposed changes in legal aid.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Legal Aid Advisory Committee has itself already made public its advice to the Lord Chancellor on the proposed eligibility changes and the Lord Chancellor's response to its advice. I have placed copies of the correspondence in the Library.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

European Communities (Amendment) Bill

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the legal issues in connection with the European Communities (Amendment) Bill on which he has made public statements, indicating on which of them he sought advice from *(a)* his Department's lawyers, *(b)* Crown Law Officers and *(c)* European Court legal advisers.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We have taken legal advice from various sources during the passage of the European Communities (Amendment) Bill. It is neither customary nor appropriate for me to reveal these sources.

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether legal advice was sought before 20 January on the effects of amending the European Communities (Amendment) Bill.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Yes.

Whitehead Detention Camp, Hong Kong

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many reported incidents there have been of *(a)* total number of crimes reported, *(b)* murders, *(c)* attempts to escape, *(d)* incidents of rape, *(e)* incidents of child sex abuse, *(f)* drug abuse, *(g)* abortions and *(h)* suicides for each year at the Whitehead detention camp in Hong Kong.

Mr. Goodlad: The figures for 1991 and 1992 are as follows:

	1991	1992
(a) Total number of crimes reported	844	588
(b) Murder cases	4	4
(c) Escapes	419	263
(d) Rape cases reported	2	2
(e) Reports of sex abuse	0	0
(f) Arrests involving dangerous drugs	5	7
(g) Illegal abortions	0	0
(h) Suicides	[1]0	1

[1] And two attempts.

Population of Whitehead Detention Centre

	Number
1 January 1991	22,528
1 January 1992	24,856

Official Entertainment

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much was spent on official entertainment in his Department during 1991-92 and 1992-93 to date.

Mr. Goodlad: The following was spent on entertainment by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Overseas Development Administration:

	£
1991-92	5,700,606
[1]1992-93	3,943,940

[1] To date.

Angola

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will support mandatory sanctions against UNITA, including the banning of all lethal and non-lethal supplies and all flights to and from UNITA-controlled areas of Angola.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Resolution 804, adopted by the United Nations Security Council on 29 January, urged members to cease the supply of lethal material to any Angolan party. We keep the situation under review, but do not believe that mandatory sanctions could be effectively applied against UNITA.

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what efforts he is making to promote the ending of the current conflict in Angola through the implementation of the peace accords which were agreed with the Angolan Government on 31 May 1991.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Government fully support United Nations efforts to promote dialogue between the Government of Angola and UNITA with a view to agreeing a ceasefire and full implementation of the Bicesse peace accords. With our EC partners, we have urged UNITA to agree a date for a further meeting with the Government of Angola to be held under United Nations auspices in Addis Ababa, and to agree to a truce in the besieged city of Huambo.

Kenya

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of *(a)* the treatment of ethnic and political minorities in Kenya and *(b)* other aspects of the present human rights situation; and what advice he has given to the Kenyan Government about the necessary human rights provisions in Kenya for the continued provision of aid.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have expressed concern at the highest levels over recent renewed outbreaks of ethnic clashes and have stressed the importance of the Kenyan Government providing security for all Kenyan citizens. My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development has also raised concerns over Kenya's human rights performance, a key factor which Her Majesty's Government take into account when allocating aid.

South Africa

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement concerning the European Community observer mission in South Africa.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The European Community observer mission in South Africa—ECOMSA—is making a valuable contribution to defusing violence and reducing tensions. ECOMSA, together with the Commonwealth team, has been particularly praised for its professionalism, and has rapidly built extensive relations with, for example, local political organisations, peace accord structures and the South African police. They have the advantage of comprising several senior serving police officers with experience in, for example, community policing.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the terms of reference of the European Community observer mission in South Africa; what is the period of the mandate of the mission; what is the size of the mission; what is the number of members from each EC member state; and in which areas of South Africa it is operating.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The European Community observer mission in South Africa was deployed in accordance with the terms of Security Council resolution 772 to work in association with other international observer groups and the structures of the national peace accord as part of their efforts to reduce tension and end violence.

The mission was initially deployed for six months, with effect from October 1992, and comprises 15 members contributed from member states as follows:

	Number
United Kingdom	2
Denmark	2
France	1
Germany	2
Greece	1
Ireland	2
Netherlands	2
Portugal	1
EC Commission	2

The EC observers are at present deployed with six members at the ECOMSA headquarters in Johannesberg, four members in Durban and two members in East London and Cape Town respectively.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans there are to extend the period of the mandate of the European Community observer mission in South Africa beyond the current expiry date.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: This is under consideration among the Twelve. A decision is expected shortly.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements have been made for the European Community observer mission in South Africa to report to *(a)* the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, *(b)* the Council of Ministers, *(c)* the structures of European political co-operation, *(d)* the Commission of the European Communities, *(e)* the European Parliament and *(f)* the national parliaments of the member states of the European Community.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Regular reports are submitted to the presidency. These are made available for discussion as necessary by European Community Foreign Ministers. They are also circulated to all member states and can be drawn on to inform their parliaments as appropriate.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recommendations the European Community observer mission in South Africa has made to *(a)* the presidency and *(b)* the Council of Ministers.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: To date, the reports of the European Community observer mission in South Africa have been factual commentaries on the situation and about action engaged in by team members.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on which dates the Council of Ministers has discussed the question of the European Community observer mission to South Africa since October 1992.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: This matter has not been discussed by the Council of Ministers since October 1992.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consideration the Council of Ministers has given to the possibility of expanding the European Community observer mission to South Africa and extending its mandate when agreement is reached on the calling of one person one vote elections.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: This question has not yet been considered by the Council of Ministers. Any election-monitoring mission would be different in nature, and would probably have to operate separately, from the current observer exercise.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many United Kingdom citizens are currently attached to *(a)* the United Nations observer mission to South Africa, *(b)* the European Community observer mission to South Africa, *(c)* the Commonwealth observer group to South Africa and *(d)* the Goldstone commission.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: There are three United Kingdom citizens currently serving with the United Nations observer mission to South Africa, two with the European Community observer mission, one with the Commonwealth observer group to South Africa, and one with the Goldstone commission.

TRANSPORT

Suffolk Railways

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the money to be spent on *(a)* safety and *(b)* capital investment by regional railways in Suffolk in the next financial year.

Mr. Freeman: The disaggregation of expenditure at this level is a matter for British Rail. It is for BR to determine what safety-related expenditure is required in each area and how the available capital investment resources should be shared out.

Consultants

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the contracts awarded by his Department to *(a)* Coopers and Lybrand management consultants, *(b)* Touche Ross management consultants, *(c)* Price Waterhouse management consultants, *(d)* Ernst and Young management consultants, *(e)* Chrichton Roberts Ltd., *(f)* KPMG management consultants and *(g)* Leopold Joseph management consultants, with the total cost of the contracts with each contractor, for (i) the past 12 months and (ii) 1991-92.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The following contracts were awarded by the Department of Transport:

(i) THE PAST 12 MONTHS:

(a) *Coopers Lybrand Management Consultants*—
A Review of the Inspectorate's Performance Measures.
DVOIT Job Costing.
TRL's Temporary Finance Director.
Independent Assessment and Review of Sale of Marks—Market Testing Assignment.

Total cost £178,000.

b. *Touche-Ross Management Consultants*—
HQ Accommodation Study.
Preparation of an Operation Requirement for Design and Development of a Property Management Information System for PMT.
Preparation of an OR for a Property Management Information System.

Total cost £143,000.

c. *Price Waterhouse Management Consultants*—
Advice on personnel arrangements.

Total cost £68,000.

d. *Ernst and Young Management Consultants*—
Development of Decision Framework to Assist DOT with European Standardisation.
Commission to Design, Develop and Implement a Payroll Modelling System.
HQ Accommodation Management Implementation Study.
IS/IT Scoping Study.
IS/IT Full Study.

Total cost £380,000.

e. *Chrichton Roberts Ltd.*

Total cost Nil.

f. *KPMG Management Consultants*—
Pilot Implementation of Project Management Software.
Implementation Study—Business Analysis—Extension to cover Local Authority Issues.
Advice on Networking Policy.
Network referencing Phase 1

Total cost £403,000.

g. *Leopold Joseph Management Consultants*—

Total cost Nil.

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ii. *1991-92*

a. *Coopers Lybrand Management Consultants*—
DVOIT Agency Implementation Support.
Study of EC Directive and Rail Liberalisation.

Total cost £591,000.

b. *Touche-Ross Management Consultants*—
Accommodation Management Information Study.
Property management information system for AOSD.

Total cost £105,000.

c. *Price Waterhouse Management Consultants*

Total cost Nil.

d. *Ernst Young Management Consultants*—
Study of the Options of a Payroll Modelling System for PMT.
Preparation for the Design and Development of Payroll Modelling System.

Total cost £66,000.

e. *Chrichton Roberts Ltd.*

Total cost Nil.

f. *KPMG Management Consultants*—
Assisting in Developing a Management Accounting Model.
PMS DOT Implementation Study—Business Analysis.
Information Systems Strategy for the Vehicle Inspectorate.

Total cost £205,000.

g. *Leopold Joseph Management Consultants*—

Total cost Nil.

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many contracts for consultancies were awarded by his Department over *(a)* the last 12 months and *(b)* 1991-92.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The following consultancy contracts, including management consultancies, were awarded by the Department of Transport over:

(a) Last 12 months: 298 and *(b)* 1991-92: 288.

In the case of both *(a)* and *(b)* the majority of contracts are in the general and research areas—management consultancy contracts are not a high proportion of the total numbers.

Publicity

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 2 June 1992 to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), *Official Report*, columns *510-11*, what is his Department's *(a)* current outturn estimate for publicity expenditure for 1992-93 and *(b)* budgeted publicity expenditure for 1993-94.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The current estimated outturn for publicity expenditure for 1992-93 by my Department is £8·78 million. The 1993-94 estimates will be considered by Parliament on 9 March, after which budgets will be published. The budget for 1993-94 is expected to be in line with 1992-93 expenditure in real terms. These estimates do not include publicity expenditure by the Department's executive agencies.

Cyclists

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if his Department will introduce a public campaign on the need for cyclists to have both a front and rear light when riding a pedal cycle during the hours of darkness; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: My Department is planning to launch a cycling safety campaign in March and our publicity material will include advice on the use of lights by cyclists.

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he proposes to introduce to stop motorists driving too close to motor cyclists and pedal cyclists.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Advice to motorists to give cyclists plenty of room is contained in the "Highway Code", "The Driving Manual", "Your Driving Test" and a leaflet currently being issued with vehicle excise duty reminders.

Pedestrian Crossings

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what conclusions the Transport Research Laboratory has come to for the criteria which need to be applied to the installation of pedestrian crossings and islands to meet the needs of vulnerable people; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The Transport Research Laboratory has carried out research into pedestrians' use of crossings, the effectiveness of the crossings and accidents which occur.

As a result, the assessment criteria for the provision of pedestrian crossing facilities are being revised to remove the existing numerical criteria and encourage more account to be taken of local needs.

The new Puffin pedestrian crossing which is being developed makes it easier and safer for all pedestrians. it automatically extends the crossing time as needed for elderly and disabled pedestrians. The TRL is continuing to monitor and assess the new crossing design.

Advice has been issued to local authorities on the provision of dropped kerbs and tactile paving at pedestrian crossing points to improve the safe and independent mobility of wheelchair users and visually impaired people.

Severn Crossing

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many representations he has received since May 1992 concerning developing *(a)* the current Severn bridge and *(b)* the second Severn crossing as toll-free bridges.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: We have received since May 1992 some 150 representations about the reduction or removal of the tolls specified in the Severn Bridges Act 1992. Very few of them distinguish between the two bridges.

Electric Cars

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research has been undertaken by his Department on the possible use and development of electric cars in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The Transport Research Laboratory is soon to complete a review of worldwide research and experience in the use and environmental impact of alternative fuels including electricity. This covers various road vehicles including cars. It will draw on earlier TRL work on electric vehicles which included published reports on their market prospects, energy consumption and refuelling infrastructure.

The Department is also funding a study examining the feasibility of limited in-service field trials of vehicles using a range of alternative fuels including electricity.

In addition, engineers in the Department continue to keep abreast of electric vehicle developments worldwide, and I welcome the continuing efforts by manufacturers to develop advanced batteries and more competitive electric vehicles.

British Rail (Public Service Obligation)

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the relationship between the public service obligation grant for 1993-94 and the 1988 public service obligation directive to British Rail; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Public service obligation grant is paid to meet the cost to British Rail of compliance with the obligation laid down, which is currently defined in the Secretary of State's direction of 30 March 1988. Payments made in the years since the direction was issued have varied according to need. The Government's initial estimate of grant needed for 1993-94 is £850 million, but the amount to be paid will be settled in the light of the board's budget, still in preparation, and may be subject to subsequent adjustment.

Coaches

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the difference between the minimum standards of construction for coaches registered in the United Kingdom for coaches which do not exceed 60 mph and those for coaches which travel at speeds up to 70 mph; and if he will exempt coaches which do not exceed 60 mph from the requirement to have seat belts fitted even in exposed seats.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Coaches and large buses that can exceed 60 mph are required to have anti-lock brakes and seat belts on exposed seats and, from 1 April 1993, to comply with European superstructure strength requirements.

These features are not required for large buses that cannot exceed 60 mph. They operate normally at low speed on short town and city routes. The need for belts and the likelihood of their being used are less than on faster long-distance coaches and we have no plans to make them compulsory.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to tighten up regulations on the construction of coaches registered in the United Kingdom which travel at speeds not exceeding 60 mph.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No, but I intend to monitor the situation. If it becomes apparent that coach operators are generally using vehicles of lower than appropriate safety standards, I will consider new measures.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport from what year coaches will be restricted to a maximum speed of 100 kilometres per hour *(a)* on the continent and *(b)* in the United Kingdom; what effect these restrictions will have on the safety standards of coaches manufactured in the United Kingdom; and what representations he has received from coach manufacturers on this subject.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: EC directive 92/6 requires speed limiters on new coaches to be set at 100 km/h from 1 January 1994. It will also apply to coaches registered after 1 January 1988 from 1 January 1995 if the coach is used for international transport and from 1 January 1996 if the coach is used for national transport. We will be consulting shortly on draft regulations to implement the directive.

The safety standards applying to the construction of coaches are not directly affected by the directive.

I have been approached on the subject of safety by one United Kingdom coach manufacturer.

Rail Privatisation

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what are the costs so far to *(a)* British Rail and *(b)* his Department of preparing for the privatisation of railways;

(2) what are *(a)* the staff costs and *(b)* the consultancy fees he expects (i) British Rail and (ii) his Department to incur in 1992-93 and 1993-94 in preparing for privatisation;

(3) what sums *(a)* British Rail and *(b)* his Department have budgeted for 1993-94 to meet the cost of preparing for rail privatisation.

Mr. Freeman The Department of Transport's internal BR privatisation costs cannot be separately identified before September 1991. The following costs include those of special advisers where appropriate:

	£ million
1991-92	0·5
1992-93 estimated outturn	1·5
1993-94 expected expenditure	9·5
Consultants' costs:	
1991-92	0·5
1992-93 estimated outturn	5·2
1993-94 expected expenditure	12·0

British Rail's costs and estimates are a matter for British Rail.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Listed Buildings

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to transfer the responsibility for grade I listed buildings from English Heritage to local authorities.

Mr. Brooke: English Heritage's forward strategy, published last October, proposed certain changes to responsibilities for grade II listed building and conservation area casework in London. Revised proposals have recently been put to me following public consultation, and I am considering them. The strategy proposed no change in current responsibilities for grade II buildings outside London.

Football Licensing Authority

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when the Football Licensing Authority will begin to issue licences; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: Licensing will be introduced in time for the start of the 1993-94 football season in August. Accordingly, section 9 of the Football Spectators Act, which creates the offence of admitting spectators to unlicensed premises, will be brought into force during the close season.

I also intend to use the powers conferred on me by section 11 of the 1989 Act to make an order ensuring that clubs in the Premier League and first division meet the August 1994 deadline for all-seater stadiums. I will therefore begin shortly the statutory consultations which will lead to the inclusion of seating requirements in next year's licences.

Initially, I intend to levy only a nominal fee of £100. The level of the fee will be kept under review, and is likely later to be raised to reflect more closely the full costs involved in determining the licence conditions.

The Government continue to support the principles of spectator safety and comfort as set out in the Taylor report. We remain firmly committed to the all seater requirement for the top two divisions, and to the implementation of safe terracing for those in the lower divisions that choose not to provide all-seating. The introduction of licensing will be a major step in achieving these aims.

HEALTH

Nursing Care Beds

Ms. Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nursing care beds for elderly people were available in hospitals in each regional health authority in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 19 February 1993]:* The average number of available beds in wards caring for elderly patients is given in the table. There is no separate classification of "nursing care beds".

Average number of available beds in wards caring for elderly patients

	1982	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*
England	55,646	55,801	55,571	55,320	54,588	53,275	51,042	48,733	45,902	42,107
Northern	3,809	3,885	3,894	3,940	3,949	4,075	3,958	3,834	3,683	3,435
Yorkshire	5,090	5,041	4,938	4,960	4,827	4,621	4,291	4,136	3,909	3,575
Trent	5,204	5,229	5,233	5,237	5,263	5,116	4,901	4,655	4,411	4,050
East Anglian	2,372	2,417	2,452	2,467	2,497	2,539	2,500	2,432	2,373	2,240
North West Thames	3,366	3,329	3,380	3,417	3,460	3,386	3,305	3,329	3,173	2,808
North East Thames	4,555	4,574	4,635	4,636	4,614	4,260	3,972	3,878	3,483	3,179
South East Thames	4,237	4,233	4,088	3,985	3,740	3,535	3,384	3,324	3,212	2,903
South West Thames	3,064	3,035	2,975	2,907	2,878	2,832	2,834	2,555	2,566	2,422
Wessex	3,543	3,510	3,477	3,468	3,433	3,203	3,022	2,923	2,780	2,765
Oxford	2,027	2,006	1,974	1,866	1,825	2,054	1,832	1,819	1,647	1,457
South Western	3,771	3,848	3,807	3,782	3,720	3,486	3,464	3,366	3,240	2,925
West Midlands	6,256	6,230	6,235	6,176	6,054	6,004	5,665	5,084	4,846	4,434
Mersey	3,136	3,171	3,180	3,120	3,042	2,909	2,786	2,523	2,047	1,870
North Western	5,135	5,193	5,175	5,230	5,161	5,128	5,001	4,747	4,406	3,916
Special Health Authorities	80	102	127	130	126	128	128	128	127	127

Source: SH3 1982-1986
KHO3 1987-88 to 1991-92

NATIONAL FINANCE

Alcohol Imports

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would the average tax saving be in *(a)* excise duty and *(b)* VAT to an individual buying the full indicative allowance of beer in France and importing into the United Kingdom for personal consumption, compared with purchasing the same amount in the United Kingdom.

Sir John Cope: The guidance level for duty paid beer is 110 litres. On beer of typical strength, the excise duty in the United Kingdom is 41p per litre or £45·10 for 110 litres compared with £2·57 for 110 litres in France. French duty is due to rise from 2p to 7·5p a litre or £8·25 for 110 litres in May. The United Kingdom applies a VAT rate of 17·5 per cent. on beer compared with 18·6 per cent. in France. The amount of VAT that is liable on 110 litres of beer in either country will vary according to the product.

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many arrests have been made by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise verification officers since 1 January of persons illegally selling alcohol bought in France or Belgium at lower excise duty rates and imported to the United Kingdom ostensibly for personal use.

Sir John Cope: In January, Customs detected 36 cases of illegal sales of excise goods. Of these, 13 related to alcohol. Customs take legal proceedings by way of arrest when appropriate, but other options, such as proceeding by way of information and summons, are also available. Two arrests were made. Other forms of offence action have been taken or are being considered in the remaining cases.

Manufacturing Investment

Ms. Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has about the level of manufacturing investment in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1991 and *(c)* 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: Estimates of manufacturing investment for 1990, 1991 and 1992 at constant prices were published in the 1992 fourth quarter capital expenditure press notice released by the Central Statistical Office on 11 February 1993. The 1992 figure is provisional. Copies of the press notice are available in the House of Commons Library.

Monetary Policy

Ms. Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which monetary aggregate takes precedence in the formation of policy in the event of M0 rising above and M4 falling below their respective target ranges.

Mr. Nelson: Current spending in the economy has in the past been more closely related to M0 than to M4. The authorities also take account of a number of other domestic indicators, as well as the exchange rate, in their monetary policy decisions.

Bank Notes

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the cost of redesigning and issuing the new £5, £10 and £20 Bank of England notes; and what will be the cost of redesigning and reissuing revised notes which are easier to distinguish from each other.

Mr. Nelson: The cost of designing the new £5, £10 and £20 Bank of England notes, including subsequent changes in design, falls within the normal research and development expenditure of the Bank of England printing works which amounts to some £750,000 a year.

In introducing the new series of banknotes, the opportunity was taken to incorporate features in the design and in the printing processes which reduced the cost of producing notes. The cost of printing and issuing banknotes amounts to some £60 million a year. The revised versions of the new notes will be issued in the normal course of replacing worn notes, so there will be no additional issuing costs.

Imports

Ms. Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the effect of the change in the value of the pound sterling since 14 September 1992 on the cost of imports in the last quarter of 1992.

Mr. Nelson: In addition to the external value of the pound, import prices depend on world prices and importers' profit margins. Thus, it is not possible precisely to isolate the impact of the change in the exchange rate.

Publicity

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 2 June 1992 to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), *Official Report*, column *397*, what is his Department's *(a)* current outturn estimate for publicity expenditure for 1992-93 and *(b)* budgeted publicity expenditure for 1993-94.

Mr. Nelson: The estimated spending on publicity during 1992-93 is £32,000. This is lower than the figure given on 2 June and the difference mainly results from the transfer of Chessington computer centre from the Treasury to the Office of Public Service and Science. Budgeted expenditure for 1993-94 is £50,000.

Retail Sales

Ms. Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has about the level of retail sales in *(a)* November 1992 and *(b)* January 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: The estimate of the volume of retail sales —seasonally adjusted—in November 1992 is 121·6; 1985 = 100. The provisional estimate for January 1993 is 122·3. The level of sales volumes in the three months to January equalled the record level recorded in the three months to November.

Environmental Protection

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact on environmental protection of a windfall tax on the utility companies.

Mr. Dorrell: None, but in the absence of other changes, an increase in the tax burden on utilities would reduce the resources available to them.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the scope and value of tax incentives for companies for environmental protection projects for the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Dorrell: There are no specific incentives for companies' environmental projects, but the taxation system as a whole contains many incentives to protect the environment. These include the level of hydrocarbon oils duties and capital allowances which already cover energy saving investment.

Windfall Tax

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many times a windfall tax has been levied since 1961; which types of companies were affected; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The term "windfall tax" is not clearly defined. Development gains tax—1973—development land tax—1976—the tax on banks' interest-free deposits —1981—and supplementary petroleum duty—1981— were introduced in response to what were seen as exceptionally high profits. The first two applied to gains on disposals of development land by firms in any sector, the third to the banking sector and the last to the oil industry.

Environmental Variables

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what efforts have been made to date to integrate environmental variables into national accounting systems.

Mr. Nelson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on 8 December 1992, at columns *571-72*.

Cycle Helmets

Miss Lestor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about zero rating cycle helmets for VAT purposes; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Cope: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations on this subject and these will be carefully considered in the run-up to the Budget. The hon. Member will appreciate that it would be inappropriate for me to comment further at this stage.

EC Abatement Procedure

Mr. Booth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much the abatement procedure has reduced the United Kingdom net payments to the European Community since 1985.

Sir John Cope: By the end of 1992, the abatement had reduced the United Kingdom's net payments to the European Community budget by £11,843 million. The table shows the level of abatement received each year since 1985.

£ million

Year	*Abatement*
1985	166
1986	1,701
1987	1,153
1988	1,594
1989	1,154
1990	1,697
1991	2,497
1992	1,881

Capital Gains Tax

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the annual yield from capital gains tax in each year since 1979-80.

Mr. Dorrell: The requested information is given in table 1.2 of the 1992 edition of "Inland Revenue Statistics". A revised estimate for the yield in 1992-93 will be published on Budget day in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1993-94".

RPI Advisory Committee

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to receive a report from the Retail Prices Index Advisory Committee.

Mr. Lamont *[pursuant to the reply, 21 January 1993, c. 344]:* I have today received a supplementary report from the Retail Prices Index Advisory Committee on the treatment in the index of council tax transitional relief. The supplementary report is being published this afternoon as Cm 2153 and copies are available in the Vote Office.

Personal Income Tax

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the net revenue forgone in each financial year as a result of the reductions in personal income tax for higher rate taxpayers introduced by the Finance Act 1988 in the light of Government receipts since then.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 22 February 1993]:* The table shows the direct revenue costs in a full year compared with reintroduced tax rates of 45, 50, 55 and 60 per cent. The band widths for the tax rate schedule have been calculated by uprating the corresponding parts of the 1987-88 regime by movements in the retail prices index as in the statutory indexation formula. The estimates take account of the introduction of independent taxation from 1990-91 and the restriction of mortgage interest relief to the basic rate from 1991-92.

Estimated change in tax revenue at rates in excess of 40 per cent.

Year	*£ billion*
1988-89	2·6
1989-90	3·2
1990-91	3·7
[1]1991-92	3·9
[1]1992-93	3·8

[1] Provisional estimates.

The estimates do not allow for any behavioural effect that might have resulted had the tax rates above 40 per cent. been retained, and do not include capital gains tax.

Maastricht Treaty

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update the table given in his answer of 21 January, *Official Report*, columns *339-40*, relating to the convergence criteria of the Maastricht treaty.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 23 February 1993]:* Following is the updated table as requested.

	Latest inflation[1]	*Budget balance*[2]	*General government debt*[3]	*Long-term bond yield*[4]
Belgium	2·8	−6·7	130·6	7·7
Denmark	1·5	−2·3	72·7	8·7
France	2·0	−2·8	49·1	7·8
Germany[5]	4·4	−3·2	47·6	6·9
Greece	14·4	−13·4	104·0	n.a.
Ireland	2·3	−2·7	96·4	9·9
Italy	4·3	−10·5	105·4	13·0
Luxembourg	2·6	−0·4	5·3	7·7
Netherlands	2·5	−3·5	80·6	6·8
Portugal	8·5	−5·6	66·7	11·3
Spain	5·4	−4·6	46·6	11·5
United Kingdom	1·7	−6·1	43·7	7·9

[1] Latest percentage change in consumer prices on year ago.

[2] 1992 general government financial balance (as a percentage of GDP). European Economy (January/February 1993).

[3] 1992 gross debt of general government (as a percentage of GDP), estimates taken from European Economy (May 1992).

[4] Yield on fixed interest government securities on February 18th 1993, except Ireland (December 1992) and Portugal (November 1992).

[5] Inflation and government debt figures are for western Germany.

Source: OECD and Eurostat.

Public Expenditure Programme

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what meetings he or his departmental officials have had with representatives of the International Monetary Fund in the United Kingdom at which he or they have discussed with them the Government's public expenditure programmes.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 23 February 1993]:* Under article IV of the articles of agreement of the International Monetary Fund, fund staff carry out regular surveillance of the economies of the member countries. Fund staff visited the United Kingdom on 1 to 11 December 1992 for its annual article IV consultation. This consultation covered all aspects of the Government's economic policy, including public expenditure.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Flood Prevention, Stanmore

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will hold urgent discussions with the National Rivers Authority and the London borough of Harrow on the need for flood prevention remedial measures to protect residents in certain areas of Stanmore, Middlesex.

Mr. Curry: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food makes grant available to the National Rivers Authority, local authorities and other bodies towards the cost of flood defence schemes which are technically sound, economically worth while and environmentally sympathetic. In the case referred to, the Ministry has indicated that any scheme put forward by the responsible local bodies will be sympathetically considered against the criteria laid down. I understand that the National Rivers Authority is working on designing a suitable scheme and is in contact with the Ministry's river and coastal engineers.

Marine Laboratories

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what consultations he has had with *(a)* staff, *(b)* the fishing industry, *(c)* local councils, and *(d)* hon. or right hon. Members regarding the possibility of conferring next steps agency status on the marine laboratory in Lowestoft; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what consideration he has given to conferring next steps agency status on the marine laboratory in Lowestoft; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what plans he has for the rationalisation or amalgamation of services provided by the marine laboratory facilities in Aberdeen and Lowestoft; and if he will make a statement;

(4) what assessment has been made of the implications for organisational and departmental responsibilities of the assumption of next steps agency status by one or both of the present marine laboratory facilities in Aberdeen and Lowestoft; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Staff representatives were informed last July that a study group had been established to review the merits of a move to next steps agency status for the MAFF directorate of fisheries research. My right hon. Friend is currently considering the issues raised by this review in consultation with colleagues and will report his decision to the House in the normal way.

Salmonella

Mr. Spring: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what further advice he has on salmonella in eggs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer *[pursuant to his reply, 9 February 1993, c. 556-58]:* I have today made an order revoking the Poultry Laying Flocks (Testing and Registration etc) Order 1989, as amended. Commercial egg laying flocks will no longer be required to be registered or tested for the presence of salmonella.

I previously announced that, in the light of the expert advice from the committee chaired by Professor Heather Dick, and in accordance with the new EC zoonoses directive, the compulsory slaughter of commercial egg-laying flocks infected with salmonella enteritidis would no longer be required: this change will take effect tomorrow.

Pea Crop

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the precise criteria for the derogation for this season's vining pea crop from the set-aside regime.

Mr. Curry: Vining peas are not covered by the arable area payments scheme, which includes provision for set aside. However, there is a derogation for those who can demonstrate that they had sown, or were committed to sowing, vining peas before 17 November 1992 and who wish to claim aid on their vining peas for 1993. Any such growers will have to apply to their regional service centre or local area office for a vining pea claim form and to return it by 15 May 1993. They will have to confirm that they have sown by that date and to sign the following undertaking and provide the supporting information mentioned.

DECLARATION ON VINING PEAS

1. I understand that vining peas have been removed from the list of crops eligible for arable area aid. I am, however, claiming aid in 1993 for vining peas under the derogation in Commission Regulation 3738/92 which permits me to do so. *I certify that prior to 17 November 1992, I was already committed to growing vining peas* in the expectation of receiving area payments, because either:

2. I had prior to that date already entered into a binding contract with a buyer or processor for vining peas which is still in force, and had therefore committed myself to setting aside land in the expectation of planting vining peas on other land and receiving aid in respect of them and could not have changed my plans on or after 17 November 1992 without suffering adverse financial consequences: *I attach a copy of the contract;* or

3. Although I had not entered into a contract as referred to in (2) above, I can demonstrate that before 17 November 1992 I had made a farm plan committing myself to setting aside particular land in the expectation of planting vining peas on other land and receiving aid in respect of them and could not have changed my plans on or after 17 November 1992 without suffering adverse financial consequences. *I attach a copy of the dated farm plan covering all arable crops and intended set aside land and an explanation of my claim that, had I changed my plans on or after 17 November 1992, I would have necessarily suffered adverse financial consequences.*

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Aid Debt

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list each write-off of aid debt approved since 1 January 1987, with the date and sum involved.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The following aid debt agreements have been signed since 1 January 1987:

Country	*Debt agreement*	*Signed*	*Value (£)*
Senegal	"United Kingdom/Senegal retrospective terms agreement 1988"	29 August 1988	1,070,878·57
Guyana	"United Kingdom/Guyana debt rescheduling arrangement 1989"	29 August 1990	5,457,440·55
Egypt	"United Kingdom/Egypt retrospective terms agreement 1991"	25 July 1991	7,020,961·00
Jamaica	"United Kingdom/Jamaica debt waiver arrangement 1991"	30 April 1992	9,541,265·73
Bolivia	"United Kingdom/Bolivia retrospective terms agreement 1992"	9 June 1992	1,053,256·48
Honduras	"United Kingdom/Honduras retrospective terms agreement 1992"	21 August 1992	5,000,000·00
Total			29,143,802·33

In addition we have agreed to write off £56 million of Zambia's aid debt with effect from 1 April 1993, provided that Zambia's economic reform programme stays on track. Aid agreements with a number of other countries were signed prior to 1 January 1987.

The forgiveness of aid debt has in recent years been only a small part of our wider initiatives through Toronto and Trinidad terms to relieve debt and debt servicing payment by developing countries.

Thailand

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much aid per year the British Government give to Thailand, how much aid is given *(a)* to the Government and *(b)* to non-governmental organisations; and what the aid is used for.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: In the last three years for which figures are available, gross United Kingdom bilateral aid expenditure to Thailand was as follows:

(£'000)

	1989-90	*1990-91*	*1991-92*
(a) Official channels	11,318	9,071	3,644
(b) Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs)	362	458	423
	11,680	9,529	4,067

Multilateral aid to Thailand attributed to the United Kingdom is estimated to have been £3,320,000 in 1989, the latest available figure.

The totals at *(a)* comprise assistance under the aid and trade provision, principally the supply of locomotives, funds from the Commonwealth Development Corporation—present coverage includes development finance, housing, industry and natural resources—disaster relief, drug-related aid, and technical co-operation projects focused on United Kingdom training, English language teaching, flax processing, water, sanitation and public administration.

The aid through NGOs *(b)* covers a host of sectors including social and women's development, environmental conservation, income generation, education, health and agriculture, and includes work with prostitutes and street children through Christian Aid.

Angola

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what efforts are being made to supply emergency aid to Angola.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We maintain close contact with British non-governmental organisations which are assessing how best to help meet current needs. Security problems are making assessment difficult.

Following the destruction of Luanda's water treatment works, we have contributed £45,000 to One World Action, a non-governmental organisation, which is running a community-based cholera prevention programme.

Poland and Hungary (Assistance for Economic Restructuring)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a list of the current application of the PHARE funds by *(a)* cost, *(b)* purpose of each project, *(c)* country where funds are to be used and *(d)* the British firms or institutions involved.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The list of current PHARE-funded projects is extensive. EC Commission documents containing information on their cost, purpose and recipient country have been placed in the Libraries of the House. Details of the involvement of British firms and institutions are not available in the form requested.

Kenya (Elections)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) how many ballot papers were supplied by the British Government for the recent Kenyan elections; and how many were necessary for meeting the legitimate voting needs of the Kenyan electorate;

(2) for what reasons the ballot papers for the recent Kenyan elections were supplied by the British Government rather than by the European Community.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The British Government did not supply any ballot papers for the recent Kenyan elections.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many ballot boxes were supplied by the British Government for the recent elections in Kenya; how many were calculated as necessary for the elections; and how many were thought to be surplus to immediate requirements.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The British Government supplied 35,000 ballot boxes in accordance with the requirement for the elections calculated by the Kenyan electoral commission.

Commonwealth of Independent States

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a list of the current application of TACIS—technical assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent States—funds by *(a)* cost, *(b)* purpose of each project, *(c)* destination for funds and *(d)* the British firms or institutions involved.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The list of current TACIS-funded projects is extensive. EC Commission documents containing information on their cost, purpose and recipient country are now available in the Libraries of the House. Details of the involvement of British firms and institutions are not available in the form requested.

Development Banks

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of the capital of *(a)* the World bank, *(b)* the Latin American development bank, *(c)* the African development bank and *(d)* the Asian development bank is held by the United Kingdom; and what sum has been paid in.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The United Kingdom's present shareholdings are detailed in the table.

Bank	*Total United Kingdom shares*	*Percentage of total subscribed capital*	*Value (US$ million)*	*Cumulative amount paid in (US$ million)*	*Cumulative percentage shareholding paid in*
World bank	69,397	5·50	8,372	539·5	6·44
Inter-American	32,839	0·97	580·4	25·2	4·34
Asian	36,131	2·24	516·8	62·0	11·99
African[1]	22,564	1·39	225·6 SDRsmn	28·2 SDRsmn	12·58

Notes:

[1] African Development Bank shareholdings are expressed in Bank Units of Account (BUA) which are equivalent to Special Drawing Rights (SDRs).

NB: These figures do not include the funds the United Kingdom has contributed to the concessional lending funds of the banks.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the level of arrears owed to *(a)* the World bank, *(b)* the Latin American development bank, *(c)* the African development bank and *(d)* the Asian development bank in each of the past three years.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The information requested is detailed in the table:

Institution	*Arrears at end 1990 US $ million*	*Arrears at end 1991 US $ million*	*Arrears at end 1992 US $ million*
World Bank	2,420	1,937	1,974
Inter-American Development Bank	704	190	13
Asian Development Bank	31	33	31
African Development Bank	[1]143	[1]177	[1]282

[1] African Development Bank Group arrears are expressed in Special Drawing Rights (SDRs).

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of the funds disbursed under the auspices of the World bank's special programme for Africa originate from *(a)* the European Community and *(b)* the United Kingdom bilateral aid program.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: According to information from the World bank, 7·3 per cent. of the funds disbursed under the auspices of the World bank's special programme for Africa up to June 1992 came from the European Community and 6·4 per cent. from the United Kingdom bilateral aid programme.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington), of 11 December 1992, *Official Report*, column *816*, on access to information about the World bank, which body has made a proposal to make World bank environmental assessments more widely available; which body considered that proposal; what were the details of that proposal; when and what was the outcome; and what further initiatives he will take to pursue this proposal.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Dafis) on 11 February at column *727*. The bank's executive directors are expected to consider this recommendation soon.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps are being taken to ensure that World bank staff implement fully and efficiently the decisions taken by the World bank board.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The World bank board regularly reviews the bank's performance in implementing policies and in implementing programmes in its borrowing member countries. In addition individual World bank operations are subject after completion to evaluation of their effectiveness in meeting approved objectives; evaluation findings are submitted to the board.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the names of each local Zambian non-governmental organisation which will be consulted on each of the World bank projects under consideration in Zambia; on what date consultation was initiated; and on what date it is due to be concluded.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We do not have the information requested.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects the World bank to conclude the review of the implementation of the Narmada dam project.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: As agreed at the bank's board meeting last October, a World bank mission is due to review in April the progress made against a set of performance benchmarks agreed with the Indian authorities.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what subjects will be on the agenda of the next general meeting of the World bank.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The next annual meeting of the World bank will be held in October. The agenda is not yet available.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs by what methods and using what criteria the United Kingdom contribution to the World bank in 1991-92 is assessed for effectiveness.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Our contributions to the World bank form part of the British aid programme and are judged against the objectives set out in the annual departmental report, Cm. 2202. The greater part of our contributions are made to the International Development Association on the basis of the reports agreed by donors for each replenishment.

Wappenhans Report

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress of discussion concerning the Wappenhans report.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Dafis) on 11 February, at column *727*.

Sardar Sarovar Project

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what account has been taken of human rights violations associated with the Sardar Sarovar project in considering United Kingdom involvement in funding the project.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We are well aware of reports of such incidents. Our position on the continuation of external support for the project is that we shall take into account all the relevant issues.

International Development Association

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what were the conditions attached to the ninth replenishment of IDA; and what steps have been taken to ensure they were met prior to the 10th replenishment of IDA.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The report on the ninth replenishment of the International Development Association was published as Cm. 1325 in November 1990. Annual progress reports on implementation are presented to the World bank's board of directors, and were considered by IDA donors in the course of negotiations on the 10th replenishment.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the United Kingdom's contribution in current prices, and as a proportion of the total, to the International Development Association on its establishment and on each successive replenishment, including the proposed 10th replenishment; and what reasons there have been for changes in the proportion.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: United Kingdom contributions to IDA replenishments have been:

	US dollars millions	*Share*
IDA 1		
Initial Subscription	131·14	17·33
Supplementary Contribution	96·60	12·97
IDA 2	155·52	12·96
Special Contribution	103·68	12·23
IDA 3	311·04	12·74

	£ sterling million	*Share*
IDA 4	206·46	11·10
IDA 5	475·40	10·60
IDA 6	554·97	10·10
Special Contribution	105·00	n/a
IDA 7	401·52	6·70
IDA 8	524·16	6·70
IDA 9	619·03	6·70
IDA 10[1]	620·00	6·15

[1] Proposed contribution

n/a = Not available.

The United Kingdom share is affected by the number of donors and the outcome of discussions among donors on burden sharing during the replenishment negotiations.

PRIME MINISTER

Ministers' Homes (Security)

Mr. Hain: To ask the Prime Minister what was the cost of work carried out at public expense at the home of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food since 1989.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

Security work is carried out at the home of Ministers on the advice of the security authorities. Its cost is kept to the minimum necessary to provide proper protection.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list those Ministers entitled to assistance from public funds in respect of security facilities at their private homes.

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Prime Minister in how many cases since 1979 permanent accommodation for security staff has been provided at public cost for Ministers in or on property owned by Ministers.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

It is not in the public interest to disclose or aid the identification of security arrangements relating to public figures.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Young Offenders

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to reduce the levels of those juvenile offences linked to substance abuse or drug or gambling addiction.

Mr. Jack: It is not possible to estimate precisely how much juvenile crime is linked with substance abuse or drug addiction, although it is known that many offenders, including juvenile offenders, may have problems with alcohol or drugs, and all action to reduce misuse may, accordingly, help to prevent crime.

The Department of Health organises extensive publicity campaigns against the misuse of drugs and other substances. The national curriculum incorporates aspects of health education, including the dangers of drugs, solvents and alcohol misuse. which schools are statutorily required to teach. The Home Office drugs prevention initiative, which was launched in 1989, has established 20 local drug prevention teams around Great Britain. The main purpose of the teams is to work with the community to promote the prevention of drug misuse and young people are targeted as the principal group at risk.

Home Office research has shown that there is no evidence of any association between the playing of amusement machines, which is the only form of gambling to which juveniles have ready access, and delinquency.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on evidence from the Magistrates Association on the extent to which teenage offenders commit frequent crimes over a relatively short period as a result of a sudden traumatic incident in their lives; and if he will outline his proposals for dealing with such cases.

Mr. Jack: We have noted the contents of the evidence to which the hon. Member refers. This is currently before the Home Affairs Select Committee for consideration in its inquiry. Courts and criminal justice agencies are already able to take account of the circumstances which give rise to offending behaviour in determining the most appropriate course of action in particular cases: relevant advice on this should be included in a pre-sentence report, which is required before imposing any custodial sentence in the magistrates or youth courts, or one of the more demanding community sentences.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what proportion of cleared-up offences were committed by juveniles in 1979, 1981, 1985, 1991 and 1992;

(2) what is the amount of crime for which juveniles are known to have been responsible in 1979, 1985 and 1992;

(3) how many offences committed by juveniles were dealt with by way of caution in 1979 and 1992.

Mr. Jack: Although overall clear-up figures are collected centrally, it is not possible to separately identify those offences committed by juveniles.

Information on "known offenders"—those found guilty or cautioned—by age is published annually in chapter 5 of the Command Paper "Criminal statistics England and Wales". 1992 data will not be published until the autumn. Copies of the annual publication are available in the Library.

Bail Offenders

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of offences were committed by persons on bail in *(a)* 1978 and *(b)* 1992.

Mr. Jack: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Sweeney) on 22 February 1993, at column *427*.

Prison Assaults

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of convictions of assault on *(a)* male prison officers and *(b)* female prison officers at Durham prison, Frankland prison and Low Newton centre for the past 10 years.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Information about prisoners found guilty on adjudication of an assault on an officer or member of staff is available only from 1 April 1989 and is given in the table. The sex of the officer or member of staff is not recorded centrally.

Assaults[1] on a prison officer or member of staff

Establishment[2]	[3]*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	[4]*1992*
Male establishments				
Low Newton	2	5	16	9
Durham	16	32	43	40
Frankland	24	75	53	32
Female establishments				
Low Newton	8	11	9	8
Durham	1	—	—	—

[1] Including attempts.

[2] At which the adjudication was held.

[3] April to December.

[4] Provisional.

Crime (Clear-up Statistics)

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the clear-up rates for crime in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1992.

Mr. Jack: The requested information for 1979 is published in table 2.21 of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales 1989". Information for 1992 is not yet available but information for 1991, which is the latest published figure, has just been published in table 2.11 of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales 1991". Copies of both are available in the Library.

Table 2.21
Notifiable offences of fraud and forgery recorded by the police by offence
England and Wales

Number of offences

	Offence					
	51 *Fraud by company director etc.*	*52* *False accounting*	*53* *Other fraud*	*60* *Forgery, or use of, false drug prescription*	*61* *Other forgery etc.*	*Total fraud and forgery*
Offences recorded						
1981	30	2,415	96,065	964	7,197	106,671
1982	24	2,667	111,290	987	8,133	123,101
1983	45	2,292	109,615	976	8,863	121,791
1984	71	1,883	112,214	1,070	10,855	126,093
1985	37	1,823	120,758	880	11,269	134,767
1986	25	1,854	120,923	912	9,717	133,431
1987	43	1,816	119,893	1,114	10,110	132,976

	Offence 51 Fraud by company director etc.	52 False accounting	53 Other fraud	60 Forgery, or use of, false drug prescription	61 Other forgery etc.	Total fraud and forgery
1988	40	2,075	119,645	1,307	10,806	133,873
1989	25	2,106	121,756	1,196	9,407	134,490
1990	53	2,001	133,866	1,009	10,980	147,909
1991	24	1,623	159,136	968	12,991	174,742
Offences cleared up 1991						
Number	20	1,535	84,630	775	10,007	96,967
Percentage	[1](83)	95	53	80	77	55

[1] ( ) Percentages in brackets are based on totals of less than 100.

Police (Stabbings)

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers in each police authority area have been injured or killed by stabbing in each year since 1979.

Mr. Jack: Information on the number of police officers injured by stabbing is not collected centrally.

The number of police officers who were the victims of offences currently recorded as homicide where a sharp instrument was used, including knives, by police force in England and Wales since 1979 is a follows:

Police Force	*Year*	*Number*
Wiltshire	1979	1
Metropolitan	1980	1
West Yorkshire	1981	1
Greater Manchester	1982	1
	1983	—
	1984	—
Kent and Metropolitan	1985	2
	1986	—
	1987	—
	1988	—
	1989	—
	1990	—
Metropolitan	1991	2

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many stabbings resulted in either maiming or death in each police authority area in each year since 1979.

Mr. Jack: Statistics on the proportion of offences where a sharp instrument or knife were involved were published for those forces where they were available for the years 1986 to 1989 in tables 2.23 and 2.24 of "Criminal Statistics, 1989, England and Wales", Cm. 1322, a copy of which is in the Library. The number of offences currently recorded as homicide where a sharp instrument, including a knife, was involved is shown by police force in the table. Information for the years 1979 to 1981 is not available except at disproportionate cost and information for 1992 is not yet available.

Offences currently recorded as homicide involving the use of a sharp instrument, England and Wales 1982 to 1991

	1982	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
MPD	72	44	62	72	75	70	57	59	52	73
Cumbria	3	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	3	0
Lancashire	2	5	7	5	6	9	5	5	6	3
Merseyside	5	4	7	3	9	3	7	4	6	11
Greater Manchester	10	8	6	6	19	14	12	8	4	7
Cheshire	1	3	3	1	1	1	2	2	3	2
Northumbria	3	3	5	4	2	5	3	6	6	5
Durham	0	2	2	0	2	1	0	0	3	0
North Yorkshire	3	0	0	1	1	2	1	4	2	2
West Yorkshire	10	6	6	9	10	10	7	13	10	15
South Yorkshire	6	10	4	4	3	4	7	3	5	8
Humberside	7	2	2	1	2	3	4	2	3	2
Cleveland	4	1	3	3	1	0	3	6	3	3
West Midlands	15	10	17	18	12	15	9	10	8	12
Staffordshire	0	2	1	0	2	2	3	2	3	3
West Mercia	1	1	1	2	5	1	1	0	2	1
Warwickshire	1	1	0	1	0	2	0	1	0	1
Derbyshire	1	2	1	0	1	0	2	4	2	3
Nottinghamshire	3	0	6	4	5	5	1	0	4	5
Lincolnshire	2	0	2	0	0	2	0	2	0	2
Leicestershire	2	1	1	4	3	0	0	1	5	3
Northamptonshire	0	5	3	1	3	5	4	1	1	0
Cambridgeshire	1	0	1	1	0	2	2	1	1	2
Norfolk	0	0	3	0	5	1	1	1	7	8
Suffolk	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	4	2	2
Bedfordshire	2	4	0	1	2	4	3	2	2	3
Hertfordshire	1	1	5	0	4	0	7	2	1	5
Essex	4	1	7	3	6	3	6	5	1	7
Thames Valley	4	7	3	7	4	2	6	7	5	7
Hampshire	3	4	0	4	5	4	1	2	6	3
Surrey	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	2	1	2

	1982	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
Kent	6	4	9	4	7	4	6	2	4	2
Sussex	0	2	4	4	5	1	2	4	4	3
Devon and Cornwall	1	0	4	2	1	4	6	1	3	3
Avon and Somerset	3	5	2	3	3	9	2	2	2	3
Gloucestershire	0	0	1	2	0	0	1	3	1	3
Wiltshire	2	2	1	0	2	2	1	4	1	3
Dorset	1	2	3	0	4	0	1	0	1	2
North Wales	4	2	3	1	0	1	4	0	0	2
Gwent	3	1	1	4	1	2	3	1	0	0
South Wales	2	3	1	2	7	3	6	6	11	1
Dyfed-Powys	1	1	0	1	0	2	2	0	0	1
Total	191	150	187	180	220	201	190	182	184	223

Police Forces

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the police forces in England and Wales which include more than one county administration; and if he will set out the numbers on the combined police authority, in each case, from each constituent local authority and petty sessions.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The following police forces in England and Wales include more than one county administration:

Avon and Somerset, Devon and Cornwall, Hampshire, Sussex, Thames Valley, West Mercia, Dyfed Powys, North Wales and South Wales.

The numbers on the combined police authorities are as follows:

County	*Local Authority Members*	*Magistrates*
Avon and Somerset		
Avon	18	9
Somerset	8	4
Devon and Cornwall		
Devon	20	10
Cornwall	9	5
Isles of Scilly	1	0
Hampshire		
Hampshire	20	10
Isle of Wight	4	2
Sussex		
East Sussex	10	5
West Sussex	10	5
Thames Valley		
Berkshire	10	5
Buckinghamshire	8	4
Oxfordshire	8	4
West Mercia		
Hereford and Worcester	14	7
Shropshire	8	4
Dyfed Powys		
Dyfed	12	5
Powys	5	3
North Wales		
Clwyd	12	8
Gwynedd	8	4
South Wales		
Mid Glamorgan	10	5
South Glamorgan	8	4
West Glamorgan	8	4

Prisoner Statistics

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of prisoners in custody in each of the last six months.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I would refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) on 12 February, at columns *811-12*.

Immigration

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what financial contribution is made by Her Majesty's Government to the work of the ad hoc group, immigration, including the cost of time of civil servants spent at meetings, allocations for travel costs and any other specific allocations; and on which vote the costs fall.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Except during the United Kingdom presidency, there have been no direct financial subventions from United Kingdom funds to the work of the ad hoc working group on immigration.

Meetings of the ad hoc group, usually in the presidency capital, and of its subgroups, usually in Brussels, are serviced by the secretariat of the Council of the European Communities, and accommodation and so on are provided by the presidency or the secretariat respectively.

Attendance at the preparation for meetings forms part of the normal duties of officials, most of whom are from the immigration and nationality department, their salary and so on and travelling subsistence costs form part of the overall expenditure of the Department, which is met from class IX vote 3.

A detailed breakdown of the staff costs of all those involved in this work could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to bring forward amendments to the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 to permit members of the Animal Procedures Committee to disclose information currently restricted.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Government have no plans to amend section 24 of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986.

Betting Shops

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if she will make it her policy to extend the provisions of the Shops Act 1950 to cover betting shops, before 1 March.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No, we have no plans to extend the provisions of the Shops Act 1950 to cover licensed betting offices.

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has for tackling juvenile crime in Cleveland.

Mr. Jack: The Government have already introduced a wide range of measures which aim to prevent young people from committing crime. In Cleveland, safer cities projects in Hartlepool and Middlesbrough provide grants for a number of local initiatives aimed at tackling juvenile crime. These link, in turn, with the work being undertaken at local level by the police, probation, local authority education and social services, which is co-ordinated through an inter-agency strategy group.

In the Criminal Justice Act 1991, implemented on 1 October 1992, Parliament strengthened the powers of the court in relation to defendants under the age of 18. The Government are presently considering additional measures to help the courts to deal more effectively with the small number of juveniles who persistently re-offend and for whom existing measures appear not to be working.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to give local authorities the power forcefully to detain juveniles remanded or serving a sentence in their care.

Mr. Yeo: I have been asked to reply.

Following consultation, we are considering what further guidance may need to be given about the control and restraint of young people in residential care.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Companies House

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what checks his Department makes when a company files its annual return at Companies House.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: This is a matter for Companies House. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from David Durham to Mr. Austin Mitchell, dated 22 February 1993:

You tabled a Parliamentary Question regarding the checks made when a company delivers its annual return to Companies House.

My examiners carry out two types of check. First, they ensure that the company's name, registered number and registered office are consistent with the information already held.

Secondly, they check that all the necessary details have been provided regarding company type, principal business activities, location of registers, secretary, directors, issued capital and members and that the form has been signed and dated.

This process is simplified if the company uses a "shuttle" annual return form provided by Companies House. In this case, most of the information will be pre-printed and it would only be necessary to check additions or amendments to that information.

Department Inspectors

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish a table showing the amounts paid to each of his Department's inspectors for the reports published since 1985.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The information requested by the hon. Member is as follows:

Name of company	*Date of publication of report*	*Payments to accountant inspector and support staff from his firm (£)*	*Disbursements including VAT (£)*	*Payments to legal inspector and legal staff (£)*	*Disbursements including VAT (£)*
Westminster Property Group plc[1]	28 November 1985	—	1,882	—	—
Aldershot Football Club Ltd.	2 July 1987	84,602	19,625	16,042	2,488
Milbury plc Westminster Property Group Ltd.	27 October 1988	723,736	157,672	221,440	33,215
Emray plc (now Equity and General plc)[2]	4 May 1988	[3]13,538	9,477	—	—
Greenbank Trust plc[1]	4 August 1988	—	3,237	—	—
Summer International plc (formerly Sumrie Clothes plc)	14 October 1988	37,925	12,551	7,725	—
Bremner plc	7 June 1989	58,193	14,731	63,443	16,708
County NatWest Ltd. County NatWest Securities Ltd.	20 July 1989	770,370	205,921	116,437	17,494
Consolidated Gold Fields plc	6 September 1989	118,522	19,775	10,776	1,697
House of Fraser Holdings plc	7 March 1990	1,015,992	244,194	218,500	33,818
Alexander Howden Group plc	29 August 1990	784,763	187,421	71,134	12,382
Minet Holdings plc (Interim) Minet Holdings plc WMD Underwriting Agencies Ltd.	24 July 1986 29 August 1990	885,457	227,633	132,220	23,110
Aldermanbury Trust plc	20 March 1991	370,321	58,798	448,825	94,913

Name of company	*Date of publication of report*	*Payments to accountant inspector and support staff from his firm (£)*	*Disbursements including VAT (£)*	*Payments to legal inspector and legal staff (£)*	*Disbursements including VAT (£)*
The Animal Defence Society Ltd.	17 April 1991	28,705	8,916	15,762	2,726
Sound Diffusion plc	1 May 1991	783,478	142,928	53,265	8,010
Rotaprint plc	24 July 1991	580,412	140,170	125,105	18,766
The Milford Docks Company	16 January 1992	382,980	92,782	130,556	20,212
BOM Holdings plc	27 February 1992	807,244	182,690	168,322	27,622
Blue Arrow plc	24 September 1992	2,312,296	572,292	597,936	91,864
National Westminster Bank plc	14 January 1993	1,612,272	476,880	405,907	71,309
James Neill Holdings plc Francis Industries Ltd. FH Lloyd Holdings plc The Mersey Docks and Harbour Company Metal Closures Group plc Winchmore plc	21 January 1993	105,134	23,308	100,926	21,447
Edencorp Leisure plc[1]	18 February 1993	—	14,222	—	—

[1] Reports by departmental officers.

[2] Departmental officer appointed with non-departmental inspector.

[3] Stockbroker (inspector) and support staff.

Audit Companies

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will introduce proposals under which all auditing firms carrying out the audit of a public limited company would be required to publish the profits made from its overall auditing business.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: No.

Car Registrations

Ms. Harman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what information he has about the number of new car registrations in each year after 1988; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: New car registrations between 1988 and 1992 are as follows:

Year	
1988	2,215,574
1989	2,300,944
1990	2,008,934
1991	1,592,326
1992	1,593,601

Highlands and Islands

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations his Department has made to the European Commission with regard to objective I status for the highlands and islands of Scotland; what decision he has reached about whether Merseyside should be put forward; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe) on 17 February, *Official Report,* column 269.

Cleaner Technology

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the agencies represented on his liaison group on cleaner technology; how many meetings this group has had; and what new initiatives have flowed from its work.

Mr. Eggar: The interdepartmental liaison group on cleaner technology has representatives from Department of the Environment, Science and Engineering Research Council, Health and Safety Executive, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Office of Science and Techology, and the Royal Academy of Engineering, under the chairmanship of Department of Trade and Industry. The group has now had three meetings. The group has been exchanging information on the separate initiatives that the different Departments are pursuing and the scope for co-operation between them. The Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of the Environment are working together to promote waste minimisation and energy efficiency.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether his inquiry into United Kingdom output of, and trade in, environmental and clean technology industry has been completed; and if he will place its conclusions in the Library.

Mr. Eggar: Work within the DTI to identify and extract relevant data on output of, and trade in, environmental and clean technology is continuing.

European Companies (Accounts Regulation)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether subsidiaries of European companies are subject to home or host country accountancy regulation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Companies incorporated in Great Britain, whether or not they are subsidiaries of companies incorporated in other European countries, are required to prepare and file accounts in accordance with part VII of the Companies Act 1985.

Military Equipment

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether military equipment made as a result of collaboration between a British and an overseas company needs a United Kingdom export licence before it can be sold to a third country.

Mr. Needham: Military equipment made as a result of collaboration between a British company and an overseas company requires a United Kingdom export licence if exported from the United Kingdom. Exports of such equipment from overseas countries are the responsibility of those countries.

Weaving Industry

Mr. Martlew: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what investment has taken place in the cotton and man-made fibre weaving industry, statistical class 4322, in the last five years for which figures are available; and to what extent this investment benefited from Government grants.

Mr. Sainsbury: The available information for investment for standard industrial classification activity heading 4322 is given in the table.

Investment in the cotton, silk and man-made fibres weaving industry

	£ million
1986	29·3
1987	21·7
1988	36·4
1989	36·3
1990	40·9

The annual amounts of Government grants paid in support of investment in the cotton and man-made fibre weaving industry in the United Kingdom for the years 1986 to 1990 were:

	£ thousands
1986	920
1987	1,480
1988	469
1989	685
1990	953

In Great Britain grants were paid under the regional selective assistance scheme and the revised regional developments grants scheme. Information about grants paid to this industry under the original regional grants scheme is available only at disproportionate cost. In Northern Ireland grants were made available from the Industrial Development Board for Northern Ireland under the Industrial Development (NI) Order 1982.

Single Market

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many complaints were referred to the single market compliance unit in 1992; and how many were satisfactorily resolved.

Mr. Needham: The single market compliance unit—SMCU—receives inquiries daily. At any one time the SMCU is dealing with some 30 to 40 cases. However, in practice, after detailed examination, only a minority of these, about 10 per cent. turn out to be breaches of EC law. Those not involving breaches are normally passed on to the Department's sectoral or trade divisions which are better able to assist with such inquiries.

In 1992 the SMCU dealt with 23 new cases involving actual breaches of the EC law to add to the 16 which it was already dealing with. Typically, a case takes at least six months and sometimes over three years to resolve. This is due to the lengthy process of compiling sufficient evidence, normally with the help of British embassies, together with the time it takes to raise a complaint with a member state or the European Commission. Of the cases dealt with last year by the SMCU, nine so far have been successfully resolved.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to expand the number of desks at the single market compliance unit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: In line with my Department's new "Business in Europe" initiative, the single market compliance unit is to expand. Expressed in terms of man years, the level of resources allocated to the SMCU is to rise from 2·5 to 4·5.

Internal Market Council

Mr. Rowe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Internal Market Council held on 8 February.

Mr. Needham: I attended this first Council of the Danish presidency under the chairmanship of the new Danish Industry Minister, Mr. Troejborg. It was also the first Council for Commissioner Vanni d'Archirafi.

The meeting had a short agenda which it completed in half a day. A review of the completion of the internal market confirmed that some 95 per cent. of the original White Paper had been agreed, with few problems reported on the free movement of goods since the 1 January deadline. An updated "league table" of implementation of White Paper measures by member states showed that the United Kingdom had risen to third position, with an 85 per cent. implementation record.

There was general agreement on carrying forward the initiative on "Making the Single Market Work", in the light of the Commission's response to the Sutherland report. It is hoped that specific proposals on, for example, improving exchange of information between member states on single market issues will be considered by future Councils during the Danish presidency.

The Council adopted a regulation providing for checks for product safety at the Community's external border, as well as food law directives covering fruit juices and food contaminants. The Commission was requested by the Council to introduce specific proposals for safety standards covering motor cycle helmets, in addition to the existing powers available under the personal protective equipment directive.

One-stop Shops

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the progress on his pilot scheme for one-stop shops.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 22 February 1993]:* Fifty-seven partnerships have submitted bids for funding pilot one-stop shops. The bids cover a wide geographical area and many make proposals for establishing One Stop Shops in more than one local area. This is an excellent reponse and these bids are now being examined.

I will announce the winning bids within the next two months.

EC Development Assistance

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations his Department has made to the European Commission with regard to objective 1 status; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 23 February 1993]:* I refer to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe) on 17 February, *Official Report*, column *269*.

Post Office

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many post offices and sub-post offices closed in the United Kingdom and in each region and county each year since 1988.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 22 February 1993]:* The number of post offices closed in the United Kingdom in each year since 1988 is as follows:

Year	*Number*
1988-89	76
1989-90	242
1990-91	372
1991-92	303

The majority of these closures were in rural areas where, due to the decline in the number of village shops, it has not been possible to find suitable candidates for subpostmasterships. A breakdown of this information by region or by county could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his estimate of the value of the privately owned assets that form the branch service network of Post Office Counters Ltd.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 22 February 1993]:* Neither the Government nor the Post Office have any records of the privately owned assets within the branch network of Post Office Counters Ltd. and have no authoritative basis on which to estimate the value of those assets.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the Government Departments and other agencies having contracts with Post Office Counters Ltd.; and what is the duration of the contract period in each case.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 22 February 1993]:* The following Government Department and agencies have contracts with Post Office Counters Ltd.:

Department/Agency	*Duration of current contract (years)*
Department for National Savings	3
Benefits Agency	3
United Kingdom Passport Agency	2
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	3

In addition Post Office Counters has contracts with the BBC, Girobank, Royal Mail, Parcelforce, British Telecom, British Gas, regional and Scottish electricity companies and some 100 local authorities. The duration of the current contracts with these bodies varies between six months and five years.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the cost of franchises for franchised post offices and the income generated from the sale of franchises.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 22 February 1993]:* The cost of each franchise for franchised post offices varies with the circumstances of sale. Cumulative income from the sale of franchises to December 1992 amounted to some £5·5 million.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the profit or loss on Post Office Counters Ltd. in each year since the separation of its accounts; and what was the value of the direct assets of Post Office Counters in each of these years.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 22 February 1993]:* The profits after taxation and net assets of Post Office Counters Ltd. in each year since the separation of its accounts were as follows:

Year	*Profits after taxation £ million*	*Net Assets £ million*
1986-87	13·6	455·4
1987-88	20·9	493·7
1988-89	31·3	517·9
1989-90	10·7	[1]251·7
1990-91	22·0	244·0
1991-92	16·0	254·0

[1] As part of the introduction of return on capital employed targets, a special dividend, representing funds accumulated as a result of previous years' activities and amounting to £276·3 million, was paid to the holding company.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many post offices and sub-post offices, showing community post offices separately, opened in the United Kingdom and in each region and county in each year since 1988.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 22 February 1993]:* The number of post offices opened in the United Kingdom in each year since 1988 is as follows:

Year	*Number*
1988-89	35
1989-90	21
1990-91	63
1991-92	[1]157

[1] includes 74 satellite offices.

The number of community and restricted hours offices operating in rural areas at the end of each financial year was as follows:

	Community offices	*Restricted hours*
March 1989	724	0
March 1990	1,413	23
March 1991	1,511	55
March 1992	1,626	90

A breakdown of this information by region or by county could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the licence fee for new sub-post offices in each year since 1989; and what income those fees generated in each year.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 22 February 1993]:* For franchised offices a commercially confidential and individual franchise fee is negotiated with each agency partner. For other new or resited post offices an initial fee equivalent to 12 months' remuneration in England and nine months' remuneration in other parts of the United Kingdom is levied. All rural offices are exempted from paying such fees. Since April 1992 initial fees have no longer been levied on transfer of sub-post offices at their existing site.

The overall yield to Post Office Counters Ltd. from franchise and initial fees has been £3·9 million in 1989-90, £9·6 million in 1990-91 and £10·5 million in 1991-92.

Cornwall and Devon

Mr. Tyler: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what criteria he used to substantiate the application for designation of *(a)* Cornwall and *(b)* Devon as economically deprived regions requiring objective 1 status for European Community development assistance; and what effect a separate or joint submission will have on Cornwall's chances of success;

(2) if he will publish his submission to the European Commission seeking designation of Cornwall and Devon as economically deprived regions requiring objective 1 status for development assistance.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 23 February 1993]:* The European Council decided at Edinburgh that the future coverage of objective 1 should be determined as article 8(1) of Council regulation (EEC) 2052/88. This states that objective 1 regions shall be regions at NUTS II level whose per capita GDP is less than 75 per cent. of the Community average. It also provides for the inclusion of Northern Ireland and, for special reasons, of other regions whose GDP figure is close to 75 per cent.

Devon and Cornwall together form a NUTS II level region with GDP assessed as being 82 per cent. of the Community average. My right hon. Friend has written to the responsible Commissioner proposing this NUTS II region for objective 1 on the grounds of its relatively low GDP coupled with its peripherality, the effect of defence changes and declining employment in agriculture. I do not consider that it would be appropriate to publish my right hon. Friend's letter.

Cornwall alone is classified as a NUTS III region. Its estimated per capita GDP exceeds not only 75 per cent. of the Community average, but the estimated figures of more then 60 other NUTS III regions in the Community, which are not part of NUTS II regions, likely to be eligible for objective 1 status.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Market Testing

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list all the market tests that have taken place in his Department since November 1991; whether the result was the maintenance of in-house provision or whether the service was contracted out; what was the name of the successful contractor where appropriate; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Market tests for the following services have taken place:

Travel services

A contract for a new national travel service to this Department and the Department of Health was awarded to Wagons-Lits in January 1993.

Facilities management and the provision of office services at Quarry House, the Department's new headquarters building in Leeds shared with Department of Health.

There was no existing in-house provision, but in-house bids were made for office support services. The contract was awarded to Manpower UK Ltd in June 1992.

Cleaning services for North Fylde Central Offices, Norcross, Blackpool.

Contract awarded to Care Cleaning Services in April 1992.

Building maintenance and works. Contracts for services previously provided by Property Services Agency (PSA) have been awarded to:

Tarmac Construction in April 1992 and June 1992
Henry Boot in May 1992
Laing Management in April 1992
The contract for services to the Fylde Benefit Directorate was won by PSA in April 1992.

Contributions Agency's microfilming and retrievals service.

The contract was awarded to the in-house team in February 1993.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many staff in his Department are assigned to the market testing programme; how much the programme has cost his Department since November 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Currently there are some 150 staff assigned to the market-testing programme. The total cost since November 1991 has been some £1,480,000.

Lambeth (Rent Rebates)

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what sum was recovered from Lambeth council in respect of rent rebates in June and July 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: Lambeth's payments on account of non-housing revenue account—HRA—rent rebate subsidy were adjusted for these months to reflect the Department's revised estimate for the 1991-92 year. The recovered amounts were offset against the authority's total payments on account. The information is in the table:

1992	*Gross payment due (£)*	*Amount recovered*[1] *(£)*	*Net payment due (£)*
June			
Rent Rebates (non-HRA)	330,750	1,116,940	−786,190
Rent Allowances	2,516,687	0	2,516,687
Community Charge Benefit	895,446	2,752,322	−1,856,876
Administration	126,379	0	126,379
Total	3,869,262	3,869,262	0
July			
Rent Rebates (non-HRA)	330,750	1,507,869	−1,177,119
Rent Allowances	2,516,687	0	2,516,687
Community Charge Benefit	895,446	2,361,393	−1,465,947
Administration	126,379	0	126,379
Total	3,869,262	3,869,262	0

[1] Prior year adjustments (1991-92).

Publicity

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 2 June 1992 to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, (Mr. Dobson) *Official Report*, column *469*, what is his Department's *(a)* current outturn estimate for publicity expenditure for 1992-93 and *(b)* budgeted publicity expenditure for 1993-94.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department's current estimate for publicity expenditure in 1992-93 is as follows:—

	£ million
Headquarters DSS	9
Benefits Agency	7·8
Contributions Agency	1·8

Estimated publicity expenditure for 1993-94 is as follows:—

	£ million
Headquarters DSS	7·6
Benefits Agency	9·5
Child Support Agency	4·1
Contributions Agency	1·3

Independent Living Fund

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what reply is being made to the letter sent on 4 February by the Terrence Higgins Trust to the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People in regard to the independent living fund; what action he is taking; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: I will be replying to the letter in due course.

Official Entertainment

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much was spent on official entertainment in his Department during 1991-92 and 1992-93 to date.

Mr. Scott: Total expenditure was £91,934 in 1991-92 and £94,850 so far in 1992-93.

Disability Allowances

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was *(a)* the total number of people in receipt of either mobility allowance or attendance allowance or both as at the end of March 1992 and *(b)* the total number of people in receipt of either disability living allowance or attendance allowance at the latest available date.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 22 February 1993]:* The information requested is estimated as follows:

(a) 31 March 1992

	Thousands
Benefit	*Number of recipients*
Attendance Allowance (all ages)	1,059
Mobility Allowance	[1]685
Both Attendance Allowance and Mobility Allowance	[2]170
Total	1,574

(b) Latest available date

	Thousands
Benefit	*Number of recipients*
Attendance Allowance (over 65)	[3]719
Disability Living Allownce	[4]1,103
Total	1,822

[1] Figure excludes small number of cases already converted over to Disability Living Allowance.

[2] Figure includes small number of Attendance Allowance cases that have been suspended eg because of hospitalisation.

[3] As at 31 March 1992—the latest date for which data is available.

[4] All data provisional. Figures based on a 5 per cent. sample of live cases on the Disability Living Allowance system at 30 November 1992 with estimates made of both Attendance Allowance and Mobility Allowance cases awaiting conversion. It will include a small number of suspended cases.

EDUCATION

Newall Green School, Manchester

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what representations he has received from the governors of Newall Green high school in Manchester in regard to key stage III assessments; what reply he is sending; what action he is taking; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend received a letter from the governors of Newall Green high school on 27 January. The Department gave a full reply on 22 February.

The tests are well prepared and will go ahead. My right hon. Friend has recognised that some schools and teachers need a year to get used to the tests. He has, therefore, decided that in future test results will be included in school performance tables from the second year of their introduction nationally. This means that the secondary school performance tables will include the results of the tests in English and technology from 1994.

Student Grants

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has to remove from local authority control the responsibility to allocate grants and tuition fees to students; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend keeps the arrangements for administering student awards under periodic review. If he has any plans for changes, he will announce them at the appropriate time.

Grant-maintained Schools

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Sweeney) of 17 February, *Official Report*, column *213*, what criteria he will take into account in deciding whether to agree grant-maintained status to an existing indpendent school.

Mr. Forth: In reaching a decision, the Secretary of State will take account of a number of factors similar to those currently applied in respect of applications for new voluntary schools. These will include:

(i) the school's ability to deliver the National Curriculum;
(ii) the suitability of the premises;
(iii) the need, including denominational need, for additional places in the maintained and grant-maintained sectors;
(iv) whether the school will offer equal opportunities for girls and boys;
(v) whether the Funding Authority supports the proposal.

Primary Classes

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) if he will give the figures for the average size of all classes in primary schools in England for each year since 1984;

(2) if he will give the figures for the average size of class taught by one teacher in primary schools in England for each year since 1983.

Mr. Forth: Information about class sizes in maintained primary schools in England for years 1983 to 1992 is given in the table.

Average size of classes in maintained primary schools in England
Position as at Janauary each year

Year	*Classes taught by one teacher*	*All classes*
1992	26·4	26·8
1991	26·3	26·8
1990	25·9	26·4
1989	25·7	26·1
1988	25·4	25·9
1987	25·4	25·8
1986	25·5	25·9
1985	24·9	25·2
1984	24·7	25·0
1983	24·8	25·1

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will give the figures for the percentage of classes taught by one teacher with a class size of over 30 pupils in England in 1991.

Mr. Forth: The percentages of classes with more than 30 pupils being taught by one teacher in maintained primary and secondary schools in England in January 1991 were 20 per cent. and 4 per cent. respectively.

Education Authority Budgets

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list all education authorities for which he is responsible in order, expressing the percentage of their budget which is not distributed to schools and held back for central administration.

Mr. Forth: I refer my right hon. Friend to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) on 19 October 1992, *Official Report*, columns *8-12*.

Schools Statistics

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the percentage in schools of *(a)* governors, *(b)* administrators, *(c)* inspectors and *(d)* teachers who are of ethnic minority origins.

Mr. Forth: A survey carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research in 1990 found that just over 1 per cent. of governors were from ethnic minority groups.

Information on the ethnic origins of administrators and inspectors is not centrally available.

The Government introduced ethnic monitoring of teachers in January 1990 following recommendations by the Swann committee, but response so far has been poor, although it is improving. As a result it is not yet possible to draw conclusions about the percentage of teachers nationally who are from ethnic minorities.

"Choice and Diversity"

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education on how many occasions he has met Church representatives on matters referred to in the Government White Paper "Choice and Diversity" since its publication; and on what dates.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend met the president of the Methodist Conference on 5 November 1992 and the Bishop of Guildford, chairman of the General Synod board of education, on 9 February to discuss the Government's proposals, set out in the White Paper and embodied in the Education Bill currently before Parliament. He is also scheduled to meet the Churches' Joint Education Policy Committee on 8 March. This is in addition to meetings between my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State and representatives of the churches and meetings of the churches with my officials.

English Tests

Mr. Godsiff: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many pupils of key stage 3 age were involved in the pilot studies conducted by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate for key stage 3 English on which the proposed tests for 1993 are based.

Mr. Forth: The University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate conducted pilot tests in November 1992 and January this year. Three thousand pupils were involved in the first pilot and 2,700 in the second.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Training

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people were participating in *(a)* Action for Community Employment, *(b)* the youth training programme, *(c)* the job training programme, *(d)* the enterprise allowance scheme, *(e)* job clubs and *(f)* Restart courses, at the latest available date and in each year since 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Restart courses were discontinued in Northern Ireland in March 1989. Otherwise the information is as follows:

	1990-91	*1991-92*	*1992-93*[2]
Action for Community Employment	10,073	10,072	9,660
Youth training programme	12,914	15,480	14,079
Job training programme	3,000	3,840	4,398
Job clubs	1,427	1,933	1,675
Enterprise allowance scheme	818	537	[1]—

[1] Since 1 April 1992 the enterprise allowance scheme has been replaced by the business start programme which is an amalgamation of the enterprise allowance and the Local Enterprise Development Unit's enterprise grant scheme.

[2] April to January.

Newry and Armagh

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total population in each ward within the constituency of Newry and Armagh.

Mr. Hanley: The most recent estimates of the total resident population in each of the local government wards covered by the Newry and Armagh constituency are set out in the table. The information is taken from the "Summary Report of the Northern Ireland Census 1991", a copy of which is in the Library.

Ward	*Usually resident population*
District of Armagh	
Abbey Park	2,389
Ballymartin	2,039
Callan Bridge	2,377
Carrigatuke	2,150
Charlemont	2,184
Demesne	2,737
Derrynoose	2,010
Downs	2,260
Hamiltonsbawn	2,504
Hockley	2,395
Keady	2,405
Killeen	2,539
Killylea	2,260
Laurelvale	2,537
Loughgall	2,301
Markethill	2,257
Milford	2,328
Observatory	2,570
Poyntz Pass	2,028
Rich Hill	3,005
Tandragee	2,503
The Mall	2,039
District of Newry and Mourne	
Ballybot	2,041
Bessbrook	2,888
Camlough	2,508
Creggan	2,464
Crossmaglen	2,423
Daisy Hill	2,876
Derrymore	2,948
Drumalane	3,450
Drumgullion	3,028
Fathom	2,868
Forkhill	2,578
Newtownhamilton	2,322
St. Mary's	2,772
St. Patrick's	2,534
Silver Bridge	2,607
Tullyhappy	2,120
Windsor Hill	3,341
Total	97,585

Further Education

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the total number of *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time students at each third-level education facility in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is as follows:

	Full-time	*Part-time*	*Total*
Universities[1]			
Queen's University	9,880	2,623	12,503
University of Ulster	10,972	5,221	16,193
Colleges of Education[1]			
St. Mary's	698	—	698
Stranmillis	689	—	689
Further Education Colleges[2]			
Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education	3,959	17,509	21,468
North-West College	2,063	3,846	5,909
Fermanagh	811	1,971	2,782
Limavady	556	880	1,436
Omagh	923	1,208	2,131
Antrim	379	1,522	1,901
Ballymena	1,131	2,592	3,723
Newtownabbey	786	2,780	3,566
New Technical Ballymoney	308	1,075	1,383
Coleraine	671	1,193	1,864
Magherafelt	514	797	1,311
Larne	303	898	1,201
Northern Ireland Hotel and Catering College	223	69	292
Lisburn	757	2,473	3,230
Down	880	2,081	2,961
Newcastle	368	742	1,110
Castlereagh	693	2,429	3,122
North Down	1,218	4,654	5,872
Lurgan	528	1,033	1,561
Portadown	876	2,120	2,996
Armagh	1,002	1,048	2,050
Banbridge	337	1,159	1,496
East Tyrone	867	1,558	2,425
Newry/Kilkeel	1,284	2,947	4,231

[1] Provisional 1992-93 figures.

[2] 1991-92 figures (latest available). Of the 21,437 full-time and 58,584 part-time students at Institutions of Further Education, 951 are following full-time higher education courses and 3,144 are following part-time higher education courses.

Births

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many babies were born at each of the hospitals in Londonderry, Omagh, Dungannon, Enniskillen, Armagh, Newry and Craigavon in 1992; and how many of the mothers at each hospital were domiciled in the Republic of Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: The information is not available in the exact form requested. The table shows the number of live and still births at hospitals in Londonderry, Omagh, Dungannon, Enniskillen, Newry and Craigavon for the financial year 1991-92. The number of mothers at each hospital domiciled in the Republic of Ireland is shown in brackets. Armagh community hospital provides obstetric out-patient clinics only.

Hospital	*Live*	*Still*	*Total*
Craigavon Area (Craigavon)	2,287 (12)	12 (0)	2,299 (12)
Daisy Hill (Newry)	1,668 (5)	7 (0)	1,675 (5)
South Tyrone (Dungannon)	895 (1)	3 (0)	898 (1)
Altnagelvin (Londonderry)	2,846 (50)	11 (0)	2,857 (50)
Erne (Enniskillen)	732 (4)	4 (0)	736 (4)
Tyrone County (Omagh)	970 (0)	4 (0)	974 (0)

Housing Grants

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many grant applications were received in each Northern Ireland Housing Executive grants office since the commencement of the provision in the Housing Order 1992; and how many applications were (i) approved, (ii) refused and (iii) under consideration.

Mr. Atkins: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, but the chief executive has advised me that the information requested is as follows:—

Grants Office	*Received*	*Refused*	*Under consideration*	*Approved*	*Withdrawn*
North East Region					
Ballymena	477	46	431	—	—
Ballyclare	627	149	476	—	2
Coleraine	271	38	217	—	16
West Region					
Omagh	653	22	592	—	39
Fermanagh	628	44	581	—	3
Derry	1,078	29	1,024	—	25
South Region					
Craigavon	712	68	641	—	3
Newry	799	98	701	—	—
South East Region					
Lisburn	670	72	596	2	—
Newtownards	793	33	741	—	19
Belfast Region					
Belfast District 1	645	100	528	—	17
Belfast District 2	855	24	810	—	21
Belfast District 3	875	19	837	—	19
Total	9,083	742	8,175	2	164

The executive is giving priority to dealing with the backing of cases received prior to the introduction of the new scheme on 1 October 1992. This must be cleared by the end of March.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will give details of the formulae employed as part of the income assessment of Northern Ireland Housing Executive grant applicants;

(2) if he will give details of the income levels which are acceptable to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive for grant purposes.

Mr. Atkins: If a grant applicant and all other relevant persons are in receipt of income support, full grant up to the cost of the approved works is payable.

In all other cases, a test of resources is applied to determine how much, if anything, an applicant and other relevant persons may have to contribute towards the cost of the approved works. The balance of the costs will be met by grant.

The test sets income and capital returns against appropriate allowances. Any resultant excess of income over allowances is translated into a borrowing power, to determine the amount which individual grant applicants are deemed to be able to contribute towards the cost of the works. The treatment of income and capital, the various allowances and the formula for arriving at the borrowing power, are contained in the House Renovation etc. Grants (Reduction of Grant) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1992—statutory rule 1992 No. 412—copies of which are available in the House of Commons Library. There is no income bar on applications for housing grant.

Housing Waiting Lists

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the average waiting period for a housing applicant in the A1 priority category in each district office of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive; and what were the comaprable waiting periods for each of the past five years.

Mr. Atkins: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. I am advised by the chief executive that the information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mortgage Repossessions

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many orders for mortgage repossessions have occurred in each constituency in Northern Ireland in the past 12 months.

Mr. Atkins: Statistics show that in Northern Ireland as a whole 633 orders to repossess both domestic and commercial mortgaged properties were issued in 1992, compared with 832 in 1991.

A breakdown by constituency is not available.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Quangos

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his oral reply of 15 February, *Official Report*, column 15, if he will list the 800 quangos abolished by the Government.

Mr. Waldegrave: The figure 800 refers to the difference between the number of non-departmental public bodies in 1979—2,167 and 1992—1,412. It does not correspond to a single list of abolished bodies because there have been both creations and abolitions throughout the period. Further information is given in "Public Bodies", published annually since 1982 and available in the Library of the House.

Research and Development

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer of 18 February, *Official Report*, columns *300-4*, about the framework research development programmes, what were the values in pounds sterling of the payments shown in tables B and C at the time the payments were made.

Mr. Waldegrave: The information given in table B in my answer of 18 February, *Official Report*, columns *300-4*, is the breakdown of expenditure for the third framework programme covering the period 1990-94. The amounts deemed necessary for the specific areas were agreed in April 1990. The supplementary funding was agreed in December 1992. Table 1 sets out the sums for the programme as it was initially adopted in April 1990 in pounds sterling at the rate of exchange prevailing at that time—£1 = 1·351 ecu—and for the supplementary funding at the exchange rate prevailing in December 1992—£1 = 1·253 ecu. The drawing down of these sums will take place over a period extending beyond 1994.

The information on payments made to date under the third framework programme was shown in table D of my previous answer. These payments took place between October and December 1991 and table 2 shows their value in pounds sterling based on the average rate of exchange over that period—£1 = 1·413 ecu.

Table C of my answer of 18 February contains information on thousands of contracts let at different times during the period 1987-1991. Information on payments in pounds sterling, at the time each specific payment was made, would be obtainable only at disproportionate cost.

Table 1

Third framework programme of Community activities on research and development (1990-94)

Breakdown of the amount deemed necessary between the various activities

	Framework programme agreed April 1990 [1]*£ million*	*Breakdown of supplement agreed December 1992* [2]*£ million*
Information technology	1,000·7	143·7
Communication technology	362·0	51·9
Telematics	281·3	39·9
Industrial and materials	553·7	79·8
Measurement and testing	103·6	15·2
Environment	306·4	43·9
Marine sciences and technology	77·0	11·2
Biotechnology	121·4	17·6
Agri and agro-industrial	246·5	35·1
Biomedicine and health	98·4	14·4
Life sciences for development	82·2	12·0
Non-nuclear energies	116·2	[3]47·9
Nuclear fission	147·3	23·1
Fusion	339·0	87·8
Human capital and mobility	383·4	55·1
Total	4,219·0	[3]718·5

[1] £1 = 1·351 ecu.

[2] £1 = 1·253 ecu.

[3] £39·9 million in reserve with priority for non-nuclear energy.

Table 2

Payments under the third framework programme for European Community research and development (1990-94)

Programme	*Germany* *£ million*	*United Kingdom* *£ million*	*Total EC funding* *£ million*
Communication technologies	5·862	5·206	30·323
Telematics	2·281	3·292	18·250
Environment	·854	·204	1·449
Total (nearest 50,000)	9·00	8·70	50·02

Note: exchange rate: £1 = 1·413 ecu.

Consultants

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many contracts for consultancies were awarded by his Department over *(a)* the last 12 months and *(b)* 1991-92.

Mr. Waldegrave: The number of consultancy contracts awarded by the Office of Public Service and Science and its agencies *(a)* in the last 12 months, 1 February 1992 to 31 January 1993, and *(b)* in the financial year 1991-92 are as follows:

(a) 358

(b) 272.

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the contracts awarded by his Department to *(a)* Coopers and Lybrand management consultants, *(b)* Touche Ross management consultants, *(c)* Price Waterhouse management consultants, *(d)* Ernst and Young management consultants, *(e)* Chrichton

Roberts Ltd, *(f)* KPMG management consultants and *(g)* Leopold Joseph management consultants, with the total cost of the contracts with each contractor, for (i) the past 12 months and (ii) 1991-92.

Mr. Waldegrave: The information on total costs of contracts awarded by my Department, including its agencies, HMSO and COI to the management consultants listed is as follows:

(a) *Coopers and Lybrand*

Past 12 months (total cost £177,039)—

Supercomputing
COI Customer feedback system
Consultancy extension for Strategic Assignments Consultancy Service
Chartermark Marking Framework

1991-92 (Total cost nil)—

No Contracts

(b) *Touche-Ross*

Past 12 months (Total cost £125,335)—

Review of Financial Information Systems
Market Testing Catering at the London Centre
Sunningdale Park Facilities Management Contract Strategy
[2]Financial Management Information System (CCTA) Consultancy Support: Full Study (Two contracts)
Developing an in-house bid strategy for Market Testing Information Systems/Information Technology
Case and the Issues for Management—Quality Assurance
[2]Financial Management Information System (CCTA) Acceptance Testing
Market Testing experiences
Managing Information Systems Provision

1991-92 (Total cost £80,605)—

[2]Financial Management Information system (CCTA) Acceptance Testing (Two contracts)
Specification for GEMINI Standard Notation
[2]Financial Management Information System (CCTA) Consultancy: Full Study

(c) *Price Waterhouse*

Past 12 months (Total cost £444,711)—

Objective Setting in Personal Review
Charterline
Bristol Warehouse Market Testing

1991-92 (Total cost[1])—

Core Performance Profiles Grades 5-7

(d) *Ernst and Young*

Past 12 months (Total cost £546,272)—

[2]FMS on Purchasing at AFRC
COI Framework Study
Review 3 years performance as an Executive Agency
Review of Purchasing Practices
Study of Electronic Funds Transfer
OPSS Business Unit
Market Testing Workshops; Case for Speakers
Developing an in-house bid strategy for Market Testing Information Systems/Information Technology
Development of Generic Guidance for Market Testing (two contracts)
Information Technology Infrastructure Library—Information Technology services organisation module improvement/development
[2]Appraisal and evaluation library development of exec. information systems volume
Managing Information Systems Provision

1991-92 (Total cost £413,650)—

[1]FMS on Purchasing at AFRC
Market Testing
Report on International data on Science and Technology
[1]Appraisal and Evaluation library development of executive Information Systems Volume
Prioritisation of Information Systems—Tool Support
GEMINI handbook Technical edition
Validation Technical Framework Activity Model
Replacement Consultants in Strategic Assignments Consultancy Service
Consultancy Support for Government Data Network/CSS
Information Technology Infrastructure Library
Information Technology Services Organisation Module

(e) *Chrichton Roberts Ltd.*

Past 12 months (Total cost nil)—

No Contracts

1991-92 (Total cost nil)—

No Contracts

(f) *KPMG*

Past 12 months (Total cost £116,804)—

FMS on costing of Research Council contracts with OGDs
Future Financial Options for the College
[1]Infrastructure Management Scoping Study
[1]Business Transformation Scoping Study
Speaker for Managing Change Workshop

1991-92 (total cost £201,495)—

Information Systems Strategy Study
Distributed Information Technology Infrastructure Scoping Study
[1]Infrastructure Management Scoping Study
[1]Business Transformation Scoping Study
Management Consultancy Support for Telecommunications Division
Report on International Data on Science and Technology
Standards in Competence Frameworks
A Management Matters Survey

(g) *Leopold Joseph*

Past 12 months (total cost nil)—

No contracts

1991-92 (Total cost nil)—

No contracts

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[1] The cost of single contracts is commercial in confidence.

[2] These contracts were awarded in either February or March 1992 and therefore are included under both the past 12 months and 1991-92.

Publicity

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer of 2 June 1992 to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), *Official Report*, column *419*, what is his Office's *(a)* current outturn estimate for publicity expenditure for 1992-93 and *(b)* budgeted publicity expenditure for 1993-94.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Duchy of Lancaster's expenditure on advertising for qualifying beneficiaries in connection with the administration of intestacies in the duchy area for the year ending 30 September 1992 was £25,676·89. Estimated expenditure for 1993 is £24,500 and for 1994 is £25,000.

Estimated expenditure on advertising for the recruitment of magistrates in the duchy area for 1993 is £2,500.

WALES

Public Bodies

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will specify the cost of administering all non-departmental public bodies broken down by *(a)* executive bodies, *(b)* advisory bodies, *(c)* tribunals and *(d)* national health service bodies for which his Department has responsibility in Wales, during each of the last three years.

Mr. David Hunt: Expenditure directly incurred by the Welsh Office on administering its executive and advisory non-departmental public bodies and tribunals for the relevant years is shown in the annual publication, "Public Bodies" for 1990, 1991 and 1992. Copies are available in the Library of the House. Comparable figures in respect of national health service bodies are not readily available, and I will write to the hon. Gentleman shortly.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to instruct all non-departmental public bodies operational in Wales to *(a)* consult community and town councils in Wales regarding finance for schemes affecting their communities and *(b)* provide reasons in writing to community and town councils when their representations to such bodies are not accepted.

Mr. David Hunt: No. This is a matter for the bodies themselves.

Consultants

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the contracts awarded by his Department to *(a)* Coopers and Lybrand management consultants, *(b)* Touche Ross management consultants, *(c)* Price Waterhouse management consultants, *(d)* Ernst and Young management consultants, *(e)* Chrichton Roberts Ltd., *(f)* KPMG management consultants and *(g)* Leopold Joseph management consultants, with the total cost of the contracts with each contractor, for (i) the past 12 months and (ii) 1991-92.

Mr. David Hunt: The Welsh Office has awarded contracts to five of the firms mentioned. These are as follows:

i. OVER THE PAST 12 MONTHS

Coopers and Lybrand Management Consultants
Assistance with the preparation of the market testing programme.

Touche Ross Management Consultants
Evaluation of the Teamcare Valleys project.
Investment appraisal: cancer treatment services in North Wales.
Financial modelling of local government reorganisation.
Welsh Office Internal Audit: assistance with market test.
Review of the transfer of regional oral plastic and maxillo facial surgery services.
Option appraisal: acquisition of property for the Health Promotion Authority for Wales.

Price Waterhouse Management Consultants
Assistance with 1992-93 Market testing programme.

KPMG Management Consultants
Innovation Network Wales: assessment of innovation encouragement in Wales.
Adequacy and accuracy of agent authority (roads) accounts.
Study into the future of the Welsh Office's in-house computer bureau.
Advice on commercial, legal and financial issues arising from the establishment of local authority waste disposal companies.
Appraisal of applications for NHS Trust status in 1993.

ii. 1991-92

Coopers and Lybrand Management Consultants
Review of local management of schools in Wales.
Assistance with the preparation of the market testing programme.
Health Intelligence Unit: preparation of business plan.

Touche Ross Management Consultants
Survey of financial control and management arrangements in further and higher education establishments.
Feasibility study into a school of public health.
Option appraisal: cardiac services in South Wales.
Breast Test Wales: preparation of business procurement plans.

Ernst and Young Management Consultants
End-year procedures for the Department's AS400 computer system.

KPMG Management Consultants
New product development study.

Details of costs cannot be disclosed for reasons of commercial confidentiality.

South Wales Valleys (Development)

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to initiate a community development strategy for the south Wales valley areas.

Mr. David Hunt: I will be announcing my intentions shortly on what will succeed the programme for the valleys. Community development will continue to play an important part in my proposals.

Social Care Planning

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will amend the guidance notes for social care planning to secure that specific forums are established by local authorities to examine local housing demands.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I have no plans to do so.

Bed-and-Breakfast Accommodation

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people are currently accommodated in bed-and-breakfast accommodation in each rural local authority area in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information is not available centrally.

University Hospital of Wales (Catering)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the state of the proceedings relating to the South Glamorgan health authority catering contract at the University hospital of Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The application for leave to apply for judicial review is the subject of continuing correspondence between the solicitors for the applicants and the Treasury Solicitors Department acting for the Secretary of State and the South Glamorgan health authority.

Business Rate

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to adjust the poundage rates applied to the uniform business rate in Wales in line with the poundage levels set for England.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: No. The poundage for Wales and England were set in 1990 at a level which ensured that the overall yield from non-domestic ratepayers remained at the 1989-90 level in real terms. The Welsh poundage was set at a higher rate than the English poundage in 1990 because of lower rateable values in Wales. Since 1990, the poundages in Wales and England have been uprated each year in line with the annual increase in the retail prices index as at September of the preceding year.

The loss of revenue consequent on a real-terms reduction in the Welsh poundage would have to be met from either increased revenue support grant or by the imposition of higher council tax bills on the people of Wales.

Social Care Plans

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to issue guidelines to local authorities on the involvement of housing providers in the formulation of social care plans.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Appropriate guidance has been issued, notably as regards the preparation of housing strategies and operational plans.

Environmental Protection

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish further cost details of the commitments and actions on the environment listed at figure 7.02 of his Department's annual report, 1993, Cm 221.

Mr. David Hunt: Cost details of most of these commitments and actions were set out within the publication "The Environment in Wales: Second Report", and further details have recently been given in the various relevant chapters of the departmental report for 1993-94 to 1995-96. It is not yet possible to attribute specific costs to the remainder of the commitments and actions.

Reservoirs

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to make adaptations to drinking water reservoirs in Wales to enable them to be connected into dual-purpose hydro-generators.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This is a matter for the commercial judgment and decision of the relevant water companies.

European Environmental Agency

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make representations to the European Community to advocate Wales as a possible location for the new European Environmental Agency.

Mr. David Hunt: Cambridge was chosen as the United Kingdom bid for the location of the new European Environmental Agency in 1990, after a long consultation process. There are no plans to reconsider this decision.

Manufacturing Jobs

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many skilled or semi-skilled jobs have been lost in the manufacturing sector in each local authority area in Wales in each of the last two years.

Mr. David Hunt: The information is not available.

Truancy

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the absence rate in each of the local education authorities in Wales in the secondary section; what measures he proposes to reduce these rates; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Although information about absence rates is not collected centrally, details of attendance rates can be found in table 1.09 of "Statistics of Education and Training in Wales: Schools No. 1 1993", a copy of which is in the Library of the House. It is our intention for details of absence rates on an individual school basis to be published and we will shortly be issuing a consultation paper which addresses this issue amongst others.

It is, however, for local education authorities to ensure that parents are fulfilling their statutory obligations as to their children's education.

Training

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give, in 1992-93 prices and cash terms, the total amount spent of the budget for training for Wales in each year since 1989-90, the expected outturn in 1992-93 and plans for 1993-94.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information requested is given in the following table:

Wales training expenditure in cash and real terms (1992-93 prices) 1989-90 to 1991-92 and expected outturns in 1992-93 and plans for 1993-94

	£ millions
1989-90	
Cash	148·406
Real terms	178·607
1990-91	
Cash	146·132
Real terms	162·869
1991-92	
Cash	145·773
Real terms	151·968

	£ millions
1992-93	
Estimated outturn	150·095
1993-94	
Cash	146·700
Real terms	150·734

Local Government

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library the latest conclusions of the sub-group on internal management submitted to the Welsh Consultative Council on local government reform.

Mr. David Hunt *[pursuant to his reply, 4 February 1993, column 337]:* The final report of the internal management sub-group has now been considered by the Welsh Consultative Council on Local Government. I have placed a copy of this report in the Library of the House.

Assisted Areas

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to publish the results of his review of regional assisted areas in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: The representations received about the review of assisted areas are currently being considered. The Government hope to be able to make an announcement on the result of the review as soon as possible, taking into account the outcome of the coal review and subject to receiving European Commission clearance.

ENVIRONMENT

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

19. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made in putting out local services to compulsory competitive tendering.

Mr. Robin Squire: A wide range of local authority services are subject to CCT, including highway and building construction and maintenance, refuse collection, street sweeping, grounds maintenance, and catering. Last November my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced the extension of CCT to a further range of local authority professional and corporate services.

22. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the development of compulsory competitive tendering on housing management.

29. **Sir Paul Beresford:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the development of compulsory competitive tendering on housing management.

Sir George Young: The Housing and Urban Development Bill contains provisions which pave the way for the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering to local authority housing management. It is anticipated that regulations governing the detailed operation and implementation of local authority housing management CCT will be introduced later this year.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to ensure that all local authorities apply compulsory competitive tendering with equal rigour; and which county councils are in the bottom quartile of performance in this area.

Mr. Robin Squire: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Sweeney) earlier today.

Urban Programme

20. **Mr. Mandelson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a further statement on the effects of the abolition of the urban programme on his inner-city strategy.

Mr. Howard: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the Member for Bristol, East (Ms. Corston) earlier today.

23. **Mr. Mudie:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from the Leeds area on the effects of the abolition of the urban programme on his inner-city strategy.

Mr. Howard: The urban programme has not been abolished. There will be a substantial programme in 1993-94 amounting to £176 million, which will enable us to honour in full existing commitments and provide £20 million for urban partnership fund projects as part of the new capital partnership programme. Planned resources for my Department's urban group of programmes for 1993-94 will increase by over £90 million; total spending will be over £1 billion.

Mineral Planning

21. **Mr. Jack Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the outcome of the consultations relating to the mineral planning guidance note 3.

Mr. Baldry: I announced on 15 July 1992 the Government's intention to revise the current planning guidelines on opencast coal which are contained in minerals planning guidance note 3. Draft revised guidance will be issued for public consultation as soon as possible following the outcome of the coal review.

Eco-labelling

24. **Mr. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects the first EC eco-labels to be issued in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maclean: The European Commission recently announced that the eco-labelling scheme would be launched in June and that they expected to have agreed the criteria for a range of product groups by then. The number and timing of awards will depend on industry's response to the scheme and whether there are any objections to the proposed awards.

Retail Development

25. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received regarding his Department's draft planning policy guidance PPG6 (revised) on town centres and retail development; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: We have received about 550 responses to the draft, and I expect to publish the revised guidance in the spring.

Empty Council Properties

26. **Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the 10 local authorities with the highest number of empty council homes.

Mr. Baldry: In the latest housing investment programme returns, the 10 councils reporting the highest percentage of their council house stock empty on 1 April 1992 were:

	Empty dwellings
Liverpool	5,552
Hackney	2,432
Burnley	368
Manchester	4,938
Salford	1,661
North Tyneside	1,082
Redbridge	373
Tower Hamlets	1,703
Easington	619
Newcastle upon Tyne	1,562

These figures cover management vacants and those which are empty awaiting sale, major repairs or demolition.

I am considering whether to put greater emphasis on a more selective definition that would better reflect underlying trends in local authorities' management performance.

Rented Accommodation

27. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further steps he intends to announce to increase the availability of specialist and low-cost accommodation for rent in areas of high house prices.

Sir George Young: Housing associations are now the main providers of new social housing for rent. The Government make capital resources available to them through the approved development programme (ADP) of the Housing Corporation, which also provides revenue support to special needs schemes.

The allocation of the ADP between and within regions is determined by the housing needs indicator (HNI), a composite, relative indicator of the incidence of housing needs which takes account of many factors, including the number of people unable to afford to buy their own homes.

The corporation estimates that over the three years from 1992-93 to 1994-95, 170,000 new social homes will be provided by housing associations in England—far more than the 153,000 originally forecast. Measures taken to encourage the private rented sector and to make better use of empty homes within the public sector should also increase the supply of housing for rent.

Housing Associations

28. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many properties have been bought by housing associations using the additional sums allocated to them in the autumn statement.

Mr. Baldry: The latest figures from the Housing Corporation show that by 19 February approvals for the purchase of 16,666 properties had been granted, with 5,755 purchases actually completed. This means that already our original target of 16,000 purchases has been exceeded, using only 93 per cent. of the funds allocated. The corporation now estimates that housing associations in England will be able to buy over 17,000 homes for those in need as a result of the allocation in the autumn statement. Another 3,500 purchases will be made possible through cash grants to tenants to become home owners. I congratulate the corporation and housing associations involved on their excellent work.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the future funding of small and medium-sized housing associations.

Sir George Young: The Housing Corporation's allocations are made in response to competitive bidding by housing associations. In 1992-93, just over half the Housing Corporation's main programme funds were allocated to housing associations with fewer than 2,500 units of stock. The allocations for 1993-94 will be announced shortly and I fully expect small and medium-sized associations to continue to be well represented among developing associations.

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he is in a position to announce the distribution among local authority areas of the Housing Corporation's allocations to housing associations in 1993-94.

Sir George Young: I am pleased to announce the allocation to local authority areas of new approvals to be made by the Housing Corporation under its 1993-94 approved development programme. Copies of a table containing the information have been placed in the Library of the House. The corporation is itself writing to individual housing associations with details of their 1993-94 allocations.

The corporation estimates that, next year, the ADP will fund the completion of 54,500 homes, including 10,000 for low-cost home ownership. This is an increase of 3,300 on the 51,200 completions anticipated for 1993-94 a year ago. In addition, the housing market package announced in the autumn statement has added an extra 19,000 units to this year's programme to achieve a total of 120,000 new housing association lettings across these two years, compared with the 94,600 anticipated at the time of the 1992-93 ADP.

The ADP continues to provide good value for money. Competitive bidding between housing associations, consortium deals with developers, and the provision by local authorities of land at nil or reduced cost mean that the corporation expects to approve between 10 per cent. and 20 per cent. more units in 1993-94 than was estimated when decisions were announced in December about the national breakdown of the ADP. This would mean an additional 4,240 to 8,480 new homes for people in need.

Decisions on the ADP and local authority housing investment programmes (HIPs) are now taken within a co-ordinated framework. As I announced at the time of the HIP settlement in December, local authorities, the Housing Corporation and local housing associations have co-operated closely in preparing local programmes as part of a single housing strategy, and we have been able to consider the two programmes in parallel.

Local Government Finance

30. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authorities have increased their indebtedness in the last 10 years.

Mr. Robin Squire: A total of 249 local authorities are known to have increased their external debt between March 1982 and March 1992. This represents 69 per cent. of authorities for whom figures are available; data are unavailable for 40 authorities.

Local Government (Corruption)

31. **Mr. Oppenheim:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on corruption in local government.

Mr. Robin Squire: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given earlier today by my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities, to my hon. Friend the member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham).

Local Government Restructuring (Lancashire)

32. **Mr. Elletson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will visit Blackpool to discuss the restructuring of local government in Lancashire.

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans to visit Blackpool in the immediate future.

House Building

33. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the latest year-on-year figures for public sector house building; and what is the comparative figure for 1979.

Mr. Baldry: Provisional figures show that in England in 1992 there were 20,700 housebuilding completions by housing associations and 2,900 completions by local authorities, new towns and Government Departments. The comparative figures for 1979 are 16,300 by housing associations, and 74,800 by local authorities, new towns and Government Departments.

These figures are derived from records for building control purposes. It is sometimes difficult for local authorities, or the National House Building Council, which is responsible for building control, to identify whether a dwelling is being built for a housing association or for a private developer. This may lead to an understatement of housing association starts.

In addition the figures cover only the construction of new dwellings, and exclude rehabilitation, purchases of existing stock and incentive payments made to tenants in order to release homes for reletting. If these are included, new units of social housing made available through housing associations funded by the Housing Corporation's approved development programme is expected to total 65,000 units in this financial year, together with around 5,000 units funded by local authority housing association grant and some 3,400 local authority units freed by the cash incentive scheme of grants to enable local authority tenants to become home owners.

Refurbishment

34. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from the National Federation of Council Leaseholders regarding costs of refurbishment schemes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The federation has made representations concerning the level of contributions demanded from council leaseholders towards costs of major works.

I am aware that in some areas high service charge bills can cause difficulties and I have commissioned research to find out how widespread the problem is.

Market Testing

35. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will consider extending market testing to a range of his own Department's activities.

Mr. Howard: My Department is already market testing a range of its own activities, of which the main ones are listed in the citizens charter first report (Cm 2101). But that list also includes the testing of some services which have been provided to the Department by hitherto monopoly suppliers.

Planning Applications (Objectors)

36. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to give objectors to planning applications a right of appeal to the Secretary of State.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. and learned Friend has no such plans.

Crime Prevention

37. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what account is taken in the current year's revenue grant settlement to local authorities of their responsibilities in crime prevention.

Mr. Robin Squire: There is no provision in the revenue support grant settlement which is earmarked specifically for crime prevention. Within the overall resources provided, however, police and probation services do undertake a range of functions directed towards crime prevention and reduction.

Local Government Employment

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his Department's estimate of changes in employment in local government between 1990-91 and 1992-93.

Mr. Howard: Over the period I estimate that the number of people employed by local government has reduced by about 75,000, the equivalent of 52,000 full-time posts or 2·8 per cent.

Nitrate Pollution

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the impact on public water supplies of nitrate pollution.

Mr. Maclean: Water supplies in the 2,577 water supply zones in England and Wales are routinely monitored to check their levels of nitrate against the standard of 50 milligrams per litre which is set in the relevant regulations of 1989. Most zones comply fully with this standard but, in 1991, breaches of this standard were found in 94 zones. The water companies have in place improvement programmes to secure compliance with the standard for nitrate by the end of 1995 at the latest.

House Condition Survey

Ms. Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the results of the English house condition survey 1991 will be made available; and what will be their role in the allocation of specified capital grant resources for the English regions in 1994-95.

Mr. Baldry: Results from the 1991 English house condition survey will be published this year. It is planned that, for 1994-95, figures from the 1991 survey will replace the 1986 figures currently used in the formulae for the allocation of specific capital grant to English regions.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he now expects the house condition survey; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The results of the English house condition survey will be published this year.

Watch Your Waste Week

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans his Department has to mark Watch Your Waste Week in March; and what proposals he has for the future of the event.

Mr. Maclean: The Department, in conjunction with Waste Watch, has been encouraging local authorities, voluntary groups and industry to participate in Watch Your Waste Week. The week is being launched in London on 18 March and a range of events is being planned throughout the country.

The Department also plans to have a stand at the ideal home exhibition, March 18 to April 12, which will focus, amongst other issues, on recycling.

I would encourage all hon. Members to participate in the week. I have put details about the week in the Library of the House.

Our aims for the campaign are to increase awareness of how people can reduce, re-use and recycle their waste and also to encourage them to buy products which minimise waste or are made from recycled products. We will consider, in the light of its effectiveness, whether or not the week should be repeated.

Empty Properties

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the number of empty properties purchased by housing associations or other bodies as a result of the policy changes announced in the autumn statement and the number which have been used to provide additional social housing.

Mr. Baldry: The latest figures from the Housing Corporation show that by 19 February approvals for the purchase of 16,666 properties had been granted, with 5,755 purchases actually completed. This means that already our original target of 16,000 purchases has been exceeded, using only 93 per cent. of the funds allocated, and nearly 6,000 families have been housed. The corporation now estimates that housing associations in England will be able to buy over 17,000 homes for those in need as a result of the allocation in the autumn statement. Another 3,500 purchases will be made possible through cash grants to local authority and housing association tenants to become home owners. All the homes purchased by housing associations or freed by existing tenants will be used to provide additional social housing. I congratulate the corporation and housing associations involved on their excellent work.

National Parks

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to bring forward legislation concerning the national parks in England and Wales.

Mr. Maclean: Our policy statement on the national parks, published in January 1992, promised legislation to create independent authorities for the eight national parks in England and Wales currently run as county council committees. I fully recognise the importance of introducing national park legislation at the earliest opportunity and I have repeatedly said that we will do so.

Urban Partnership

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 12 February to the hon. Member for Wyre Forest, (Mr. Coombs), *Official Report*, column *835*, what was the total value of the bids put forward for urban partnership; and if he will list the successful authorities with *(a)* the value of the bids put forward, *(b)* the number of projects put forward, *(c)* the value of bids accepted and *(d)* the number of projects supported.

Mr. Robin Squire: The total value of the bids submitted for a share of the urban partnership fund (UPF) was £82·1 million. The table lists for the successful authorities *(a)* the value of bids submitted, and *(b)* the number of projects/packages of projects submitted. A full list of proposed projects, together with the amount of UPF support which has been agreed in principle for each, has been placed in the Library of the House. It is open to local authorities to take forward proposals which have not been offered UPF support using their capital receipts and any private sector or other contributions.

	Total value of UPF bids (£ million)	*Total number of projects/packages of projects submitted for UPF support*
Birmingham	2·550	14
Bolton	0·799	4
Brent	0·750	7
Bristol	0·500	1
Burnley	0·395	7
Coventry	7·510	6
Derby	0·532	7
Doncaster	1·124	3
Dudley	0·775	8
Gateshead	0·907	2
Greenwich	1·242	7
Hackney	0·498	7

	Total value of UPF bids (£ million)	*Total number of projects/packages of projects submitted for UPF support*
Hammersmith and Fulham	0·817	12
Hartlepool	0·765	6
Hull	0·398	3
Islington	1·107	3
Kirklees	2·500	1
Knowsley	3·982	3
Leeds	6·020	4
Leicester	0·583	14
Lambeth	1·085	4
Langbaurgh	0·430	2
Liverpool	3·175	2
Manchester	2·495	21
Middlesbrough	0·896	2
Newcastle	2·866	12
Newham	0·807	2
North Tyneside	1·862	6
Nottingham	0·550	11
Oldham	1·240	4
Plymouth	1·794	5
Preston	0·582	3
Rochdale	0·840	9
Rotherham	0·740	1
Salford	1·657	16
Sandwell	2·281	12
Sefton	0·395	2
Sheffield	5·320	5
South Tyneside	0·710	3
Southwark	1·230	2
Stockton	0·177	6
Sunderland	1·300	4
Wandsworth	0·670	1
Wigan	0·500	3
Wirral	1·115	2
Wolverhampton	2·000	23

Water Disconnections

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the operation of the law relating to the powers for a water company or others to cause a disconnection of a domestic consumer's water supply.

Mr. Maclean: The Director General of Water Services issued guidelines to water companies last year on a consistent and fair approach towards customers with unpaid charges. This followed a review of companies' policy and practice. He is now considering reports from the regional customer service committees on the effectiveness of the guidelines and will be considering what further action may be necessary. It is right that bills should be paid, but equally that water companies should provide every assistance to customers who are having difficulty meeting their bills.

Construction Industry

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action is being taken to assist the construction industry.

Mr. Baldry: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 27 January 1993 to my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) at columns *762-63*.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of total carbon dioxide emissions is accounted for by domestic consumption of energy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Emissions of carbon dioxide from domestic sources in the United Kingdom have been estimated at 14 per cent. of total emissions in 1990.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the level of output of carbon dioxide in the United Kingdom in *(a)* 1992 and *(b)* 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Estimated emissions of CO_2 in the United Kingdom in 1991 and 1992 are not yet available. My Department aims to publish 1991 figures, broken down by emission source, by type of fuel, and by final user of energy, in April in the annual "Digest of Environmental Protection and Water Statistics (No. 15)".

Housing Action Trusts

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which tenants' groups have put forward proposals for housing action trusts since the announcement of the citizens charter.

Sir George Young: We have had approaches from:

Norris Green Tenants and Homeowners Association, Liverpool

Fern Lodge Estate Tenants and Residents Association, Streatham, London

St. George's Residents Association, Gloucester Grove Estate, Peckham, London

Harris Street Neighbourhood Forum (Elmington Estate), Camberwell, London

Norfolk Park Tenants and Residents Association and St. Aidan's Tenants Association, Norfolk Park Estate, Sheffield

Departmental Publicity

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide details of the breakdown of expenditure on departmental publicity relating to housing matters for 1992-93.

Sir George Young: As at 23 February 1993 my Department has committed £1·86 million for publicity expenditure on housing and urban programme policies. The breakdown is as follows:

	£
Advertising—media and production	1,007,500
Printing—design and production	474,400
Exhibitions—stand space and production	127,300
Audio Visual—design and production	13,300
Promotions	65,000
Fulfilment—response and postages	53,200
Conferences—room hire and organisation	117,800
Miscellaneous—small items, badges, etc.	1,500

Darwin Initiative

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many meetings of his advisory committee under the chairmanship of Sir Crispin Tickell on the Darwin initiative have taken place; and if he will make a statement on the progress of the Darwin initiative.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment gave to the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Milligan) on 17 February at column *282*.

Ministers' Private Residences

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the Ministers who have received public funds for approved work on their private residences arising from their ministerial duties.

Mr. Howard: I can answer only in respect of my own Department. There has been no such expenditure on the homes of current DOE Ministers other than strictly for security purposes. It is not in the public interest to disclose or aid the identification of security arrangements relating to public figures.

EC Eco-audit Scheme

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made on the EC eco-audit scheme.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. and learned Friend on 20 January 1993 to my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) at column *267*, in which he reported that the Council had reached broad agreement to the proposal.

The Government hope that the proposal will be adopted during the Danish presidency.

Housing Legislation

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list, in order, all the primary housing legislation passed by the Government since 1979.

Sir George Young: The table lists, in order, the Acts directly related to housing in England passed by Parliament since 1979.

1980—Housing Act
1983—Mobile Homes Act
1984—Housing and Building Control Act
1984—Housing Defects Act
1985—Housing Act[1]
1985—Housing Associations Act[1]
1985—Housing (Consequential Provisions) Act[1]
1985—Landlord and Tenant Act[1]
1985—Rent (Amendment) Act
1986—Housing and Planning Act
1987—Landlord and Tenant Act
1988—Housing Act
1989—Local Government and Housing Act

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[1] Consolidation not new legislation.

Other primary legislation indirectly related to housing includes:

1980—Local Government, Planning and Land Act
1982—Social Security and Housing Benefits Act
1983—Matrimonial Homes Act
1983—Social Security and Housing Benefits Act
1984—Building Act
1984—Registered Homes Act
1986—Building Societies Act
1986—Social Security Act
1987—Access to Personal Files Act
1988—Landlord and Tenant Act
1989—Social Security Act
1990—Social Security Act
1991—Registered Homes (Amendment) Act
1992—Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act
1992—Social Security Administration Act.

Drinking Water

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many prosecutions have been taken out by the drinking water inspectorate against water supply companies for failure of drinking water standards.

Mr. Maclean: Legislation does not provide for water companies to be prosecuted for failure to meet drinking water quality standards. A criminal offence has been created of supplying water unfit for human consumption. There have been no prosecutions of water companies to date, but the drinking water inspectorate is investigating a small number of incidents which may lead to prosecution.

Revenue Support Grant

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the level of revenue support grant per head in *(a)* Pendle, *(b)* Ribble Valley, *(c)* the City of Westminster, *(d)* Wandsworth and *(e)* the City of London for 1992-93 and 1993-94.

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is as follows:

	RSG per head 1992-93 £	*RSG per head 1993-94* £
Pendle	325·65	49·62
Ribble Valley	292·92	13·64
City of Westminster	958·85	802·79
Wandsworth	714·59	619·18
City of London	10,771·14	11,225·31

The figures for the two years are not comparable since revenue support grant for the year 1993-94 is to be paid direct to each billing and major precepting authority, whereas in 1992-93 it was all paid into the collection fund administered by the charging authority.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much rate or revenue support grant per head of population has been given in total to each of the metropolitan authorities since 1980; and how much extra grant Sheffield would have received over that period if it had received *(a)* the grant per head of the highest recipient authority and *(b)* the grant per head of the average of all authorities.

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 2 February 1993]*: The amount of rate or revenue support grant in total for each metropolitan district authority for the period 1980-81 to 1993-94 inclusive divided by the average resident population over that period is given in the table. Sheffield would have received an extra £918 million if it had received the grant per head of the highest recipient authority and an extra £286 million an average of £20·4 million for each year if it had received the average grant per head of the metropolitan districts. Sheffield's total RSG over the period was £1,535·2 million.

Average rate or revenue support grant per head for metropolitan authorities since 1980-81

Local authority	*Grant per head (£ head)*
Barnsley	3,188
Birmingham	3,878
Bolton	3,680
Bradford	4,488
Bury	2,815
Calderdale	3,670
Coventry	3,352
Doncaster	3,318
Dudley	2,125
Gateshead	3,457
Kirklees	3,820
Knowsley	4,374
Leeds	2,888
Liverpool	4,557
Manchester	4,509
Newcastle upon Tyne	2,910
North Tyneside	3,241
Oldham	4,182
Rochdale	4,015
Rotherham	3,366
Salford	3,742
Sandwell	3,159
Sefton	2,870
Sheffield	2,851
Solihull	2,263
South Tyneside	4,037
St. Helens	3,355
Stockport	2,407
Sunderland	3,696
Tameside	3,496
Trafford	2,254
Wakefield	2,800
Walsall	2,979
Wigan	3,139
Wirral	3,229
Wolverhampton	3,633

SCOTLAND

Gartnavel Hospital (Deaths)

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many deaths have occurred in the past five years after patients placed under supervision in Gartnavel hospital, Glasgow, have left the hospital.

Mr. Stewart: On the understanding that all in-patients are under supervision during their stay in hospital, four Gartnavel Royal patients have died in the past five years having left the hospital without being discharged.

Nurses

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many agency nurses were employed in each health board in each year since 1989.

Mr. Stewart: The information is not available centrally in the form requested. The table shows the average whole-time equivalent of the agency nurses working in health boards at 30 September each year.

Average whole time equivalents at 30 September

Health board	[1]*1989*	[1]*1990*	[2]*1991*	[2]*1992*
Scotland[3]	211·5	266·1	247·4	279·2
Argyll and Clyde	2·3	2·0	0·6	0·3
Ayrshire and Arran	7·7	2·1	2·9	[4]0·9
Borders	4·2	0·3	0·0	0·0
Dumfries and Galloway	0·0	0·0	0·4	0·4
Fife	0·0	1·1	0·7	0·3
Forth Valley	0·6	6·8	2·3	0·0
Grampian	7·1	6·5	11·9	[5]31·4
Greater Glasgow	85·0	153·4	117·1	164·9
Highland	0·0	0·5	0·3	0·8
Lanarkshire	0·0	0·1	0·0	0·0
Lothian	104·2	91·4	109·0	80·2
Orkney	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0
Shetland	0·4	2·7	2·3	0·0
Tayside	0·0	0·2	0·1	0·0
Western Isles	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0

[1] Whole time equivalents calculated on the estimated total hours worked by agency nurses based on the six months data that are available.

[2] Whole time equivalents calculated on the total hours worked by agency nurses during the year ending 30 September.

[3] Rounding of individual figures may produce slight differences between the sum of constituent items and totals.

[4] Ayrshire and Arran Health Board includes agency hours at the South Ayrshire Hospitals NHS Trust.

[5] Grampian Health Board includes agency hours at Aberdeen Royal Hospitals NHS Trust.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidance has been given to health boards to ensure that student nurses are not unemployed when they qualify.

Mr. Stewart: None. The matching of newly qualified nurses to vacancies is best handled at local level. The majority of newly qualified nurses find employment on completion of their training, but student nurses are made aware at the start of their training that employment is not guaranteed at the end of their course.

Set-aside Land

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what area of agricultural land in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scoland as a whole is set aside under the common agricultural policy; and what is its annual value.

Sir Hector Monro: In 1991-92, 674 hectares in Strathclyde and 27,415 hectares in Scotland were set aside under the provisions of the common agricultural policy. Set-aside grant payments in respect of those areas amounted to £103,573 and £4,706,725 respectively. Details of land set aside in 1992-93 are not yet available.

Marine Laboratory, Aberdeen

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what consideration he has given to conferring next steps agency status on the marine laboratory in Aberdeen; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what consultations he has had with *(a)* staff, *(b)* the fishing industry, *(c)* local councils and *(d)* right hon. or hon. Members, regarding the possibility of conferring next steps agency status on the marine laboratory in Aberdeen; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer given by my right hon. Friend on 18

November 1992 at column *271*, stating that the Scottish Office's fisheries research service (FRS) is being considered as a candidate for next steps agency status. The senior management of FRS are fully engaged in this consideration, and staff are being kept informed. The House will be informed of any final decision, in the normal way.

Archaeological Sites

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what is his assessment of the damage caused by the recent strong gales on archaeological sites in *(a)* Orkney, *(b)* Shetland, *(c)* St. Ninian's Isle and *(d)* the Western Isles;

(2) what action he proposes to take to help rescue-archaeology in the Scottish islands;

(3) what is the preliminary assessment on materials from Jarlshof sent by his Department for expert analysis in Aberdeen in relation to oil films.

Sir Hector Monro: Responsibility for the subject of the questions has been delegated to Historic Scotland under its chief executive Mr. Graeme Munro. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Graeme N. Munro to Mr. Tam Dalyell, dated 24 February 1993.

As Chief Executive of Historic Scotland I am writing in response to your three Parliamentary Questions of 23 February to the Secretary of State for Scotland about rescue archaeology in the Scottish islands, the effect of the recent storms on archaeological sites in the Western Isles, Orkney and Shetland (including St. Ninian's Isle) and the preliminary assessment by the Robert Gordon University of the impact of oil from the Braer on stones from Jarlshof.

Coastal erosion is the most serious single issue facing archaeological sites in the Scottish islands. In addition (and principally in Orkney) agricultural improvement operations in recent decades have resulted in destruction of or damage to a number of sites. However, with changes to agricultural and crofting grant schemes in the last few years such damage has reduced. Further, section 17 of the 1986 Agriculture Act effectively requires the Minister to take account of archaeological features when assessing agricultural and grant proposals. Historic Scotland has participated in Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department training courses on section 17 to ensure that staff have an awareness of archaeological features and give them appropriate consideration in terms of the statutory requirements. Historic Scotland has included in its programme of archaeological work for 1993/4 an investigation of those small burial mounds in Orkney particularly vulnerable to destruction through agricultural improvements. Other threats do arise; for instance, Historic Scotland commissioned excavation of the neolithic settlement at Barnhouse, near Stenness in Orkney, to help prevent further damage by agricultural ploughing of long-ploughed ground. I hope that publication of the proposed National Planning Policy Guideline and associated Planning Advice Note on archaeology will lead to prevention of damage to archaeological sites through development, or at least to its mitigation. On most issues, we rely largely on liaison with Islands archaeologists to alert us to sites where rescue excavation may be desirable. In addition, scheduled sites are inspected regularly by Historic Scotland monument wardens.

Coastal erosion is unpredictable. Sites can be stable for decades; but can at almost any time be damaged by a conjunction of unfavourable tides, barometric pressures and windes. Historic Scotland and its predecessors have over the past 15 years arranged rescue surveys (Table 1) and excavations at many sites in the Scottish islands, and in particular at 35 archaeological sites and groups of sites in response to the threat of coastal erosion (Table 2). We are giving priority now to completing publication of the majority of those surveys and excavations before embarking on any further major works to protect or excavate sites.

Local Authorities are the lead organisations for coastal protection, and future protective measures or excavations should be considered along with other coastal issues: archaeology has been included in the brief for consultants reporting to the Scottish Office on coastal issues prior to preparation of a Review of Scottish Coastal Issues.

The recent storms are but one episode in a continuing story of damage to archaeological sites in the coastal erosion zone. Our response illustrates the way in which, pending further consideration of coastal issues, Historic Scotland can build on previous work to react to such episodes. Inspectors from Historic Scotland have visited a selection of sites damaged by the January storms on Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles. The Orkney Islands Archaeologist plans detailed inspection of damage to sites in Orkney with financial support from Historic Scotland. Historic Scotland will fund at least one small excavation in Orkney (at Tuquoy, supplementing previous work) and plans further detailed assessment at the Brough of Birsay as a consequence of storm damage.

Historic Scotland has arranged sampling at one damaged site in the Western Isles; other sites visited by an Inspector and damaged in the storms had been sampled previously; no systematic survey is planned at this time but this positiion will be reviewed in April following submission of reports covering survey and excavations in the Western Isles (see Table 2).

Historic Scotland has had no request from the Shetland Islands archaeologist for emergency assessment of sites following the January storms; no systematic survey is planned. A further inspection by officers of Historic Scotland is planned for late February when I shall myself be visiting Shetland.

Assessment of the effects of pollution from oil spilled from the Braer wreck on Jarlshof and neighbouring sites has already commenced. We sent one soil and 9 stone samples from the Jarlshof site to the Robert Gordon University Faculty of Science and Technology on 20 January to enable them to undertake a preliminary analysis of the extent of pollution. The intention was to help Historic Scotland clarify its position regarding a possible clean up of the site following the Braer oil tanker wreck and to assist in determining what appropriate conservation measures should be taken.

The preliminary results indicate that the site is contaminated with crude oil residues. In the absence of an authentic sample of the Braer's cargo, it has not yet been possible to confirm that the ship was the source of the contamination, though the circumstances very strongly suggest it.

There is as yet insufficient information upon which to decide the most appropriate course of action. A programme of further short, and longer term, monitoring is needed. This will look at the effects of the contamination on the biological growth on the stonework, the way it affects the weathering of the stone, and how it may alter the aesthetic appearance.

To undertake this effectively, an on site monitoring programme is envisaged which would run in parallel with a detailed literature search. This would help put the study into a broader scientific context. In addition, laboratory and field studies of the effects of remedial or preventative actions would also be instigated. The work would be carried out in conjunction with other research programmes instigated by The Scottish Office and undertaken by the Macaulay Land Use Research Institute.

I believe that Historic Scotland's record of activity at sites suffering from coastal erosion and other threats in the Scottish islands, summarised in the attached tables, demonstrates our concern and our willingness to respond. By its very nature, rescue excavation is reactive. We are seeking to ensure that wherever possible responses are made within a strategic framework.

Thus the actions which Historic Scotland on behalf of the Secretary of State for Scotland proposes to take to help rescue-archaeology in the Scottish Islands build on those which Historic Scotland has taken in the past. Historic Scotland is putting considerable effort into publication of those sites which have already been excavated, and it is reviewing the relative cost-effectiveness of further rescue excavations and protection. It is also taking measures to

increase awareness of archaeological sites in other Scottish Office departments and to improve the coordination of protection and rescue activities and to ensure harmonisation with the work of other agencies.

Table 1—Scottish islands: A list of coastal archaeological surveys commissioned by Historic Scotland plus archives with a high coastal component

Region and source	*Proportion covered*	*Comments*
Orkney		
Lamb	Good cover	In archive
Shetland		
Turner	Good cover	In archive
Western Isles		
Cowie	More than half the west coast	Formal report due March 1993, interim reports received
Shepherd		
Barber		
Branigan		

Table 2

Scottish Islands: Excavations in advance of marine and aeolian erosion in the coastal erosion zone commissioned or sponsored by historic Scotland between 1977 and 1992

	Excavator	*Last field season*	*Submission to Historic Scotland*
ORKNEY			
Birsay Bay proj. 1	Morris et al	81	published
Birsay Bay proj. 2	Morris et al	83	93
Brough of Birsay 1	Morris et al	83	93
Brough of Birsay 2	Hunter	81	published
Hurnips Point	Hunter	91	published
Noltland	Clarke	81	95 to 96
Point of Cott	Barber	85	93
Pool	Hunter	88	93
Scar	Dalland	91	93
St. Boniface	Lowe	90	94 to 95
Skara Brae II	Clarke	77	95 to 96
Tresness	Smith	83	archive
Tuquoy	Owen	88	93 to 95
Warebeth	Bell	88	published
SHETLAND			
Burland	Barber et al	83	93 to 94
Cunningsburgh	Barber et al	90	93 to 94
Eastshore	Barber et al	83	93 to 94
Fair Isle Harbour	Barber et al	83	93 to 94
Ness of Burgie	Barber et al	83	93 to 94
Sands of Breckon	Barber et al	83	93 to 94
Scantness	Barber et al	83	93 to 94
WESTERN ISLES			
Balelone	Barber et all	83	93
Baleshare	Barber et all	90	93
Barvas	Cowie	79	93
Callanish Leobag	Cowie	79	93
Dalmore	Ponting	83	93 to 94
Dalmore	Sharples	83	93 to 94
Dun Vulan	Parker-Pearson	93	field still
Hornish	Barber et al	84	93
Kneep	Close-Brooks	78	93 to 94
Kneep	Armit	92	92
Newton Ferry	Barber et al	84	93
Rosinish	Shepherd	77	94
South Glendale	Barber	83	94
Udal RUX6	Crawford	83	94 to 95

Drugs

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has held with organisations in *(a)* Inverclyde and *(b)* Strathclyde in relation to ways of dealing with drug problems; what proposals he has put forward for Scottish Office assistance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 12 February 1993]:* Drug misuse in Strathclyde is a matter of continuing concern to my right hon. Friend; and the Scottish Office is in regular contact with statutory and voluntary bodies in the area. Assistance, through funding, in tackling drug misuse is provided directly and indirectly by the Scottish Office in a number of ways. In particular, Strathclyde regional council is receiving support through the urban programme for drug-related projects, including the Inverclyde Drugline.

Student Housing

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total cost of payments from Scottish Homes to the student housing sector in each year since 1988.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 18 February 1993]:* Scottish Homes estimates that nearly £1·2 million was paid in 1990-91 and £0·9 million in 1991-92 towards providing accommodation specifically for students. Students may also have access to other general needs housing funded by Scottish Homes.

Superquarries

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the sites which have been identified in Scotland as having potential for the development of superquarries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 22 February 1993]:* The Scottish Development Department's 1977 national planning guidelines on aggregate working provisionally identified five potential locations for superquarry development: Peterhead, Loch Linnhe, Helmsdale, Harris and the Ross of Mull. In 1980 a subsequent preliminary research report entitled "Potential for a Large Coastal Quarry in Scotland" produced a short-list of five locations with suitable mineral deposits and marine access. These were South Harris, Loch Ewe, Loch Linnhe, Kentallen, and Walls (Shetland Isles). In addition, the Highland region structure plan (approved in 1990) identified Loch Eriboll. More recently a study by ARUP consultants for the Department of the Environment identified a number of broad locations in Scotland where the geological and other technical criteria exist for the development of coastal superquarries ie Shetland, the Western Isles and parts of the west and north coast. The draft national planning policy guidelines on land for mineral working published in 1992 do not specify any other locations.

Any proposals for the development of coastal superquarries will be assessed on their merits and full regard will be had to their possible environmental impact.

Fishing Vessels

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the vessels and tonnage of vessels owned or operated by the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency; and which are registerd on the fishing vessel register.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 23 February 1993]:* The Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency owns seven fishery protection vessels and two research vessels as follows:

	Gross tonnage
Fishery Protection Vessels	
Norna	1,385
Vigilant	1,250
Sulisker	1,250
Westra	885
Moidart	65
Morven	65
Skua	7
Research Vessels	
Scotia	1,521
Clupea	176

The fishery protection vessels are operated by the agency while the research vessels are operated by a private contractor. None of the vessels is on the fishing vessel register.

European Structural Funds

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 12 January to the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland, *Official Report,* column *718,* what progress he has made towards the recognition of the highlands and islands in the list of objective 1 areas for the allocation of European structural funds; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 23 February 1993]:* The gross domestic product figure for the highlands and islands has been agreed with Eurostat to be 79 per cent. of the Community average, and the Government have made representations to the Commission seeking objective 1 status for the highlands and islands. We expect the Commission's proposals to be published shortly and will be arguing the case strongly in the Council of Ministers when these are considered.

Harbour Closure, Greenock

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow can expect a response to his letter, dated 23 December 1992, about a proposal submitted by Renfrewshire Enterprise for the closure of East India harbour, Greenock.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 23 February 1993]:* An acknowledgement was sent to the hon. Member's letter on 21 January 1993. The application from Renfrewshire Enterprise raises complex issues which the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department is considering as quickly as possible. I hope to send the hon. Member a full reply in the near future.

Sheltered Placement Schemes

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table itemising how the budget for sheltered placement schemes was expended in Scotland in the financial year 1991-92; what provisions have been made in the financial year 1992-93; how this compares with the previous year in *(a)* real and *(b)* per capita terms; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 27 January 1993]:* Expenditure on the sheltered placement scheme in Scotland for the financial year 1991-92 was as follows:

	£
Local Authority contribution	525,845
Employment Service contribution	1,274,689
Total	1,800,534

Working years on sheltered placement schemes claimed were 411·190, and expenditure per worker was £4,379.

Figures for 1992-93 are not yet available.

Hospital Incinerators

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a list of the hospital incinerators in Scotland that *(a)* burn less than 25 kg of clinical waste per hour and *(b)* burn less than 1 tonne of clinical waste per hour.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 17 February 1993]:* The following is a schedule of clinical waste incinerators presently in use within the NHS in Scotland:

Hospitals with incinerators with a capacity of less than 25kG/HR

Dumfries and Galloway Health Board
Thomas Hope Hospital, Langholm
Moffat Hospital
Newton Stewart Hospital
Thornhill Hospital

Highland Health Board
Portree Hospital

Tayside Health Board
Montrose Royal Infirmary
Arbroath Infirmary

Hospitals with incinerators with a capacity greater than 25 kG/hr and less than 1 tonne/hr

Argyll and Clyde Health Board
Royal Alexandra Hospital, Paisley
Inverclyde Royal Hospital, Greenock
Islay Hospital, Bowmore

Ayrshire and Arran Health Board
Crosshouse Hospital, Kilmarnock
Ailsa Hospital, Ayr

Borders Health Board
Borders General Hospital

Dumfries and Galloway Health Board
Castle Douglas Hospital
Kirkcudbright Hospital
Garrick Hospital, Stranraer
Cresswell Maternity Hospital, Dumfries
Lochmaben Hospital
Crichton Royal Hospital, Dumfries

Dalrymple Hospital, Stranraer
Annan Hospital, Annan

Fife Health Board
Cameron Hospital, Windygates
Stratheden Hospital, Cupar
Victoria Hospital, Kirkcaldy
West Fife District General Hospital (Phase I), Dunfermline
Dunfermline and West Fife Hospital, Dunfermline
West Fife District General Hospital (Phase II), Dunfermline

Forth Valley Health Board
Falkirk Royal Infirmary
Stirling Royal Infirmary

Greater Glasgow Health Board
Cowglen Hospital, Glasgow
Gartnavel General Hospital, Glasgow
Glasgow Royal Infirmary
Ruchill Hospital, Glasgow
Southern General Hospital, Glasgow
Stobhill General Hospital, Glasgow
Western Infirmary, Glasgow
Royal Hospital for Sick Children, Glasgow

Highland Health Board
Raigmore Hospital, Inverness
Craig Dunain Hospital, Inverness
Belford Hospital, Fort William
Caithness General Hospital, Wick

Lothian Health Board
Western General Hospital, Edinburgh
Eastern General Hospital, Edinburgh
City Hospital, Edinburgh
St. John's Hospital, Howden

Tayside Health Board
Sunnyside Royal Hospital, Montrose
Stracathro Hospital, Brechin
Murray Royal Hospital, Perth
Ninewells Hospital, Dundee

Western Isles Health Board
Western Isles Hospital, Isle of Lewis
Daliburgh Hospital, Isle of South Lewis

Orkney Health Board
Balfour Hospital, Orkney

DEFENCE

Consultants

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many contracts for consultancies were awarded by his Department over *(a)* the last 12 months and *(b)* 1991-92.

Mr. Aitken: In the 12 months from 1 February 1992 to 31 January 1993, my Department placed at least 582 contracts which involved some form of consultancy; the exact figure may be a little higher, since contracts placed towards the end of January have not been recorded centrally. The exact figure for 1991-92 was 563.

These figures include various forms of technical consultancy, as well as management consultancy; it is not possible to differentiate them from the figures available.

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the contracts awarded by his Department to *(a)* Coopers and Lybrand management consultants, *(b)* Touche Ross management consultants, *(c)* Price Waterhouse management consultants, *(d)* Ernst and Young management consultants, *(e)* Chrichton Roberts Ltd., *(f)* KPMG management consultants and *(g)* Leopold Joseph management consultants, with the total cost of the contracts with each contractor for (i) the past 12 months and (ii) 1991-92.

Mr. Aitken: My Department has no record of any contracts having been placed with Chrichton Roberts Ltd. or Leopold Joseph Management Consultants Ltd. The number and value of contracts placed with the other five companies is as follows. Contracts placed in February/March 1992 will, of course, appear in both columns:

	February 1992/ January 1993[1]	*1991/1992*
Coopers and Lybrand[2]	12 contracts £8,740,330	12 contracts £4,624,622
Touche Ross Management Consultants	11 contracts £1,412,831	13 contracts £802,305
Price Waterhouse[2]	9 contracts £1,136,039	8 contracts £471,122
Ernst and Young Management Consultants	4 contracts £335,300	5 contracts £559,653
KPMG Management Consulting	1 contract[3]	Nil

[1] May be subject to revision, as contracts placed towards the end of January may not yet have been recorded centrally.

[2] Available statistics do not indentify "Management Consultants" separately from other parts of these firms. Consequently some of these contracts may be for services other than management consultancy.

[3] This is the contract mentioned in my answer to the hon. Lady on 25 January 1993 (Official Report, Column 560). As it is our practice to treat values of individual contracts as "Commercial in Confidence", I am not able to reveal the value of this contract.

It is not possible to list the subject of each and every one of these contracts without disproportionate effort.

Land Mines

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had regarding the United States Government's embargo on the export of land mines.

Mr. Aitken: We have had no such discussions.

RAF Chivenor and Brawdy

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many military training sorties were flown in each year since 1986 within 120 nautical miles of RAF Chivenor;

(2) how many military training sorties were flown in each year since 1986 within 40 nautical miles of RAF Chivenor;

(3) how many military training sorties were flown in each year since 1986 within 40 nautical miles of RAF Brawdy;

(4) how many military training sorties were flown in each year since 1986 within 120 nautical miles of RAF Brawdy.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many non-military incidents search and rescue helicopters based at (i) RAF Brawdy and (ii) RAF Chivenor have responded to in *(a)* daylight and *(b)* night-time in each of the last five years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested is set out in the table.

	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
RAF Brawdy					
Day	110	115	121	111	107
Night	31	28	42	44	43
Total	141	143	163	155	150
RAF Chivenor					
Day	151	160	140	134	158
Night	18	16	5	5	6
Total	169	176	145	139	164

With effect from 1 October 1989 RAF Chivenor moved from a 24-hour search and rescue service to day time only. The figures shown for night-time against Chivenor in 1990-92 relate to cases where SAR helicopters responded in daylight but returned to base after dark.

Military Flying

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what areas of the United Kingdom are classified as areas of high intensity military flying; and what are the criteria it uses to decide that classification.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to information contained in the Civil Aviation Authority publication "United Kingdom Aeronautical Information Publication", a relevant extract of which I am placing in the House of Commons Library.

Official Entertainment

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much was spent on official entertainment in his Department during 1991-92 and 1992-93 to date.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In the financial year 1991-92, £4·007 million was spent. As at 31 January 1993, £3·283 million has been spent in financial year 1992-93. This figure includes expenditure incurred by the Ministry of Defence itself, by formations and establishments of the armed forces at home and abroad, and by individual officers occupying command and international appointments for which entertainment allowances are payable.

Redundancy Payments

Mr. Boyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 9 February, *Official Report*, column *575*, what was the total bill for redundancy payments paid to the service personnel who left the armed forces on or before 31 December 1992 as a result of "Options for Change".

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Expenditure up to 31 December 1992 on special capital payments to personnel who left the services on redundancy terms under "Options for Change" was £83·743 million. In addition, these personnel qualified for immediate terminal grants and pensions/retired pay which would normally have become payable on completion of their engagements/commissions. Up to 31 December 1992 expenditure on terminal grants was £64·647 million and on pensions/retired pay, including lump sum commutation payments, was £46·037 million.

Gulf War

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on whether ships, regiments and squadrons which took part in the Gulf campaign will be able to include the campaign in their battle honours.

Mr. Rifkind: Her Majesty the Queen has graciously approved the award of battle honours to ships, regiments and squadrons of the three services which took part in the campaign to liberate Kuwait.

The award of the battle honour "Kuwait 1991" is to be made to those of Her Majesty's ships, Royal Naval air squadrons and Royal fleet auxiliaries which were either actively engaged in operations against Iraqi forces or engaged in logistic support duties in the central and northern Gulf to the west of the meridian 51E at any time between 17 January and 28 February 1991. The ships and naval air squadrons which qualify are as listed.

The theatre honour "Gulf 1991" and battle honours "Wadi Al Batin" and "Western Iraq" have been approved for the Army. Those Army regiments and the Army air corps which took part in the campaign will be entitled to claim these honours in accordance with normal practice in the Army.

The battle honour "Gulf 1991" has been approved for the Royal Air Force. Squadrons which took part in the campaign will be selected by the Air Force Board to receive this honour.

After claims by regiments and the Army Air Corps have been considered by the Army Board, and Royal Air Force squadrons have been selected by the Air Force Board, recommendations will be submitted to Her Majesty the Queen for approval. I am therefore not able at this stage to list the regiments and squadrons that will be honoured, but these will be reported to the House in due course.

Her Majesty's Ships, Naval Air Squadrons
and Royal Fleet Auxiliaries
to receive the battle honour "Kuwait 1991"

Her Majesty's Ships

HMS Atherstone
HMS Brave
HMS Brazen
HMS Brilliant
HMS Cardiff
HMS Cattistock
HMS Dulverton
HMS Exeter
HMS Gloucester
HMS Hecla
HMS Herald
HMS Hurworth
HMS Ledbury
HMS London
HMS Manchester

Royal Navy Air Squadrons

815
826
829
845
846
848

Royal Fleet Auxiliaries

RFA Argus
RFA Bayleaf
RFA Diligence
RFA Fort Grange
RFA Olna
RFA Resource
RFA Sir Bedivere
RFA Sir Galahad
RFA Sir Percivale
RFA Sir Tristram

Bosnia

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Mercedes-Benz tractor-trailer units are being used by United Kingdom forces in Bosnia; and what arrangements have been made for their servicing.

Mr. Archie Hamilton *[holding answer 20 January 1993]*: Routine servicing is carried out by the REME personnel. Any major repairs necessary would be carried out by the local Mercedes-Benz agent.

EMPLOYMENT

Industrial Tribunals

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will set targets for faster access to hearings at industrial tribunals and to the employment appeal tribunal in England and Wales.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Government aim to reduce the current time taken for cases to reach a hearing at the industrial tribunals and the employment appeal tribunal in England and Wales, and to help achieve this have increased the number of judges, chairmen, lay members and administrative staff and have expanded the premises. In addition, the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Bill provides that chairmen and judges may sit alone in certain cases.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the time taken for an appeal to come to hearing at the employment appeal tribunal in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* Scotland; and what assessment has been made of the reason for the difference between the figures.

Mr. McLoughlin: As regards the waiting times, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 16 February 1993, *Official Report*, columns *190-91*. One reason for the difference in waiting times is the lower workload in Scotland. There are also procedural differences in the handling of notices of appeal. However, additional judges have been appointed to the employment appeal tribunal and I expect this to be reflected in the waiting time in England and Wales.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the latest white collar unemployment figures for the *(a)* Leicester, *(b)* Luton, *(c)* York, *(d)* Exeter, *(e)* Chester, *(f)* Ashton-under-Lyne, *(g)* Stanmore and *(h)* Glasgow travel-to-work areas.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information requested is not available. Information on unemployment by occupation groups can be obtained from the Labour Force Survey, but only disaggregated to the level of standard regions.

Asbestos

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when the existing legislation as to the handling of asbestos in its manufacture or removal from buildings was last reviewed; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: All work with asbestos is governed by the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 1987. These were reviewed in 1992, together with their associated approved code of practice—ACoP—when regulations were being prepared to implement a European directive amending the 1983 asbestos worker protection directive. The Health and Safety Commission published a consultative document on the revisions last June. The new asbestos regulations came into force on 1 January 1993, and the revised ACoP will be published in early March.

Work with asbestos insulation and coating, including their removal, is also subject to the Asbestos (Licensing) Regulations 1983. These were last formally reviewed in 1986-87, although the Health and Safety Executive monitors their day-to-day effectiveness. Practical guidance on all work with asbestos insulation and coating materials is set out in a second asbestos ACoP which was also reviewed in 1992 and is due to be published in early March. This strongly encourages the adoption of work methods which are designed to limit the amount of dust that can be generated during asbestos removal activities.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many companies have been charged with not providing adequate safety facilities for workers employed by them in the removal of asbestos from buildings in the last five years; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Statistics collected by the Health and Safety Executive do not separately identify charges relating specifically to the removal of asbestos from buildings. The following table shows all informations laid and convictions secured by the HSE under the Asbestos Regulations 1969, the Asbestos (Licensing) Regulations 1983 and the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 1987. The period covered by the table is for the latest five-year period for which figures are available. Those for 1991-92 are provisional. Details of charges brought by individual local authorities are not collated centrally and so are not readily available, but cases are likely to be rare.

Prosecution action taken under the Asbestos Regulations 1969

	Informations laid	*Convictions*
1987-88	14	8
1988-89	4	3

Regulations revoked from 1 March 1988.

Prosecution action taken under the Asbestos (Licensing) Regulations 1983

	Informations laid	*Convictions*
1987-88	32	27
1988-89	14	13
1989-90	14	7
1990-91	7	7
1991-92	8	7

Prosecution action taken under the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 1987

	Informations laid	*Convictions*
1987-88	[1]—	[1]—
1988-89	21	21
1989-90	52	47
1990-91	57	48
1991-92	45	39

[1] Regulations not in force.

Wages Councils

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will estimate the effect on pay of a 1 per cent. change in the level of employment in industries covered by wages councils; and if she will estimate the effect on levels of employment of a 10 per cent. change in the level of pay in wages councils industries.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The relationship between pay and employment is determined by a large number of factors and it is not possible to make precise estimates for individual industries. However, the evidence clearly suggests that, whatever the industry, uneconomic pay increases have a significant and damaging effect on employment.

Mine Safety

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will make it her policy to refrain from granting exemptions from mine safety regulations which allow underground development to advance without roof support beyond 2 m or whose advance extends to distances at which safety cannot be guaranteed or gas cannot be tested with the approved apparatus.

Mr. McLoughlin: Exemptions from certain of the requirements of mining legislation may only be granted by the Health and Safety Executive inspectorate of mines.

An HSE inspector of mines may exempt a mine, or part of a mine, from the requirements of a particular Act or regulation providing that the inspector is satisfied that the safety of persons employed at the mine will not be prejudiced by the granting of the exemption.

Fixed-term Contracts

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what estimate she has made of the number of employees on fixed-term contracts in the United Kingdom.

Mr. McLoughlin: The latest estimate for the United Kingdom from the spring, March to May, 1992 labour force survey, is that there were 581,000 employees on fixed-term contracts in the United Kingdom.

Training

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total amount spent by her Department of the budget for training, for England in each year, since 1989-90, the expected outturn in 1992-93 and plans for 1993-94 in 1992-93 prices and cash terms.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information requested is given in the following table. The figures include training programme expenditure and administrative/running costs. The figures are also published in the 1992-93 departmental report.

England training expenditure in cash and real terms (1992-93 prices) 1989-90 to 1991-92 and expected outturn in 1992-93 and plans for 1993-94

	£ million
1989-90	
Cash	2,240
Real terms	2,696
1990-91	
Cash	2,053
Real terms	2,288
1991-92	
Cash	1,906
Real terms	1,987
1992-93	
Estimated	2,367
Outturn	[1](2,019) [2](1,771)
1993-94	
Cash	2,142 [3](1,963)
Real terms	2,201

[1] Net ESF.

[2] Net ESF and admin/running costs.

[3] Net admin/running costs.

Notes:

1. Does not include European Social Fund except 1992-93.
2. Does not include admin/running costs for 1989-90, 1990-91, 1991-92.
3. Plans for 1993-94 include, under Training for Work, funds which in 1991-92 and 1992-93 were allocated to Employment Action, a non-training programme.
4. Source for 1992-93 running costs outturn is the Spring Supplementary Estimate.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total amount spent by her Department of the budget for training, for Great Britain, in each year since 1989-90, the expected outturn in 1992-93 and plans for 1993-94 in 1992-93 prices and cash terms.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information requested is given in the following table. The figure includes training programme expenditure and administrative/running costs. The figures are also published in the 1992-93 departmental report.

Training expenditure 1989-90 to 1992-93 and plans for 1993-94 at 1992-93 prices, Great Britain

	£ million
1989-90	
Cash	2,940
Real terms	3,538
1990-91	
Cash	2,802
Real terms	3,123
1991-92	
Cash	2,694
Real terms	2,808
1992-93	
Estimated Outturn	2,761
1993-94	
Cash	2,557
Real Terms	2,627

Source:

Appropiation Accounts 1993 Spring Supplementary Estimate.

Note:

Administrative and Running Costs are not available for 1993-94.

Redundancy Payments

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many cases in each of the last four years were processed through the redundancy payments service in situations of enterprise solvency in each region and county and for the United Kingdom as a whole.

Mr. McLoughlin: The number of claims processed by the redundancy payments service in Great Britain for the last four complete financial years was:

	Claims
1991-92	305,574
1990-91	189,185
1989-90	110,132
1988-89	100,934

Information on a regional or county basis is not available. Separate arrangements apply in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the current average processing time of redundancy payment claims; what was the time in the circumstances of the insolvency of enterprises in each of the last four years; and in how many cases the delay in claim exceeded 12 weeks.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information is not available in the precise form requested. The current average time taken by the redundancy payments service to process claims for redundancy and insolvency payments is six weeks. The comparable figure for 1991-92 was 7·6 weeks.

In the period 1 April 1992 to 31 January 1993, 88·7 per cent. of claims were processed by the redundancy payments service within 12 weeks. In 1991-92, the figure was 79·7 per cent. Information is not available for previous years.

Up to 10 working days is allowed for payment by the Department's finance office after approval of a claim.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will give for each of the last four years the cost to the redundancy payments service of meeting payment shortfalls due to the insolvency of enterprises; and how much of this was subsequently recovered.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978 provides for various payments out of the national insurance fund when an employer is unable to make them by reason of insolvency. Payments made and sums recovered in the last four years were as follows:

£ million

	1991-92	*1990-91*	*1989-90*	*1988-89*
Payments				
To employees, in respect of arrears of pay, holiday pay, compensation for pay in lieu of notice and certain other payments	148·0	75·9	33·1	29·7
To occupational pension schemes in respect of unpaid contributions	2·9	0·9	0·5	0·6
TOTAL PAYMENTS	150·9	76·8	33·6	30·3
Debt recovery				
Recovery of debts in insolvency	12·2	7·9	9·0	9·5

Note: Because of the delay between the making of payments and the eventual settlement of claims in the insolvency, the sums recovered do not correspond directly to the year in which payments were made.

Small Firms (Regulations)

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will list all those regulations affecting small firms which have been abolished by her Department in each year since 1979.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 23 February 1993]:* I shall arrange for a list of regulations affecting business which have been abolished by the Department to be placed in the Library by early March.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 25 February 1993

EDUCATION

Further Education Funding Council

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when he will make appointments to the regional committees of the Further Education Funding Council for England; and when the committees will begin operating.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend is currently considering appointments to the nine regional committees of the Further Education Funding Council. He hopes to announce the chairmen of the committees by 1 April, with a view to the full establishment of the committees as soon as possible.

Religious Education

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment has been made of the proportion of religious education syllabuses which comply with the requirements of the Education Reform Act 1988.

Mr. Forth: The Department has made no such assessment.

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will publish the study undertaken by the National Curriculum Council into religious education syllabuses.

Mr. Forth: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend, the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) on 22 February 1993, *Official Report*, column *452*.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Mr. Jock Kane

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to allow Mr. Jock Kane to publish his two books; and what are the legal costs incurred by the Treasury Solicitor.

Mr. Hurd: I have no plans to apply for the lifting of the High Court injunctions restraining the publication of these books. The books contain information which would cause serious damage to national security and which Mr. Kane obtained in the course of his employment at GCHQ.

The Treasury Solicitor has estimated the legal costs for the 1987 High Court case as £5,870. Figures are not available for 1984, but would not exceed the 1987 figure. Action also taken in 1987 in the Scottish courts, in which legal costs of £839 were incurred.

Maastricht Treaty

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his statement of 15 February, *Official Report*, column 27, whether he will list those articles and protocols which are desirable but not necessary to incorporate into domestic law for the ratification and implementation of the Maastricht treaty.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I refer the hon. Member to the remarks of my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney General in the Committee stage of the Maastricht Bill on 22 February, *Official Report*, columns 737-39, and to the written answer given by my right hon. and learned Friend to the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) on the same date, *Official Report*, column *433*.

Treaty of Union

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs by what means the obligations of tiles I, V, VI and VII of the treaty of union are acceded to by an applicant state of the European union, other than by article O of that treaty.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Article O sets out exhaustively the procedure for accession to the treaty on European union, including titles I, V, VI and VII.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Data Protection

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he intends to defer the market testing of ED5 in order to clarify the legal position with regard to article 8(4) of the draft EC data protection directive.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I have no plans to do so.

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what outside legal advice he has received on the effect of article 8(4) of the draft EC data protection directive on the ability of private contractors to hold data concerning criminal convictions.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Legal advice is available from the Home Office on this as on other aspects of the draft directive. I have not sought outside legal advice.

Fridges and Freezers

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many domestic fridges and freezers his Department intends to purchase in 1993;

(2) what are the latest available annual figures for his Department's purchase of domestic fridges and freezers.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: This information is not recorded centrally and in the case of the prison service could not be obtained without disproporationate cost. The available information, which may not be complete, for the non-prisons estate is that some 66 fridges/freezers will be purchased in 1993, compared with approximately 51 last year.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his Department will make it its policy to purchase domestic fridges and freezers that do not contain ozone-depleting substances.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: It is the Department's policy, subject to ensuring value for money, to reduce the use of ozone-depleting substances by replacing the equipment which contains them except in instances where usage is essential.

Hare Coursing

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will now introduce legislation to make hare coursing illegal.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Government believe that participation in field sports is a matter for individual conscience. There are no plans for legislation to prohibit or restrict hare coursing.

Weddings

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will seek to amend the law to provide that weddings may be performed in private chapels by ministers of churches other than the Church of England.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans to do so.

Obscenity and Pornography

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to be able to report to the Prime Minister on the conclusions of the review which he has been asked to undertake of the law relating to obscenity and pornography.

Mr. Jack: As I explained in my reply to a question from my hon. Friend on 18 February, at column *299*, my Department is considering in what ways improvements can be made in the enforcement of the existing legislation relating to obscenity. My right hon. and learned Friend is keeping the Prime Minister informed and will report to him in due course.

Hong Kong (Governor)

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the Governor of Hong Kong has submitted a further report on the discharge of his functions under the British Nationality (Hong Kong) Act 1990.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Governor of Hong Kong submitted a second report to me on 30 December 1992. A copy has been placed in the Library.

Prison Education

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what interim arrangements he is making in respect of each county for prison education between April and August; and what assessment he has made of the effect on the contracts of existing college staff.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) on 19 February, at column *370*. The prison service is not the employer of education staff who work in prisons and the effect on their contracts of employment is a matter for the employers and their employees.

Juvenile Offenders, Cleveland

138. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to make an announcement about the provision of secure accommodation for juvenile offenders in Cleveland.

Mr. Yeo: I have been asked to reply.

In consultation with the directors of social services in the north-east of England, including Cleveland, we have identified the need for 11 extra secure beds in the region. I expect a firm decision about the location to be made shortly.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Southern Africa

Mr. Malone: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are his plans for future management of aid to the southern Africa region.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development has announced the Government's intention to set up a new ODA development division in Pretoria, similar to those already operating successfully in other parts of the world. The British development division in Pretoria will help shape and run Britain's increasingly important bilateral aid programme in South Africa, and programmes in Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia and Swaziland. The new development division will be operational this summer. The development division in Lilongwe will continue to manage aid programmes in Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Civil Servants

Mr. Butterfill: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what percentage of British civil servants are promoted internally while on secondment to the EC.

Mr. Robert Jackson: This information is not held centrally. The comparatively short secondments to the EC, or to UKREP, provide valuable developmental experience which Departments are encouraged to take into account when making promotions. Whether promotion on secondment is possible will depend on several factors, including the opportunities for re-absorbing the officer in the new grade on his or her return.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Serious Fraud Office

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Attorney-General how many prosecutions have been initiated by the Serious Fraud Office; and how many of these have been successful.

The Attorney-General: Since the establishment of the Serious Fraud Office, it has instituted criminal proceedings against 328 defendants.

Of this total, 221 have been tried. Of these 139 were convicted of one or more offences without a successful appeal, 72 were acquitted of all offences and 10 were neither convicted nor acquitted. In the case of eight defendants proceedings were ordered to lie on the file, one defendant died and a nolle prosequi was entered in the remaining case.

Of the remaining defendants, 90 have had proceedings instituted against them but have not yet been tried, seven are abroad and warrants for their arrest have not yet been executed, and 10 did not proceed to trial.

ENVIRONMENT

Housing Investment

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the housing investment programme borrowing allocation or basic credit approval for the last 14 years, expressed at constant prices; and what is the basic credit approval announced for 1993-94 on the same price basis.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to my answer on 25 November 1992, *Official Report*, column *669*, to the Member for Sheffield Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) for information on the housing investment programme—HIP—allocations for the years 1979-80 to 1992-93. The total of the 1993-94 HIP allocation is £1,920 million—£1,869 million in 1992-93 prices.

Housing (Negative Equity)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the total value of negative equity in homes in *(a)* England and *(b)* the north-west standard region in April 1992 and at the present date, and of the number of properties involved.

Mr. Baldry: There is insufficient information to estimate the total value of negative equity in mortgaged homes. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 23 February to my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Sir T. Arnold), *Official Report*, column *522*. The number of dwellings in the north-west region where the mortgage exceeded the value of the dewlling in the fourth quarter of 1992 was probably about 10,000.

Empty Properties

Ms. Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many empty properties have been purchased under the arrangements announced in the autumn statement; which housing associations have made the purchases and in what areas; and at what total cost.

Mr. Baldry: The latest figures from the Housing Corporation show that by 19 February approvals for the purchase of 16,666 properties had been granted, with 5,755 purchases actually completed.

The assocations making purchases in each of the Corporation's regions were:

London and Home Counties (NE)
Bedfordshire Pilgrims Housing Association, Circle 33 HA, East London HA, Family HA, Guinness Housing Trust, London and Quadrant HT, Newlon HT, Shaftesbury HA, Southern Housing Group, Warden HA;

London and Home Counties (NW)
Acton HA, Airways Housing Society, Circle 33 HA, Ealing Family HA, Family HA, Network HA, Notting Hill HA, Paddington Churches HA, Peabody HT, Thames Valley HA, Warden HA;

London and Home Counties (S)
Airways HS, Beaver HS, Bourne HS, Broomleigh HA, Family HA, English Churches Housing Group, Hexagon HA, Highweald HA, Hyde HA, James Butcher HA, Kelsey HA, London and Quadrant HT, Metropolitan HT, Moat HS, Orbit HA, Peabody HT, Southern HG, Swale HA, Thames Valley HA;

Merseyside
Co-operative Development Society (Liverpool), Liverpool HT, Merseyside Improved Houses, Maritime HA, Warrington HA;

North East
Bradford and Northern HA, North HA, North British HA, Yorkshire Metropolitan HA;

North West
Collingwood HA, Grosvenor HA, Irwell Valley HA, Family HA (Manchester), Manchester Methodist HA, Manchester and District HA, Muir Group HA, North HA, North British HA, Northern Counties HA, North Cheshire HA, South East Lancashire HA, St. Vincent Housing Co-operative, Two Castles HA, West Pennine HA;

West
Devon and Cornwall HA, Haig Homes, James Butcher HA, Knightstone HA, Oxbode HA, Oxford Citizens' HA, Redland HA, Swaythling HS, Twynham HA, West Berkshire HA, Western Challenge HA, Winchester District HA, West Dorset HA, Westcountry HA;

West Midlands
Birmingham Friendship HA, Bromford Carinthia HA, Focus HA, Mercian HA, Midland Area Improvement HA, Orbit HA, Servite Housing Initiatives, Shropshire Rural HA, South Shropshire HA;

East Midlands
Circle 33 HA, De Moatfort HS, East Midlands HA, Guinness HT, Leicester HA, Longhurst HA, Loughborough and District HS(1969), North British HA, Sanctuary HA, Suffolk Heritage HA, Suffolk HS.

The total costs incurred by 19 February were:

Source of funds	*Approvals (£ million)*	*Completions (£ million)*
Housing Association Grant	534·96	186·46
Other public subsidy	8·21	3·10
Private finance	298·31	107·88
Total costs of schemes	841·48	297·44

Smoke Alarms

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to increase the use of smoke alarms for the deaf.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I have been asked to reply.

The Home Office spends over £1 million a year on television advertising to promote the installation and maintenance of smoke alarms in occupied buildings in England and Wales. The television commercials are designed to be readily understood even without the benefit of the soundtrack. We are considering the possibility of providing subtitles on smoke alarm commercials for the 1993-94 advertising campaign.

The Home Office also produces a range of free leaflets on fire safety. These are issued mainly through fire brigades although they are made available to other organisations. One of the leaflets, "Fire safety advice for disabled people", provides information on smoke alarms for deaf people and include addresses from where these may be obtained.

PRIME MINISTER

Featherstone

Q8. **Mr. Enright:** To ask the Prime Minister when he will visit Featherstone.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister informed the hon. Member on 18 February, he is making plans for a series of visits to all parts of the country and hopes to include Yorkshire among them.

Sherwood

Q9. **Mr. Tipping:** To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to visit the Sherwood constituency.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is making plans for a series of visits to all parts of the country and hopes to include Nottingham among them.

Ministers' Homes

Mr. Hain: To ask the Prime Minister if he will give dates and costs of work carried out at public expense at the homes of Ministers of the Crown since 1979.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

Information prior to 1991 cannot be obtained except at disproportionate cost.

Since April 1991 about £1·5 million has been spent on the installation of protective security measures at the homes of current Ministers. These measures were provided on the advice of those responsible for ministerial security and reflected an assessment of the threat to the individuals concerned. All spending is carefully monitored and controlled by those responsible.

Arms Sales, Iraq

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what contribution his office has made to date to the Scott inquiry on arms sales to Iraq.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

Lord Justice Scott has asked to see certain papers and these have been made available to him.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 25 February.

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 25 February.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is on an official visit to the United States of America.

Mr. Salman Rushdie

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 18 February, *Official Report*, column 327, if he will agree to the request made by Mr. Salman Rushdie for a meeting with him.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has agreed to meet Mr. Rushdie. A date has not yet been decided upon.

HEALTH

Methadone

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many individual general practitioners prescribed methadone in the last year.

Dr. Mawhinney: Methadone is listed under three therapeutic categories of drugs within the British National Formulary. The number of general practitioners who prescribed methadone for each therapeutic category in England during 1991 is given in the table.

	Number
Antitussives	2,236
Analgesics	2,293
Used in drug dependence	6,549

Notes

1. The information provided is from Prescribing Analysis and Cost data collected by the Prescription Pricing Authority.

2. The Misuse of Drugs (Notification of Supply of Addicts) Regulations 1973 stipulates a single notification of a suspected addict every twelve months to the Home Office Index of Addicts from each practice. It will therefore not be possible to make a meaningful comparison between the above figures and the number of notifications of drug addicts collected by the Home Office.

Health Authority Costs

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the returns made *(a)* by district health authorities and *(b)* by district units and trusts on the cost of provision of services; and in what form this information is reported to Parliament.

Dr. Mawhinney: District health authorities, directly managed units and trusts prepare annual financial statements which are audited and made available to the public.

Babies (Identification)

Mr. James Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will consider a system of fingerprinting or footprinting new born babies to prevent wrong identification of infants.

Mr. Sackville: Advice from the maternity services advisory committee to the national health service is that parents should be able to see the correct details written on their baby's identity bracelets and to confirm that these bracelets are put on their baby. It is essential that all maternity units have in place procedures that ensure that these requirements are met and that bracelets are securely attached to babies in their care. Fingerprinting and footprinting are possible alternatives or additional methods but, before introducing such arrangements, they would need to be thoroughly assessed.

Free Prescriptions

Sir John Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people during the year 1991-92 *(a)* qualified for free prescriptions on the grounds of

prescribed illnesses or conditions and *(b)* are estimated to have failed to take up an exemption certificate on this ground during this period.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is not available in the form requested. Prescription charge exemption certificates for people with a specified medical condition are valid for a period of five years. In the six months from January to June 1992, the latest period for which figures are held centrally, family health services authorities issued over 40,000 such certificates. The average number issued in each of the three years from 1989 to 1991 was about 75,000. In 1991-92 community pharmacists and appliance contractors dispensed some 24·7 million prescribed items free of charge to people holding these certificates and to expectant or nursing mothers. It is not possible to estimate the number who have failed to take up an exemption certificate.

Medicines Committees

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to change the rules covering information disclosure by members of *(a)* the Committee on the Safety of Medicines and *(b)* the Committee on the Review of Medicines respectively.

Dr. Mawhinney: I have no plans, at present, to change the rules covering information disclosure by members of the Committee on the Safety of Medicines. The Committee on the Review of Medicines was disestablished on 1 April 1992.

Prescription Charges

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will list the numbers of disability working allowance claimants to date who are also in receipt of exemption from prescription charges, by reason of *(a)* low income and *(b)* prescribed illness or condition;

(2) what is her estimate of numbers and types of persons who fail to claim exemption from prescription charges.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested is not available; nor is it possible to make such an estimate. About 80 per cent. of all prescribed items dispensed by community pharmacists and appliance contractors are free of charge; a further 5 per cent. go to holders of prescription prepayment certificates.

Pharmacists

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will issue a report on the provisions made by her Department to recompense pharmacists for purchasing and maintaining adequate stocks of expensive medicines when on-cost is abolished in April.

Dr. Mawhinney: Discussions are taking place with the pharmaceutical services negotiating committee about this issue.

Prescription Forms

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether her Department has carried out a detailed costing for the introduction of a triple prescription form of the kind proposed by the pharmaceutical services negotiating committee.

Dr. Mawhinney: No detailed costing has been carried out as yet, but the issue of triple prescription forms is still under consideration.

Drugs Selected List

Mr. George: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the input, by experts and groups relating to the study of dermatology, in the advisory committee on NHS drugs on the proposed changes and addition of new categories to the NHS selected list.

Dr. Mawhinney: A consultant dermatologist, Dr. Grattan, has been appointed to the advisory committee on national health service drugs. It is open to the committee to seek any further expert advice it considers necessary for its work.

Trainee Nurses

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the health service careers department last advertised for trainee nurses in Birmingham; and how many of the last intake to qualify have obtained jobs within the NHS.

Mr. Sackville: There is no health service careers department. The last advertising campaign run by the Department of Health was in 1991-92. Details of local recruitment campaigns and jobs for qualifiers are not held centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir Donald Wilson, chairman of West Midlands regional health authority for details.

Benzodiazepine

Ms. Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prescriptions were issued for each benzodiazepine by community pharmacists in *(a)* England and Wales, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Northern Ireland in 1991.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Department holds figures only for England. The information is in the table:

	Number
Temazepam	6,039
Diazepam	3,063
Nitrazepam	3,000
Lorazepam	1,080
Triazolam	1,076
Chlordiazepoxide	504
Oxazepam	360
Loprazolam	180
Lormetazepam	171
Clonazepam	128
Clobazam	61
TOTAL	15,662

Note: The data for 1991 are not directly comparable to those for earlier years because of a change in the way in which these data are collected. From January 1991, the data are based on items. Previously they were based on prescription fees and some items may attract more than one fee.

Information relating to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Pregnancy Terminations

Ms. Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance is given to health authorities and trusts about the level of appropriate post natal follow-up, following termination of pregnancy for foetal abnormality.

Mr. Sackville: In April 1991 the Department issued copies of the Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society's "Guidelines for Professionals" to relevant points in the national health service. These guidelines are as relevant to the loss of a baby resulting from termination in pregnancy for foetal abnormality as they are for miscarriage and stillbirth.

Vitamin K

Ms. Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what developments are taking place leading to the licensing of oral vitamin K.

Mr. Sackville: Discussions have been held between the Medicines Control Agency and representatives of the pharmaceutical industry with regard to appropriate data requirements of safety, efficacy and quality for the granting of a product licence for an oral preparation of vitamin K.

Stepping Hill Psychiatric Units

Ms. Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken to ensure that the comments of the Mental Health Commissioner relating to staffing in psychiatric units at Stepping Hill contained in its letter dated 9 September 1992 are being acted upon.

Mr. Yeo: An internal review panel was set up by Stockport health authority to look into aspects of psychiatric services, including staffing, at Stepping Hill hospital. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. Peter Milnes, chief executive of Stockport health authority, for further information.

Respiratory Disease

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will fund research into the effects of sulphur dioxide and related pollutants on lung function in asthmatics and others with respiratory disease and the effects of such pollutants on the incidence of respiratory disease and asthma attacks; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The advisory group of medical aspects of air pollution episodes set up in 1990 by the Government's chief medical officer has prepared two reports on air pollutants. That on ozone was published in 1991 and that on sulphur dioxide in 1992. Copies are in the Library.

The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council—MRC—which receives its grant in aid from the Office of Science and Technology. The MRC is currently sponsoring some research into factors contributing to the rise of asthma cases and has set up a working party to examine the aetiology of asthma under the chairmanship of Professor A. J. Norman Taylor. This working party is currently considering a range of possible contributory factors to current levels of asthma including air pollution.

Health Authorities, Yorkshire

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the total FHSA budget for each such authority in the Yorkshire region for 1992-93;

(2) what is the total purchasing budget for each health authority in the Yorkshire region for 1992-93.

Mr. Sackville: The information held centrally is for regional health authorities only. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir Bryan Askew, chairman of Yorkshire regional health authority, for this information.

GP Fund Holders

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total budget for fund-holding practices for each health authority area in the Yorkshire region for 1992-93.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Yorkshire regional health authority is responsible for the management of the general practitioner fundholding scheme in these areas. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir Bryan Askew, the regional health authority chairman, for details.

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were registered at *(a)* fund-holding and *(b)* non-fund-holding practices for each health authority area in the Yorkshire region as at 31 December 1992.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not held centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir Bryan Askew, chairman of the Yorkshire regional health authority, for details.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish a table showing for *(a)* each regional health authority and *(b)* England as a whole the number of hospital beds by specialty, on the basis of average daily available beds, for each year from 1979-80 to 1991-92; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The available information has been published and copies of the national and regional summaries placed in the Library. The data for 1979 to 1986 are contained in the publication "Hospital Statistics—Form SH3", which records bed availability at individual specialty level. The data for 1987-88 to 1990-91 are contained in the "Summary of Bed Availability—Form KHO3", which implemented the recommendations of the Korner review of health service information. These data are classified by broad ward category, recognising the more flexible use of bed facilities. The summaries for 1991-92 are to be published shortly and copies will be placed in the Library.

Pamphlets

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many pamphlets the national health service management executive published from January 1990 to January 1991 and from January 1991 to January 1992; if she will list the title, the recipients and the cost; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: During the period April 1990 to December 1991, the national health service management executive issued 78 pamphlets, leaflets and brochures. The tables give the description, cost and recipient.

Information for the period January to March 1990 is not available.

April 1990 to March 1991

Title	*Recipient*	*Cost £*
Resource Management Update	**NHS Managers**	**2,135·00**
Resource Management Update —Sepember Issue	**NHS Managers**	**2,209·07**
Projects Management Reports	**NHS Managers**	**7,460·00**
Financial Management Update —Issues June and December	**NHS Managers**	**3,940·00**
Value For Money Update Newsletter Issues No. 1 and No. 2	**NHS Managers**	**6,208·00**
Partners in Primary Care: An Executive Summary	**NHS Managers**	**774·00**
Value For Money Leaflets (6)— Hospital and Care Premises Exhibition	**NHS Managers**	**5,859·25**
Day Surgery— Making It Happen Report	**NHS Managers**	**264·50**
Income Gereration Pathology and Customer Services Guides and Workbooks	**NHS Managers**	**47,346·00**
Guide To Insurable Risk Management	**NHS Managers**	**3,639·75**
Purchasing For Patients Newsletters—Issues No, 3, No. 4, No. 5	**NHS Managers**	**2,817·00**
Outpatients Demonstration Projects Brochure	**NHS Managers**	**37,269·95**
Consultion and Involving The Consumer Booklet	**NHS Managers**	**3,595·00**
Changes to Health Authorities Boundaries Publication	**NHS Managers**	**1,905·00**
Professional Advice For Purchasers	**NHS Managers**	**2,068·00**
NHS Trusts Compendium Of Guidance	**NHS Managers**	**25,923·81**
Working For Patients Update—October Issue	**NHS Managers**	**244·00**
NHS Reforms Update —November (90) and February (91)	**NHS Managers**	**472·00**
NHS Management Bulletins: April, May, June, July, August, September Issues	**NHS Managers, Press, Interested NHS Staff on Request and DH/NHSME Managers**	**39,349·31**
NHS Management Bulletin Special Royal Assent Issue	**NHS Managers, Press, Interested NHS Staff on Request and DH/NHSME Managers**	**3,764·17**
NHSME News Issues: October, November, December, January, February, March	**NHS Managers, Press, Interested NHS Staff on Request and DH/NHSME Managers**	**30,732·71**
Nursing Perspective Leaflet	**Senior Nurse Managers**	**530·00**

April 1991 to December 1991

Title	*Recipient*	*Cost £*
Resource Management Leaflet —July 1991	**NHS Managers**	**290·00**
Casemix Procurement Pack	**NHS Managers**	**18,193·71**
Clinical Coding Toolbox	**NHS Managers**	**26,253·50**
Guide to Insurable Risk Management	**NHS Managers**	**3,114·81**
Booklet On Income Gereration From Financial Investment Services	**NHS Managers**	**3,736·50**
Value For Money Update—Issues No. 3, No. 4, and No. 5	**NHS Managers**	**7,345·00**
Value For Money Literature—June	**NHS Managers**	**3,014·90**
Value For Money Update Reprint of June Issue	**NHS Managers**	**862·00**
Value For Money: Ward Materials Management	**NHS Managers**	**721·09**
Guidance on Membership of NHS Authorities	**NHS Managers**	**3,133·98**
Sharing Developments Newsletter No. 2	**NHS Managers**	**4,791·46**
Health Service Indicators	**NHS Managers**	**7,555·00**
IMG Newsletters — Issues No. 4, No. 5 and No. 6	**NHS Managers**	**5,757·09**
Assessing Health Care Needs	**NHS Managers**	**2,458·00**
Financial Management Programme	**NHS Managers**	**851·52**
Teachers In The NHS Information Pack	**NHS Managers**	**1,200·00**
NHS Trusts Financial Management	**NHS Managers**	**1,672·03**
Women In The NHS Handbook	**Women and NHS Managers**	**10,192·54**
Patient's Charter Named Nurse Leaflet	**Nurses and NHS Managers**	**30,992·00**

Title	*Recipient*	*Cost £*
Patient's Charter News—Issues No. 1 and No. 2	All NHS Staff	2,695·00
NHSME News—Issues: March, April, May, June, July, August, September, October, November and December 1991	NHS Managers, Press, Interested NHS Staff on request and DH/NHSME Managers	84,924·04
NHSME News Special Health Strategy Issue—June 1991	NHS Managers, Press, Interested NHS Staff on request and DH/NHSME Managers	3,919·10

Hospitals

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance she has given the Alexandra hospital in Redditch concerning its bid for trust status; what guidance she has given North Worcestershire health authority concerning the planned closure of the Highfield hospital in Droitwich; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: None.

Blood Tests

Mr. Dicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will introduce compulsory blood tests on a regular basis for all national health service employees; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: I have no current plans to introduce regular compulsory blood tests for all national health service staff.

Disciplinary Appeals

Mr. Boyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she takes to ensure that she is in possession of all relevant information when hearing an appeal by a doctor against a penalty imposed by a tribunal hearing a disciplinary action.

Dr. Mawhinney: The procedures for dealing with appeals against family health services authority decisions on complaints against general practitioners are set out in the National Health Service (Service Committee and Tribunal) Regulations. Copies of the regulations are available in the Library.

In determining an appeal, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will inquire into the whole of the complaint, and take into account any evidence that was available to the committee which heard the complaint and of any further information, if any, that has been presented on appeal. Where appropriate, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State may appoint persons to hold an oral hearing of the appeal and to report their findings, and may also seek advice from the Medical Advisory Committee as to whether a penalty should be imposed.

Lung Cancer

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Healthr what is her estimate of the number of people who have died in sed.each of the last three years from lung cancer as a result of handling asbestos; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: I have been asked to reply.

Since April 1985, lung cancer has been a prescribed disease under the industrial injuries scheme provided the sufferer has had occupational exposure to asbestos and has some other clinical sign of asbestos-related disease. The numbers of cases diagnosed under this scheme in the last three years for which figures are available are:

Asbestos-related Lung Cancer

Year	*Number*
1989	54
1990	58
1991	55

These figures were published in the *Employment Gazette* occasional supplement No. 3, September 1992.

However, the lung cancer deaths attributable to asbestos are known to be considerably understated, mainly because many cases may not be recognised as asbestos-related by the sufferers or their doctors.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Leader Programme

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the schemes now approved under the Leader programme; and what is the estimated funding in each scheme.

Mr. Hanley: Schemes now approved under the EC Leader programme in Northern Ireland are as follows:

Mid Ulster Enterprises (Creggan) Ltd., Omagh, Co. Tyrone—£388,320;
The Seeconnell Initiative, Castlewellan, Co. Down—£508,200;
South West Fermanagh Development Organisation Ltd.—£52,000.

Terrorism

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list all the terrorist incidents in 1992 in which shots were fired over the international frontier, bombs or command wires crossed the frontier, the terrorists came over or escaped over the frontier or that otherwise had a cross-frontier element.

Mr. Mates *[holding answer 12 February 1993]:* It would not be appropriate to disclose detailed information held by the Royal Ulster Constabulary about incidents in which charges may be brought.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Family Courts (Creches)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make it his policy for family courts to provide creche facilities.

Mr. John M. Taylor: All family court care centres have a separate child witness waiting room and, in addition, as a result of local initiatives, family rooms where children can wait have been created at a number of other courts. At the magistrates courts, creche facilities may be provided on a local basis if it is considered desirable by the relevant magistrates courts committee. This is the most practical policy in the circumstances.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Asbestos-related Diseases

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many personnel who served with the Royal Navy during the second world war are in receipt of pensions awarded further to submitting claims for asbestos-related diseases.

Mr. Scott: The information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Resettlement Agency

Mr. Stephen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the Resettlement Agency's plan to dispose of its resettlement units to voluntary organisations or local authorities.

Miss Widdecombe: The Resettlement Agency is, today, beginning a tender exercise to dispose of its resettlement units at West End house, Spur house and Pound lodge each of which is in London, and also its resettlement units at Leicester and at Lye in the west midlands. The exercise to dispose of these five units will be completed by the end of March 1994.

National Insurance

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people who pay national insurance contributions are not liable to income tax.

Miss Widdecombe: Based on information from the annual new earnings survey and estimates of the number of employees in employment, it is estimated that there are currently some 0·5 million contributors whose earnings fall below the PAYE threshold for the payment of income tax.

Marginal Tax Rates

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people faced marginal tax rates *(a)* including and *(b)* excluding social security of over (i) 40 per cent., (ii) 50 per cent., (iii) 60 per cent., (iv) 70 per cent., (v) 80 per cent., (vi) 90 per cent. and (vii) 100 per cent. in each year since 1978-79.

Mr. Burt: Such information as is available is in the tables.

Number of people with marginal deduction rates including social security (thousands)

Per cent.	*1985-86*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
100+	70	0	0	0	0	0
90+	130	45	45	45	55	75
80+	290	345	210	235	205	250
70+	290	515	415	395	400	500
60+	450	515	420	395	405	510
50+	680	515	420	395	405	510
40+	n.a.	n.a.	455	665	435	520

Notes:

1. Figures for 1985-86 to 1991-92 are for benefit units where at least one partner works 24 hours or more.

2. Figures for 1992-93 are based on benefit units where at least one partner works 16 hours or more. These people would have experienced 100 per cent. deduction rate whilst on Income Support so their circumstances as a result of the change to Family Credit, will have improved.

3. Information for the years 1978-79, 1984-85, 1986-87 and 1987-88 is not available.

4. Figures based on Family Expenditure Survey data.

Estimated number of taxpayers liable to income tax above basic rates
Taxpayers[1] liable at higher rate (thousands)

	Tax rate[2]									
	40	45	50	55	60	65	70	75	80	Total
1978-79	235	158	86	84	54	45	32	36	33	763
1979-80	302	168	108	43	53	—	—	—	—	674
1980-81	334	216	129	52	65	—	—	—	—	796
1981-82	445	305	170	75	95	—	—	—	—	1,090
1982-83	435	245	155	65	83	—	—	—	—	983
1983-84	355	245	140	55	65	—	—	—	—	860
1984-85	380	255	145	65	85	—	—	—	—	930
1985-86	380	250	150	70	100	—	—	—	—	950
1986-87	400	300	210	90	120	—	—	—	—	1,120
1987-88	360	320	240	110	160	—	—	—	—	1,190
1988-89	1,350	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,350
1989-90	1,500	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,500
1990-91	1,800	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,800
[3]1991-92	1,700	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,700
[3]1992-93	1,700	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,700

[1] Single people and married couples for years up to and including 1989-90, individuals from 1990-91.

[2] Tax rate applicable to earned income. This excludes any liability to the investment income surcharge for years up to 1983-84.

[3] Provisional estimates projected from the 1990-91 Survey of Personal Income.

Benefits

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list, for each change in the minimum lending rate since April 1992, the interest earned on £5,000 invested at minimum lending rates and the income assumed to be received by a benefit claimant with £5,000 capital for both housing benefit and poll tax benefit calculations.

Mr. Burt: The information requested is in the table. This reflects changes in the base rate rather than the minimum lending rate—the two are often used as broad synonyms but the latter has only been used intermittently since 1981. The formula for calculating benefit deductions is not intended to represent any rate of return that could be obtained from investing capital.

Date	Base rate	Amount of interest earned on capital of £5,000 invested at base rate	Benefit deduction for £5,000 capital in both housing benefit and community charge benefit	Tapered amount set against benefit: Housing benefit (65 per cent. taper)	Community charge benefit (15 per cent. taper)
	Per cent.	Per week £	Per week £	Per week £	Per week £
5 May 1992	10·00	9·615	8·00	5·20	1·20
16 September 1992	12·00	11·538	8·00	5·20	1·20
17 September 1992	10·00	9·615	8·00	5·20	1·20
22 September 1992	9·00	8·653	8·00	5·20	1·20
16 October 1992	8·00	7·692	8·00	5·20	1·20
13 November 1992	7·00	6·730	8·00	5·20	1·20
26 January 1993	6·00	5·769	8·00	5·20	1·20

NATIONAL FINANCE

Typing Pool Services

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans have been proposed regarding tendering of typing pool services in VAT and Inland Revenue offices in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Cope: Customs and Excise have included typing pool services in VAT as part of the programme of market testing activities in their regional executive units in England and Wales.

The Inland Revenue proposes to market test typing services within the boundaries of its south-west regional executive office.

Consultants

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the contracts awarded by his Department to *(a)* Coopers and Lybrand management consultants, *(b)* Touche Ross management consultants, *(c)* Price Waterhouse management consultants, *(d)* Ernst and Young management consultants, *(e)* Chrichton Roberts Ltd., *(f)* KPMG management consultants and *(g)* Leopold Joseph management consultants, with the total cost of the contracts with each contractor, for (i) the past 12 months and (ii) 1991-92.

Mr. Nelson: The record of contracts awarded by the Treasury to the companies mentioned in the question is as follows:

Company	
Coopers Lybrand	
1991-92	1 Management Consultancy
1992-93	1 Audit Consultancy
	Total Value £153,000
Touche Ross	
1991-92	1 Market Testing Consultancy
1992-93	1 Management Consultancy
	Total Value £87,000
Price Waterhouse	
1991-92	3 Management Consultancies
1992-93	1 Management Consultancy
	Total Value £108,000
Ernst and Young	
1991-92	1 Management Consultancy
1992-93	3 Audit Consultancies
	3 Management Consultancies
	Total Value £219,000
KPMG	
1991-92	1 Management Consultancy
1992-93	1 Management Consultancy
	1 Training Consultancy
	Total Value £88,000

Chrichton Roberts Ltd and Leopald Joseph management consultants have not been awarded any contracts during the 1991-92 or 1992-93 financial years.

Because of the need to maintain commercially sensitive information, we have only shown the combined total value of contracts for each company for the two years in question.

Departmental Costs

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the instances, by Government Department, when the National Audit Office, in reports published since November 1990, has identified cost overruns resulting from departmental inefficiencies.

Mr. Dorrell: Since November 1990, seven NAO reports on Government Departments have identified cost overruns. These reports are listed in the table, along with the reasons for the overruns.

Cost overruns identified in NAO reports since November 1990

Department	*NAO Report*	*Publication Date*	*HC Ref*	*Reason for Cost Overrun*
Ministry of Agriculture	MAFF: Management of Works Services	17 February 1993	HC 470	Estimating procedures
Customs and Excise	Accommodation for HM Customs and Excise London Investigation Division Staff	10 December 1990	HC 101	Cost of operational works

Department	*NAO Report*	*Publication Date*	*HC Ref*	*Reason for Cost Overrun*
FCO	Report on Appropriation Account Class II Votes 1-4	31 January 1991	163.II	Extra cost of consultants fees on IT projects
MOD	MOD: Collaborative Projects	26 February 1991	HC 247	Overruns in some collaborative projects
MOD	MOD: Support Information Technology	25 July 1991	HC 644	Project cost overruns
MOD	The 1991 Statement on Major Defence Projects	17 July 1992	HC 121	Excess costs due to developmental difficulties
Department of Transport	Contracting for Roads	4 November 1992	HC 226	Overruns caused by price increases, unforeseen ground conditions and changes in departmental requirements

Family Incomes

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) of 11 January, *Official Report*, column *546*, if he will give similar information for an increase in the reduced rate band of income tax.

Mr. Dorrell: At 1993-94 levels of income and assuming indexation of allowances and thresholds, the full year cost of a 1p cut in the basic rate of tax is about £1·5 billion. This is equivalent to the cost of increasing the lower rate band width to £3,700. Under such a regime, a married man paying tax at least at the basic rate would be £1·54 per week better off when compared with indexation.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many families with children are estimated to have taxable income below the income tax threshold; and what proportion this represents of all families with children.

Mr. Dorrell: In 1992-93 it is estimated that 1·6 million single parents and married couples with children have no income tax liability. These represent just over a fifth of all families with children.

Mortgage Tax Relief

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the saving if mortgage interest tax relief was limited to 25 per cent. of base rates.

Mr. Dorrell: The revenue yield from calculating mortgage interest relief in terms of 25 per cent. of interest charged at base rates rather than actual mortgage interest rates would be about £700 million at 1992-93 levels.

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the increase in cost to the Treasury, in terms of mortgage interest tax relief, of each percentage increase in interest rates.

Mr. Dorrell: About £500 million at 1992-93 levels.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the effect on revenues in 1993-94, and in a full year, of *(a)* increasing and *(b)* decreasing the limit for mortgage tax relief by (i) £1,000, (ii) £2,000 (iii) £5,000 and (iv) £10,000.

Mr. Dorrell: The estimated costs at 1992-93 levels of increasing or decreasing the limit for mortgage interest tax relief are shown in the table. The estimates are based on the distribution of existing mortgages and therefore exclude behavioural effects which might result.

The costs for 1993-94 will depend on the pattern of borrowing, the eligibility of borrowers for mortgage interest tax relief, tax rates and interest rates.

Limit on size of loan £	*Cost (yield) of from increasing (decreasing) the ceiling on mortgage interest tax relief at 1992-93 levels* £ *million*
40,000	600
35,000	400
32,000	200
31,000	100
29,000	(100)
28,000	(200)
25,000	(500)
20,000	(1,100)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will provide a table showing the number of recipients of higher-rate mortgage interest tax relief for each year since 1979-80 in the United Kingdom by region;

(2) if he will provide a table showing the number of recipients of mortgage interest tax relief for each year since 1979-80 in the United Kingdom by region;

(3) what was the total value of providing higher-rate mortgage interest tax relief for each year since 1979-80 in the United Kingdom by region *(a)* at current prices and *(b)* at 1979-80 prices;

(4) pursuant to his answer of 17 June 1992, *Official Report*, columns *537-38*, to the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh), if he will *(a)* update the table with the latest information he has available on mortgage interest tax relief and *(b)* provide the information at both 1979-80 prices and cash prices.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 24 February 1993]*: Information for the total of mortgage interest relief is in the tables. The regional distributions for 1979-80 to 1982-83 have been derived from the relevant surveys of personal incomes. However, following the introduction of mortgage interest relief at source—MIRAS—in April 1983, regional information cannot be extracted from Inland Revenue records. Broad estimates for the years 1983-84 to 1991-92 have accordingly been based on analyses of the family expenditure surveys for the years concerned.

Reliable estimates of the value of and the number of recipients of higher rate mortgage interest tax relief by region are not readily available and could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Cost of mortgage interest relief[1]

£ million

	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*[2,3]	*1992-93*[2]
Northern	60	80	70	95	100	140	180	200	210	250	310	350	310	230
Yorkshire	110	155	150	160	210	260	340	350	360	370	460	510	450	340
North West	135	200	180	215	260	330	440	490	510	530	690	770	640	500
East Midlands	85	115	110	130	180	230	300	320	330	340	430	480	410	340
West Midlands	145	160	190	170	230	280	370	350	360	430	550	620	510	400
East Anglia	45	50	60	75	90	130	170	170	180	220	270	300	250	180
Greater London	235	280	290	260	400	500	670	620	650	780	980	110	710	740
Other South East	375	555	600	650	740	950	1,270	1,220	1,260	1.350	1,750	1,940	1,510	1.390
South West	110	140	170	140	230	300	400	380	400	520	660	730	570	480
England	1,300	1,735	1,820	1,900	2,440	3,120	4,140	4,100	4,260	4,790	6,100	6,800	5,360	4,600
Wales	45	65	80	80	110	150	200	210	220	180	240	270	230	190
Scotland	85	125	120	140	190	260	350	300	310	370	470	530	420	340
Northern Ireland	20	35	30	30	40	50	60	60	60	60	90	100	90	70
United Kingdom	1,450	1.960	2,050	2,150	2,780	3,580	4,750	4,670	4.850	5,400	6,900	7,700	6,100	5,200

[1] Excludes option mortgage scheme (1979-80 to 1983-84).
[2] Provisional.
[3] Higher rate relief was abolished in 1991-92.

Cost of mortgage interest relief at 1979-80 prices[1]

£ million

	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*[2,3]	*1992-93*[2]
Northern	60	70	50	60	60	70	100	110	110	120	150	150	120	90
Yorkshire	110	130	110	110	130	140	200	190	190	190	220	220	180	130
North West	135	170	130	140	160	180	250	260	260	270	320	340	260	190
East Midlands	85	100	80	90	110	120	170	170	170	170	200	210	160	130
West Midlands	145	140	140	110	140	150	210	190	190	220	260	270	200	150
East Anglia	45	40	40	50	60	70	110	90	90	100	130	130	100	70
Greater London	235	240	220	170	250	270	380	340	340	390	460	480	280	280
Other South East	375	470	450	430	470	510	720	660	660	680	820	850	600	530
South West	110	120	130	100	150	160	230	210	210	260	310	320	230	190
England	1,300	1,480	1,350	1,260	1,530	1,670	2,360	2,220	2,220	2,410	2,870	2,970	2,130	1,760
Wales	45	60	60	50	70	80	110	120	120	90	110	120	90	70
Scotland	85	110	90	90	120	140	200	160	160	180	220	230	170	130
Northern Ireland	20	30	20	20	20	20	40	30	30	30	40	40	40	30
United Kingdom	1,450	1,680	1,520	1,420	1,740	1,910	2,710	2,530	2,530	2,710	3,240	3,360	2,430	1,990

[1] Excludes option mortgage scheme (1979-80 to 1983-84).
[2] Provisional.
[3] Higher rate relief was abolished in 1991-92.

Number of mortgagors[1]

Thousands

	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*[2,3]	*1992-93*[2]
Northern	280	280	290	310	380	390	410	420	440	520	540	550	560	560
Yorkshire	580	570	560	560	680	700	730	740	770	770	780	800	800	780
North West	730	730	720	750	900	940	970	1,000	1,040	1,110	1,140	1,160	1,180	1,130
East Midlands	380	380	420	450	560	590	610	650	680	660	670	680	690	750
West Midlands	610	540	530	510	630	660	690	730	750	860	870	890	890	870
East Anglia	190	160	180	210	260	270	280	310	320	350	360	370	370	370
Greater London	750	720	660	620	770	800	840	900	930	1,010	1,020	1,040	1,050	1,020
Other South East	1,320	1,410	1,420	1,560	1,850	1,870	1,910	1,910	1,980	1,930	1,970	2,020	2,040	2,130
South West	410	400	420	440	560	610	650	730	750	840	850	870	880	870
England	5,250	5,190	5,200	5,410	6,590	6,830	7,090	7,390	7,660	8,050	8,200	8,380	8,460	8,480
Wales	230	230	240	270	350	370	390	420	430	390	400	410	410	440
Scotland	320	340	320	360	450	480	500	520	540	640	660	670	680	700
Northern Ireland	90	100	90	90	110	120	120	120	120	120	140	140	150	180
United Kingdom	5,890	5,860	5,850	6,130	7,500	7,800	8,100	8,450	8,750	9,200	9,400	9,600	9,700	9,800

[1] Excludes option mortgage scheme (1979-80 to 1983-84).
[2] Provisional.
[3] Higher rate relief was abolished in 1991-92.

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the most recent figures for the number of non-taxpayers who are claiming mortgage interest relief at source, in the United Kingdom; and how much this is costing the Exchequer.

Mr. Dorrell: MIRAS is available on all qualifying mortgages regardless of the tax status of the mortgagor. A tentative estimate, based on the 1991 family expenditure survey, is that there are about 1 million non-taxpayers receiving mortgage interest relief at source in 1992-93 at a cost of some £360 million.

Income Tax

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many taxpayers pay income tax at the rate of 20 per cent. only; and what is their average *(a)* gross and *(b)* taxable income.

Mr. Dorrell: Latest estimates for 1992-93 indicate that about 4·4 million taxpayers pay income tax only at the lower rate of 20 per cent. Their average gross income is £5,400 and their average taxable income is £930.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the revenue yield from non-indexation of the basic rate limit for income tax in 1993-94 and in a full year; and what would be the increase in the lower rate band which could be financed by this amount.

Mr. Dorrell: Compared with 2·6 per cent. indexation, the yield would be about £110 million in 1993-94, £180 million in a full year. For an equivalent cost in a full year the lower rate band could be increased by about £200.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what evidence he has from local tax offices of employers not operating PAYE systems properly and failing to take into account the lower rate band of income tax when calculating tax deductions; and what has been done to rectify this situation.

Mr. Dorrell: The Inland Revenue became aware during the first half of the 1992-93 financial year that not all employers were taking the lower rate band into account in operating PAYE. In October 1992, local tax offices were advised on how to help these employers apply the tax tables correctly. These efforts have been reinforced by national press coverage of the topic in December 1992 following a local tax office initiative.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the revenue yield in 1993-94 and in a full year of *(a)* raising the rate of VAT by 1 per cent. and *(b)* extending VAT to (i) children's clothing and footwear, (ii) food, (iii) domestic fuel, (iv) fares, (v) domestic construction, (vi) books, (vii) newspapers, (viii) other zero-rated supplies and (ix) all zero-rated supplies.

Sir John Cope: Table 5·8 in the 1992 "Autumn Statement" shows an estimate that a one percentage point increase in the rate of VAT would produce a yield of £1,675 million in 1993-94 and £2,350 million in the full year of 1994-95. The statistical supplement to the 1992 "Autumn Statement" shows the estimated cost in 1992-93 in terms of forgone revenue from zero-rating various goods and services.

The figures are as follows:—

	£ million
Children's clothing and footwear	600
Food	7,000
Domestic fuel	2,600
Domestic passenger transport	1,100
International passenger transport	800
Domestic construction	1,800
Books, newspapers, magazines	1,100
Water and sewerage services	700
Drugs and medicines on prescription	500
Supplies to charities	200
Ships and aircraft above a certain size	500

These figures make no allowance for the likely behavioural response to applying the standard rate of VAT to these items so the actual yield would probably be less than these figures suggest.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimates have been made of the impact of (i) 5 per cent. and (ii) 17½ per cent. VAT on air travel on *(a)* fare levels, *(b)* the number of passenger journeys, *(c)* the transfer of traffic to private road vehicles and *(d)* road congestion;

(2) what estimates have been made of the effect of 5 per cent. and 17½ per cent. VAT on road passenger transport on *(a)* fare levels, *(b)* concessionary fare levels, *(c)* the number of passenger journeys, *(d)* the transfer of traffic to private road vehicles and *(e)* increased road congestion;

(3) what estimates have been made of the effect of 5 per cent. and 17½ per cent. VAT on rail travel on *(a)* fare levels, *(b)* concessionary fare levels, *(c)* the number of passenger journeys, *(d)* the amount of freight transported, *(e)* the transfer of traffic to private road vehicles and *(f)* increased road congestion.

Sir John Cope: A positive rate of VAT on public passenger transport would lead to higher fares and some reduction in traffic and some diversion to private road vehicles. All of these impacts would, however, depend in particular upon the individual degree of competition on routes, and numerical estimates are not available. Freight traffic already bears VAT.

Child Care

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the effect on revenues in 1993-94 and in a full year of extending the income tax exemption for workplace nurseries as a benefit in kind to *(a)* child care cheques and vouchers and *(b)* other employer-assistance with child care; and what the effects would be if relief were limited to the basic rate.

Mr. Dorrell: The available information is given in my reply to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) on 20 January 1993, at column *260*. The effect at 1992-93 levels of limiting the relief to the basic rate would be minimal.

Taxpayers

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number and percentage of adults who pay income tax broken down by *(a)* sex, *(b)* marital status and *(c)* whether they are over or under pension age, giving for each group the numbers whose highest marginal tax rate is (i) 40 per cent., (ii) 25 per cent. and (iii) 20 per cent.

Mr. Dorrell: Latest estimates of taxpayer numbers in 1992-93 based on a projection of the 1990-91 survey of personal incomes are shown in the table. Available estimates are in terms of age below or above 65 rather than pension age.

1992-93 taxpayers

	Male				*Female*				*All taxpayers*
	Single		*Married*		*Single*		*Married*		
	Aged under 65 '000	*Aged 65 and over '000*	*Aged under 65 '000*	*Aged 65 and over '000*	*Aged under 65 '000*	*Aged 65 and over '000*	*Aged under 65 '000*	*Aged 65 and over '000*	*'000*
Lower rate taxpayers	720	200	640	300	800	380	1,100	280	4,400
Basic rate taxpayers	4,200	260	6,400	640	2,700	490	3,800	260	18,700
Higher rate taxpayers	240	20	1,100	60	90	30	100	20	1,700
All taxpayers	5,200	480	8,200	1,000	3,600	900	5,000	550	24,800

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the cost in 1993-94 and in a full year of increasing the lower rate band by *(a)* £100, *(b)* £500, and *(c)* £1,000; and how many additional taxpayers would face a top marginal rate of income tax of 20 per cent. as a result, giving figures separately for men and women.

Mr. Dorrell: Estimated costs compared with 2·6 per cent. indexation of the 1992-93 allowances and thresholds, are in the table.

Increase in the lower rate band	*Revenue cost in 1993-94*	*Revenue cost in a full year*	*Additional numbers of taxpayers with a marginal rate of 20 per cent.*	
			Males	*Females*
£	*£ million*	*£ million*	*(000s)*	*(000s)*
100	80	100	110	90
500	390	490	440	470
1,000	760	960	950	860

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the tax liabilities of taxpayers in 1992-93 in the income ranges *(a)* including and *(b)* excluding the effects of changes in national insurance contributions (i) under £5,000, (ii) £5,000 to £10,000, (iii) £10,000 to £15,000, (iv) £15,000 to £20,000, (v) £20,000 to £25,000, (vi) £25,000 to £30,000, (vii) £30,000 to £40,000, (viii) £40,000 to £50,000, (ix) £50,000 to £70,000, (x) over £70,000 and (xi) over £100,000, compared with what their liability would be under the indexed 1987-88 income tax regime.

Mr. Dorrell: Latest estimates of the average reductions in income tax liability resulting from the changes in tax rates, allowances and thresholds are in the table. The 1987-88 income tax regime has been indexed to 1992-93 levels by reference to the statutory formula and allowing for independent taxation.

Range of individuals income in 1992-93 (£)	*Average change in 1992-93 compared with 1987-88 indexed regime (£)*	
	Income tax	*Income tax and National Insurance*
Under 5,000	80	90
5,000-10,000	190	250
10,000-15,000	260	400
15,000-20,000	340	490
20,000-25,000	430	570
25,000-30,000	510	630
30,000-40,000	370	480
40,000-50,000	730	840
50,000-70,000	2,150	2,240
70,000-80,000	4,840	4,920
Over 80,000	18,900	18,900
Average	400	480

I regret that a reliable analysis of taxpayers with incomes over £100,000 is not available.

For the purpose of the calculations the indexed regime of 1987-88 has been applied directly to the income base of 1992-93. In practice, retention of the 1987-88 regime, indexed as appropriate, for the intervening years would have led to changes in the income base.

Tax Exempt Special Savings Accounts

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what evidence he has of the effect of the introduction of TESSAs on savings.

Mr. Dorrell: Nearly 3·5 million people have invested more than £12 billion in TESSAs. TESSA has quickly become established as an important way of encouraging medium-term savings.

Tax Exemption

Ms. Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many people in the income groups of individual's income *(a)* below £5,000, *(b)* from £5,000 to £10,000, *(c)* from £10,000 to £15,000, *(d)* from 15,000 to £20,000, *(e)* from £20,000 to £25,000, *(f)* from £25,000 to £30,000, *(g)* from £30,000 to £40,000, *(h)* from £40,000 to £50,000, *(i)* from £50,000 to £60,000, *(j)* from £60,000 to £70,000 and *(k)* over £70,000, received tax relief on profit-related pay schemes in the latest year for which figures are available; what proportion this represents of the total number of people in each income group; and what was the average tax relief of people with profit-related pay within each income group;

(2) how many people in the income groups of individual's income *(a)* below £5,000, *(b)* from £5,000 to £10,000, *(c)* from £10,000 to £15,000, *(d)* from 15,000 to £20,000, *(e)* from £20,000 to £25,000, *(f)* from £25,000 to £30,000, *(g)* from £30,000 to £40,000, *(h)* from £40,000 to £50,000, *(i)* from £50,000 to £60,000, *(j)* from £60,000 to £70,000 and *(k)* over £70,000, benefited from inheritance tax exemption in the latest year for which figures are available; what proportion this represents of the total number of people in each income group; what was the average exemption within each income group; and what was the cost to the Treasury of inheritance tax exemption in each income group;

(3) how many people in the income groups of individual's income *(a)* below £5,000, *(b)* from £5,000 to £10,000, *(c)* from £10,000 to £15,000, *(d)* from 15,000 to £20,000, *(e)* from £20,000 to £25,000, *(f)* from £25,000 to £30,000, *(g)* from £30,000 to £40,000, *(h)* from £40,000 to £50,000, *(i)* from £50,000 to £60,000, *(j)* from £60,000 to £70,000 and *(k)* over £70,000, took out personal equity plans in the latest year for which figures are available;

what proportion this represents of the total number of people in each income group; and what was the average tax relief on PEPs, within each income group;

(4) how many people in the income groups of individual's income *(a)* below £5,000, *(b)* from £5,000 to £10,000, *(c)* from £10,000 to £15,000, *(d)* from 15,000 to £20,000, *(e)* from £20,000 to £25,000, *(f)* from £25,000 to £30,000, *(g)* from £30,000 to £40,000, *(h)* from £40,000 to £50,000, *(i)* from £50,000 to £60,000, *(j)* from £60,000 to £70,000 and *(k)* over £70,000, benefited from capital gains tax exemption in the latest year for which figures are available; what proportion this represents of the total number of people in each income group; what was the average exemption within each income group; and what was the cost to the Treasury of capital gains tax exemption in each income group.

Mr. Dorrell: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Retail Prices Index

Ms. Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the impact on 1992-93 on the retail prices index of raising £1 billion from *(a)* tobacco products, *(b)* beer, *(c)* wine and spirits, *(d)* petrol, *(e)* VAT and *(f)* vehicle excise duty.

Sir John Cope: The necessary changes in the rate of duty or VAT have been calculated on the basis of figures published in table 5.8 of the 1992 "Autumn Statement." The estimated impact effects are as follows, assuming the full tax increases are passed on to consumers in the form of higher prices:

	Per cent. change in duty	*RPI impact effect per cent.*
Tobacco	18·9	0·45
Beer	49·3	0·40
Wine and Spirits	73·2	0·93
Petrol	11·4	0·23
VED	31·0	0·26
VAT, percentage point increase	0·6	0·27

Some of the additional tax burden may fall on businesses, in particular any increase in petrol duty. If businesses pass this cost on to consumers in the form of higher prices, the long run effect on the RPI may be greater than indicated.

Tobacco

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total income in the form of duties or tax received by the Exchequer from the sale of tobacco and tobacco products during each year since 1989-90; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Cope: The following is the available information:—

	Tobacco Duty Receipts *£ million*	*Estimates of VAT on Tobacco Expenditure* *£ million*
1989-90	5,035	1,070
1990-91	5,636	1,160
1991-92	6,290	1,490

Taxes and Excise Duties

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update the information given in tables 5·2, 5·3, 5·4, 5·5, 5·6, 5·7 and 5·8 of the autumn statement 1992 on the basis of the December retail prices index.

Mr. Dorrell: Updated figures for 1993-94 on the basis of an indexation factor of 2·6 per cent. are given in the tables. Tables 5·6 and 5·8 showing illustrative changes in taxes are unaffected by the change in the indexation factor. A correction to the figures published in table 5·6 of the "Autumn Statement" was given in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) on 16 February 1993, *Official Report*, column *122*.

Table 5—Income Tax

	1992-93 *£*	*1993-94* *£*
Personal allowance	3,445	3,535
Personal allowance (age 65 to 74)	4,200	4,310
Personal allowance (age 75 and over)	4,370	4,490
Married couple's allowance	1,720	1,770
Married couple's allowance (age 65 to 74)	2,465	2,535
Married couple's allowance (age 75 and over)	2,505	2,575
Additional personal[1] and widow's bereavement allowance	1,720	1,770
Aged income limit[2]	14,200	14,600
Lower rate band	2,000	2,100
Basic rate limit[3]	23,700	24,400

[1] Primarily for single parents.

[2] If the total income, less allowable deductions, of a taxpayer aged 65 or over exceeds this limit, the age-related allowances are reduced by £1 for each additional £2 of income until the basic levels of the personal and married couple's allowances are reached.

[3] Higher rate income tax is payable on income (less allowances and those reliefs which are allowed at the higher rate) in excess of the basic rate limit.

Table 5.3—Inheritance tax

	1992-93 *£'000*	*1993-94* *£'000*
Threshold	150	154

Table 5—Capital gains tax

	1992-93 *£*	*19993-94* *£*
Annual exempt amount:		
Individuals	5,800	6,000
Trusts	2,900	3,000

Table 5.5—Costs of indexation for 1993-94

	1993-94 *£ million*	*1994-95* *£ million*
Indexation of income tax allowances lower rate band and basic rate limit[1]	750	1,000
Of which:		
Increases in allowances	560	720
Increase in lower rate band[2]	80	100
Increase in the basic rate limit[2]	110	180
Indexation of inheritance tax threshold	10	25
Indexation of capital gains exempt amount	0	5

[1] Cost includes the consequential effects on capital gains tax.

[2] Additional cost after previous change has been introduced.

Table 5

Direct Effects of Revalorising all Excise Duties[1]

	£ million yield[2] *1993-94*	*£ million yield*[2] *1994-95*	*Typical item*	*Current level of duty on typical items*	*Price change*[3]
Total[4]	600	675		—	0·19 per cent.
Of which:					
Beer and cider	55	70	Pint of beer	23·3p	0·7p
Wine	10	15	75 cl bottle of table wine	94·5p	2·9p
Spirits	20	20	70 cl bottle	£5·55	17·1p
Tobacco[6]	130	150	20 king size	£1·36	3·6p
Petrol	215	240	Litre of unleaded	23·4p	0·7p
Derv	70	70	Litre	22·9p	0·7p
VED[7]	80	85	Cars and light vans	£110·00	£2·86

[1] These are estimated on the assumption that total consumers' expenditure at factor cost does not change.

[2] Assuming implementation on 1 April 1993.

[3] The price change is assumed to equal the change in duty plus the consequential change in VAT except in the case of VED where VAT is not payable. The price change is for the typical item described above the rounded to the nearest one-tenth of a pence.

[4] Includes receipts from tax on items not listed below.

[5] Impact effect on the RPI.

[6] The duty on cigarettes has ad valorem and specific elements; revalorisation and the illustrative percentage change relate only to the specific element, but the price change includes the consequential increase in ad valorem duty and VAT.

[7] All VED, including HGVs as well as cars and light vans.

TRANSPORT

Rail Investment

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the annual investment in the existing railway including track renewals, for each year since 1963, and the equivalent figure proposed by his Department for 1993-94.

Mr. Freeman: Figures for expenditure on track renewals are not readily available prior to 1979. Figures for investment in the existing railway including track renewals and rolling stock after 1979 are in the following table. BR's initial estimate for investment in the existing railway in 1993-94 is around £550 million. The latest forecast of the outturn for 1992-93 is £1,058 million. A further £150 million has been provided for future rolling stock leases.

	£ million cash
1979	367
1980	431
1981	409
1982	378
1983	439
1984-85	557
1985-86	550
1986-87	530
1987-88	631
1988-89	695
1989-90	864
1990-91	836
1991-92	1,032

Notes:

1. Figures exclude changes in advance payments on rolling stock orders.
2. Figures for 1979 and 1980 exclude ships, harbours, hovercraft and hotels.

Rail Privatisation

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the regulator will have powers to require private rail operators, following the privatisation of British Rail, to provide common discount facilities for pensioners; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Yes, if he considers it requisite or expedient having regard to his general duties under clause 4 of the Railways Bill. But private operators will be under strong commercial incentives to offer discount facilities to attract customers.

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the pension arrangements for employees of South Yorkshire Transport if the sale to the private sector takes place after 30 June.

Mr. Freeman: I have had no recent communications from the South Yorkshire passenger transport authority, but I hope that it will sell South Yorkshire Transport Ltd. before 30 June.

MV Braer

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what further progress has been made with regard to interim measures following the MV Braer incident.

Mr. MacGregor: A paper was submitted to the Secretary General of the International Maritime Organisation yesterday for consideration at the maritime safety committee meeting in May. The paper contained details of a number of interim measures to protect the United Kingdom coast from accidental pollution. The measures include a voluntary code for laden tankers that the industry has undertaken to develop by mid-March. The code will stress the importance of:

- Passage Planning
- Compliance with internationally agreed routeing schemes
- Voluntary reporting arrangements in specified areas
- Advising coastal states if a vessel is experiencing difficulties which could lead to pollution
- The maintenance of appropriate margins of safety in case of ship breakdown
- Testing essential systems
- Satisfactory towing arrangements on tankers
- The right of masters to exercise their discretion in particular circumstances

The paper also sets out routeing measures that are under active consideration. These measures include:

- An extended area to be avoided around the Shetland Islands
- A Traffic Separation Scheme in the Fair Isle Channel

and recommendations on tanker navigation in the following locations:

- Pentland Firth
- Minch
- North Channel
- Off Smalls and Grassholme Island
- Off Scilly Islands
- Needles Channel
- Firth of Forth

We will ensure that all those affected by these measures will be fully consulted before the maritime safety committee meets in May. Copies of the paper are in the Libraries of both Houses.

Shipping

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a table showing the size in tonnes of the maritime fleet owned and registered in the United Kingdom in 1979 and that for the latest period for which figures are available; what information he has about the corresponding trend in other major European fleets over the same period; and what recent discussions have taken place with the European Commission and in the Council of Ministers regarding likely future developments, including the subject of aid to fleets.

Mr. Norris: The total deadweight tonnage of the trading fleet owned and registered in the United Kingdom fell from 39.3 million tonnes at mid-1979 to 5·6 million tonnes at the end of 1992.

The deadweight tonnage on the principal mainland European registries, irrespective of ownership, at mid-1979 and at the end of 1992 were as follows:

Deadweight

(million tonnes)

	Mid-1979	*End-1992*
United Kingdom[1]	44·3	6·4
Denmark	8·9	6·8
France	20·6	5·6
Germany[2]	13·5	6·3
Greece	63·3	46·8
Italy	19·0	10·1
Netherlands	8·2	4·6
Spain	13·6	4·0
Cyprus	3·4	36·7
Malta	0·1	18·5
Norway	39·1	37·7
Poland	4·8	4·1
Romania	2·5	4·2
Sweden	7·4	3·4
Yugoslavia	3·6	n/a

[1] Includes the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man and tonnage owned by non UK residents.

[2] The end-1992 figure for Germany includes the fleet of the former German Democratic Republic.

On future developments, the December Transport Council endorsed our presidency paper on positive measures to improve the competitiveness of Community fleets, which have all reduced in size. Particular points stressed were that there should be flexibility on manning requirements and that the Commission should bring forward proposals for a number of non-financial measures, including the enforcement of maritime safety standards to avoid Community shipowners being at a competitive disadvantage with sub-standard shipping from third countries.

During our presidency, we argued strongly for the curbing of state aids in discussion with the Commission and in the Council of Ministers, and the Commission's recent White Paper, "The Future Development of the Common Transport Policy", confirmed that state aids should not be permitted to distort competition and compromise the establishment of a level playing field. We shall continue to press for the adoption of measures to even out the terms of competition within the Community.

Kent Coast Line

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what assurances he has been given that an order for new rolling stock to serve the Kent coast line, based upon existing available funding and the Networker design, would be commercially viable; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what discussions he has had with British Rail concerning its failure to place an order for new Networker trains to serve the Kent coast line.

Mr. Freeman: My right hon. Friend and I have asked British Rail to tell me by Easter what rolling stock it wishes to lease using the £150 million leasing facility announced at the time of the autumn statement, and for which routes. New Networker rolling stock for Kent coast is one of the options. We expect BR to inform us of the commercial implications of its chosen option.

Driving Licences

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if applications for driving licences for people age 70 years or over are divulged to commercial organisations.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No personal information about applicants of any age is given to commercial organisations.

Greater Manchester Buses Ltd.

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport following his direction under section 61 of the Transport Act 1985 to Greater Manchester Buses Ltd., what assessment he has made of whether the EC acquired rights directive will apply, upon disposal, in respect of pension rights.

Mr. Freeman: Pension rights are being fully discussed between my Department, the Department of the Environment and the Greater Manchester passenger transport authority.

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what protection of employees' pension rights he intends to introduce on the disposal of Greater Manchester Buses Ltd. following his direction under section 61 of the Transport Act 1985.

Mr. Freeman: I am having constructive talks with the Greater Manchester passenger transport authority.

Twyford Down (Private Detectives)

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidance was issued by his Department to Bray's Detective Agency (Southampton) Ltd. in relation to their investigation of protesters at Twyford Down, Hampshire; what monitoring of the activities of the firm was carried out by his Department to ensure such guidance was adhered to; and if he will place a copy of such guidance in the Library.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle *[holding answer 22 February 1993]:* Bray's Detective Agency (Southampton) Ltd. was appointed to serve papers on people who have trespassed on departmental land and to photograph trespassers. It was not considered necessary to issue guidance for the execution of these tasks.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultations took place between his Department and its contractors on the Twyford Down project over the hiring of a private security firm and over the deployment of this firm on 9 December 1992.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle *[holding answer 22 February 1993]:* Site security is the responsibility of the contractor. In this case, the contractors consulted the Department before employing an experienced security firm to protect the site from intrusion by trespassers.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to reply to the letter sent to him on 21 January by the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen, regarding the use of private detective agencies and private security guards at Twyford Down, Hampshire.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle *[holding answer 22 February 1993]:* Soon.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidelines have been established by his Department *(a)* for the use of private security firms on his Department's land and *(b)* for use when considering whether to employ private detectives; and if he will place a copy of the guidelines in the Library.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle *[holding answer 22 February 1993]:* Private security firms and detectives are used infrequently. No guidelines have been established.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is the total sum of moneys paid to Bray's Detective Agency (Southampton) Ltd. by his Department since February 1992; and if he will place a copy of its contract of employment in the Library;

(2) what was the method of appointment used in the selection of Bray's Detective Agency (Southampton) Ltd.; and what criteria were used in the selection.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle *[holding answer 22 February 1993]:* The agency was appointed on the recommendation of the engineer. No formal contract was made. To date, the agency has been paid approximately £7,000.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what considerations underlay his decisions to forbid Group 4 Security Ltd. from making a statement to the television programme "Dispatches" in relation to its employment by his Department at Twyford Down; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I took the view that as overall responsibility for the M3 scheme rests with my right hon. Friend, I should issue a single statement to the makers of the "Dispatches" television programme about the action taken to progress this scheme.

Submarine Monitoring Scheme

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the policy of HM Coastguard in respect of the current operation of the subfacts scheme.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 23 February 1993]:* HM coastguard supports the agreement between the Ministry of Defence and the fishing industry that information on the areas where dived submarines are active should be provided for the benefit of fishermen.

Recent discussions have been held with Ministry of Defence officials to consider the options available for transmitting subfacts information. Proposals are awaited from the MOD as to the best way forward.

Vehicle Testing Centres

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to be reporting on the results of his consultation on the future of vehicle testing centres.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) on 10 February, *Official Report)*, column *659*.

Unleaded Fuel

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the latest figures for *(a)* how many and *(b)* what proportion of (i) new cars use unleaded fuel and (ii) car owners have converted their cars to unleaded fuel, and what proportion this is of cars that can be converted, (iii) new cars have a catalytic converter and (iv) car owners have a catalytic converter fitted.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: All new petrol-engined cars manufactured since 1 October 1990 have had to be capable of running on unleaded petrol, deliveries of which in November 1992 amounted to 49·2 per cent. of the total figure of 1,925,987 tonnes for deliveries of motor spirit. The number and proportion of older cars adapted to use unleaded is unknown. Since 31 December 1992 virtually all new petrol-engined cars have been fitted with catalysts; and of the total car fleet of some 22·9 million vehicles, the proportion fitted with these devices is currently about 5 per cent.

A1 Motorway

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 19 February, *Official Report*, column *385*, if he will publish a breakdown of the operational costs of the proposed A1 motorway between Redhouse and Hook Moor.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The first year operational costs of £80 million in respect of the announced preferred route for this scheme is broken down as follows:

Costs		*£ millions*
(i)	time	25·136
(ii)	fuel	12·106
(iii)	other vehicle costs such as depreciation and maintenance	41·948
(iv)	routine maintenance such as sign replacement, drainage renovation and condition inspections	0·314
	Total	[1]79·504

[1] (rounded to £80 million).

Company Cars

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many cars were registered for ownership in a company's name in each year since 1973-74; and what estimate he has of the number of people who had such cars in each year.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Information on the registration of cars under a company name is not available before 1976. For the years since 1976 the figures for Great Britain are as shown in the table.

Cars registered for the first time

	(000)	*Percentage of all cars registered in year*
1976	500	39
1977	580	44
1978	660	42
1979	770	45
1980	630	42
1981	600	40
1982	640	40
1983	710	39
1984	740	42
1985	830	45
1986	860	46
1987	970	48
1988	1,130	51
1989	1,180	51
1990	1,050	52
1991	830	52
1992	830	52

Regular statistics on the number of employees in the United Kingdom taxed on the private use of a company car were not collected by the Inland Revenue before 1978-79. The available figures from 1978-79 onwards are shown in the table.

	(000)
1978-79	550
1980-81	650
1981-82	800
1983-84	850
1985-86	1,050
1987-88	1,550
1988-89	1,750
1989-90	1,850
1990-91	1,950
1991-92	1,900
1992-93	1,850

These figures do not include self-employed people who use their cars for business purposes. It is estimated that in recent years there have been some 2 million people in this category.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Leyland DAF

Mr. Bell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if it is his intention to intervene on behalf of Leyland DAF.

Mr. Sainsbury: The European Commission recently approved assistance by the Italian Government to Fiat for capital investment in an assisted area of Italy. There is currently no equivalent proposal in respect of Leyland DAF.

Bicycles

Mr. Bell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make proposals to redress the imbalance in the General agreement on tariffs and trade agreement between the reduction of du[illegible]on imports of complete bicycles and that on componen[illegible].

Mr. Needham: No agreement has yet been finalised in the GATT Uruguay round table negotiations. The latest EC proposal for reduction in the Community's common external tariff, tabled in December 1992, offers no reduction in the current 17 per cent. duty on complete bicycles, but reduces that on components from 8 to 5·5 per cent. In making this revised offer, the EC has stated that it is ready to improve it in further negotiations. The United Kingdom will continue to work for a result which includes the greatest possible reduction in the EC tariff on bicycle components.

Offshore Oil and Gas

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which aspects of development proposals for smaller oil and gas fields will be subject to less rigorous assessment by his Department's officials.

Mr. Eggar: We plan, as recommended in the scrutiny that I published on 22 October 1992, to identify a threshold below which the Department would normally expect to give less rigorous scrutiny to questions of reservoir potential in considering field development applications. Applications would, however, have to satisfy the full range of requirements and obligations placed on oil and gas producers.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the categories of information which will no longer be required from oil companies by his Department as a result of the change in regulations on oil and gas field development announced by the Minister for Energy on 22 October 1992.

Mr. Eggar: My Department is implementing the recommendations of the scrutiny that I published on 22 October and we plan to issue comprehensive new guidelines in June 1993. As far as information is concerned, we are reducing monitoring of production from fields already on stream and it is our intention to reduce information accompanying field development applications to the minimum needed to assess acceptability and compliance with relevant obligations. We have already made clear our preparedness, as recommended in the scrutiny, to receive information in the latter category in the companies' own format.

Faraday Centres

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are his current plans for the future of the Faraday centres programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: My Department has consulted widely on the needs of industry which could be met by a series of "Faraday centres" as proposed by HRH the Prince of Wales's working group on innovation. I have concluded that a strong case for the establishment of Faraday centres does not exist but that the principles underlying the Faraday proposals should be taken forward as part of developing science and technology policy.

The House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology has reached similar conclusions and I refer the hon. Gentleman to my Department's evidence to this Committee published on 20 January 1993—HMSO: HL50.

Export Reinsurance

Mr. Salmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) how many companies, by sector, have been in receipt of export reinsurance from the Export Credits Guarantee Department since December 1991;

(2) how much of Export Credits Guarantee Department expenditure on export reinsurance, since December 1991, went to oil and gas and related companies; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will give details of Export Credits Guarantee Department expenditure on export reinsurance since December 1991; if he will break this information down by sector; and if he will make a statement;

(4) what assessment he has made of the impact of the discontinuation of the Export Credits Guarantee Department's reinsurance provision in 1994 for oil and gas and related industry; and if he will make a statement;

(5) what assessments he has made of the impact of Export Credits Guarantee Department export reinsurance expenditure on the volume and value of United Kingdom exports by sector; and if he will make a statement;

(6) what assessment he has made of the impact of the discontinuation of the Export Credits Guarantee Department's reinsurance provision in 1994 for United Kingdom exports and exporters, by sector; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 10 February, *Official Report*, column 672.

Reinsurance is provided only to the privatised successor of ECGD's insurance services group on a global basis and it is not possible to provide a breakdown between the risks, goods, trade, sector or geographical location of the exporters ultimately benefiting.

No expenditure in respect of reinsurance claims has been incurred to date.

BCCI

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total cost of Touche Ross, in conducting the BCCI receivership from the date of its appointment to 31 December 1992.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The aggregate fees and expenses of the liquidators in relation to the various insolvency proceedings in Luxembourg, England, Scotland and the Isle of Man as agreed by the courts in the relevant jurisdictions totalled US$154 million as at 13 January 1993.

Service Charges

Mrs. Browning: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what response he intends to make to the report of the sub-committee of the monitoring committee on misleading price indications on service charges in restaurants and hotels.

Mr. Leigh: A committee to monitor and review the operation of the regime established under part III of the Consumer Protection Act 1987 was set up by my hon. Friend for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) when he was Minister for Consumer Affairs.

The committee referred the question of service charges in hotels and restaurants to a sub-committee drawn from the interests concerned. The sub-committee completed its report, which was endorsed by the main committee, last June.

My hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Consumer Affairs and Small Firms has considered the recommendations in the report most carefully, but she is not convinced that further legislation would make an effective contribution to solving the problems which can arise over payment for service. She has therefore decided against further regulation in this area at this time.

A copy of the sub-committee's report will be placed in the Library.

Furniture Safety

Mr. David Porter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the number of business failures in the shops, auctions and car boot sales markets likely when the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1992 are implemented; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 23 February 1993]:* The Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations, as amended, which have been the subject of public consultation have been introduced progressively since 1988. My Department believes that the period of grace provided for non-complying furniture represents a fair balance between the needs of business and the safety interests of consumers. Statistics on the number of businesses supplying upholstered furniture are not available.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will now apply the criteria of the deregulation initiative to the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1992.

Mr. Neil Hamilton *[holding answer 23 February 1993]:* Like all Government regulations, the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988 as amended will be subject to review by the sectoral deregulation task forces of business men which are currently being set up following the Prime Minister's deregulation seminar on 2 February 1993. The deregulation criterion of proportionality between the degree of regulation and the risk of public safety was explicitly addressed during the consultation period preceding the introduction of the regulations.

Company Accounts

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many times in each year since 1985 the powers conferred by section 448 of the Companies Act 1985 have been used.

Mr. Neil Hamilton *[holding answer 23 February 1993]:* My Department does not currently maintain specific records on the number of times the powers under section 448 of the Companies Act are used but we are making plans to do so. However, the powers are seldom used, probably not more than two or three times a year.

Post Office Subsidiaries

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the present investment programme for each Post Office subsidiary for 1993-94.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 24 February 1993]:* The Post Office has not yet completed the allocation among its constituent businesses of the total planned capital investment programme for 1993-94 of £321 million.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what have been the investment programmes for each Post Office subsidiary for the last three complete years, with an estimated outturn for the current year, both in current price and cash terms.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 24 February 1993]:* The investment programmes for the principal constituent businesses of the Post Office for the last three financial years and estimated outturn for 1992-93 in both outturn and constant price terms are as follows:

Outturn prices

	1989-90 £ million	*1990-91 £ million*	*1991-92 £ million*	*1992-93 £ million*
Royal Mail	151	203	179	256
Parcelforce	47	51	28	38
Post Office Counters Ltd.	18	27	39	27
Others	35	46	20	23
Total	251	327	266	344

Constant prices (September 1992)

	1989-90 £ million	*1990-91 £ million*	*1991-92 £ million*	*1992-93 £ million*
Royal Mail	180	219	186	256
Parcelforce	56	55	29	38
Post Office Counters Ltd.	22	29	40	27
Others	42	50	21	23
Total	300	353	276	344

Steel

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will estimate the consequences for the British steel industry of the European Commission's restructuring proposals; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards EC proposals *(a)* for additional support for closure costs in the steel industry and *(b)* for additional restructuring; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 24 February 1993]:* The Government and British steel industry are in broad agreement that the Commission proposals for restructuring the EC steel industry, including use of European Coal and Steel Community financial resources to provide additional support for the social costs of permanent closures are a positive response to the problems facing the industry. I shall be discussing the Commission's proposals with my EC colleagues today.

WALES

Drug Abuse

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which social services department in Wales has agreed to operate his Department's guidelines for funding drug abuse centres in Wales from April 1993 onwards; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Welsh Office has not issued separate guidance relating specifically to the funding of residential facilities for drug misusers. General guidance has, however, been issued on the financing of community care, including the sum transferred from the Department of Social Security.

Local councils are, therefore, aware of the amounts being transferred to them and of the purpose for which the amounts are intended; including services for drug misusers. We will be monitoring how councils spend these sums.

Youth Training

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the estimates given by training and enterprise councils for each month since they were available of *(a)* the number of young people seeking a youth training place, *(b)* the number of young people who left school in 1991 who were seeking a youth training place, *(c)* the number of young people who left school in 1992 who were seeking a youth training place and *(d)* the number of young people in the special training needs category who were seeking a youth training place; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I will write to the hon. Lady.

Dentists

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many general dental practitioners in Wales in each area health authority are offering to provide NHS treatment to existing and new patients from 1 April; how many are offering NHS treatment to existing but not to new patients; and how many are offering no NHS treatment at all from 1 April.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information is not available centrally in the form requested. General dental practitioners are independent contractors and, as such, they are free to decide how much of their time they wish to devote to NHS work and how many patients they wish to have on their lists. The figures on the number of dentists practising in Wales as at 30 September 1992 are as follows:

Family health services authority area	*Number of dentists*
Clwyd	102
Dyfed	105
Gwent	135
Gwynedd	66
Mid Glamorgan	133
Powys	35
South Glamorgan	127
West Glamorgan	128
TOTAL	831

Returns from family health services authorities in Wales indicate that 25 general dental practitioners gave written notice to have their name removed from dental lists between 1 August 1992 and 12 February 1993. During that period, 47 dentists joined the dental lists and are offering a full range of NHS services.

Waste Disposal

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the cost of waste disposal for each local authority in Wales in each year since 1990; and if he will publish estimated waste disposal costs for 1993-94.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information available is given in the table. There are no estimated figures held centrally for 1993-94 since local authorities are still in the process of setting their budgets.

£000

	1990-91 (a)		*1991-92*		*1992-93*
	Net current expenditure (b)	*Gross capital expenditure (c)*	*Net current expenditure (d)*	*Gross capital expenditure (a)*	*Net current expenditure (e)*
Alyn and Deeside	663	537	581	63	837
Colwyn	160	48	232	21	399
Delyn	36	102	24	79	0
Glyndwr	217	73	166	153	148
Rhuddlan	299	1	320	0	479
Wrexham Maelor	139	148	287	242	499
Carmarthen	96	100	126	51	121
Ceredigion	415	324	284	304	263
Dinefwr	108	58	106	0	200
Llanelli	324	37	388	0	592
Preseli Pembrokeshire	199	235	167	419	389
South Pembrokeshire	200	18	262	7	388
Blaenau Gwent	142	68	2	23	128
Islwyn	179	83	227	113	243
Monmouth	378	87	694	36	703
Newport	−344	4	−399	0	−64
Torfaen	437	394	561	228	572
Aberconwy	216	0	257	18	525
Arfon	203	10	276	25	132
Dwyfor	217	85	278	74	342
Meirionnydd	142	37	145	20	145
Ynys Mon	299	90	436	115	731
Cynon Valley	150	72	135	202	−72
Merthyr Tydfil	223	40	297	36	401
Ogwr	301	0	479	0	710
Rhondda	203	574	340	1,274	355
Rhymney Valley	411	34	214	28	296
Taff Ely	255	363	113	199	913
Brecknock	236	110	262	0	316
Montgomeryshire	185	279	228	173	248
Radnorshire	99	49	125	19	204
Cardiff	340	447	−92	119	147
Vale of Glamorgan	161	0	255	0	280
Port Talbot	58	0	83	0	330
Lliw Valley	199	27	251	30	332
Neath	−18	28	16	59	8
Swansea	1,326	475	1,822	258	1,808
Total Wales	8,854	5,037	9,948	4,388	14,048

(a) Outturn.

(b) Net current expenditure is defined as expenditure on employees and running expenses, less sales, fees, charges, internal recharges and other non-grant income but gross of specific government grants.

(c) Gross capital expenditure is defined as the provision, acquisition and enhancement of tangible fixed assets which continue to be of value long after their acquisition.
(d) Provisional.
(e) Budgets. Information for capital expenditure is not available.

Community Care (Housing Management)

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to secure that housing management issues affecting older people and disabled people are considered as part of the care in the community programme.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Sound housing management is fully recognised as essential for all those who will need care in the community. Social services departments are required to liaise with housing departments in the perparation of their social care plans.

Rural Housing

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total value of supplementary credit approvals granted by his Department for developing housing in rural Wales during each of the last two years; and what is the estimated amount to be allocated for 1993-94.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: A variety of measures assist the development of rural housing in Wales as detailed in the table:

£ million

	1991-92 Outturn	*1992-93 Planned outturn*	*1993-94 Plans*
Rural Housing	3·8	4·3	4·0
Private Rented Sector	2·3	2·6	[1]—
Homelessness	0·7	0·2	[1]—
Mandatory Renovation Grants	[1]29·4	41·0	47·2
Area Renewal, Group Repair, etc	3·0	3·7	[1]—
Supplementary Rural Allocation	3·7	—	—
Measures to Stimulate the Housing Market	—	10·2	—
Housing for Wales[2]	32·0	35·0	34·0

[1] The distribution of these reserves for 1993-94 between rural and urban authorities and which are worth, in total, £28·5 million, has yet to be decided.

[2] Base programme only—does not include transfers from local authorities.

Departmental Annual Report

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many copies of his departmental annual report 1993 and expenditure plans for 1993 to 1996 Cm 2215, have been printed; at what cost; and to whom it has been distributed.

Mr. David Hunt: Some 2,500 copies of the Welsh Office departmental report, Cm 2215, were printed. The costs of printing and publication were borne by HMSO which aims to recover costs from sales revenue. As in previous years, the Department purchased copies for its own use; 425 copies were purchased at a cost of £4,154.

Copies are sent to the chief executives of the non-departmental public bodies and agencies for which the Department has some responsibility; to the chief executives of local authorities in Wales and the secretaries of the Council of Welsh Districts and Assembly of Welsh Counties; to health authorities in Wales; and to training and enterprise councils. Copies are also sent to all MPs with Welsh constituencies, and to the Welsh Affairs and the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committees. The Department also retains copies for internal distribution.

The Department also reimburses HMSO for the lost revenue in pricing the bilingual report as a single-language document. This cost for the 1993 report was £4,966.

Energy Conservation

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to increase grant aiding provision to householders in Wales to assist with *(a)* loft insulation, *(b)* hot water tank and hot water system lagging, *(c)* cavity wall insulation, *(d)* double glazing and *(e)* draught excluder systems.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The house renovation grant system can already provide assistance for these works. Changes that I announced last July, which will come into effect in early April, will improve targeting to those in greatest need.

Clean Technology

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will establish a national clean production centre in Wales to provide technical information, advice and training on clean technology methods.

Mr. David Hunt: The Government are committed to establishing a cleaner technology centre and are, at present, investigating the best way to provide such a service.

However, as yet no decision has been made as to its location.

Drinking Water

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many dwellings in Wales are currently supplied with water where lead concentrations exceed the latest World Health Organisation guidelines.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This information is not available in the form requested. However, information about lead concentrations in water supplies in Wales is contained in "Drinking Water 1991", the second annual report by the chief inspector of the drinking water inspectorate and in the document "Nitrate, Pesticides and Lead, 1989 and 1990", published by the inspectorate in July 1992.

Wave Power

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to adapt the coastal barrage schemes operational and planned in Wales for use as dual-purpose tidal generator systems.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: It is for individual developers to consider adapting coastal barrage schemes for use as dual-purpose tidal generator systems.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to promote energy conservation within large commercial buildings through the use of *(a)* revolving entrance doors and *(b)* double-glazing.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Welsh Office energy efficiency office is vigorously encouraging energy efficiency in a wide variety of ways in buildings in both the private and public sectors.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

London Marathon

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage for what reasons the London marathon is being charged for the use of the royal parks; and into what headings the fee is broken down.

Mr. Key: The Department manages the royal parks on behalf of the Crown for the enjoyment of the public. Where an event is allowed to use the park and will significantly affect the normal use of the park by the general public, we require them to pay a fee which is calculated on the basis of the area used. The fee is not made up of specific charges under particular headings. It is levied to cover such matters as remedial works following large events, additional safety responsibilities, to compensate for disruption and to assist the parks to improve facilities for park users.

Royal Parks

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list the charitable events which have been charged fees for the use of the royal parks during the course of the past three years and detail the amount paid in each case.

Mr. Key: We have charged charitable events in the past three years as follows. It should be noted that all the charges were set before the new charging policy was promulgated in July last year. No events have taken place under the new arrangements.

	£
1990	
Salvation Army International Congress	100
Walk for a Cause	100
Sunday Times Fun Run	1,000
Crusaid Walk for Life	50
1991	
Cadbury's Strollerthon	2,000
PHAB	250
Help the Aged Biathlon	100
National Fun Run (formerly ST Fun Run)	1,000
International Leage for Protection of Horses	500
Crusaid Walk for Life	75
Walk for a Cause	125
London Harness Horse Parade	500
1992	
PHAB	250
Cadbury's Strollerthon	3,000
National Fun Run	1,300
Cruisaid Walk for Life	120
Chief Rabbi's Walk for Charity	100
Terry Fox Marathon	100

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the normal fee charged by his Department for the use of royal parks for charitable events; and how the fee is arrived at.

Mr. Key: There is no set fee. The charge is calculated on the basis of the area used and the number of days the park is occupied.

EMPLOYMENT

Business Start-up Scheme

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many firms have been helped under the business start-up scheme in each of the last five years; and how many are still in business.

Mr. McLoughlin: The number of individuals who started a new business under the scheme in each of the last five years is given in the table. These figures do not equate exactly to the number of businesses started, since for some businesses more than one individual will have been supported.

Business Start-Up Scheme Entrants

Year	*Number*
1987-88	106,300
1988-89	98,500
1989-90	77,900
1990-91	60,300
1991-92	50,400

Information is not available on how many are still in business.

Unemployed Graduates

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what estimate has been made of the number of university graduates who are at present unemployed and of the breakdown of the figure by degree category.

Mr. McLoughlin: The latest estimate for Great Britain from the summer—June to August—1992 labour force survey is that there were 169,000 people of working age, qualified to degree or equivalent level or above, who were unemployed on the internationally standard International Labour Organisation definition, not seasonally adjusted.

Estimates of unemployed graduates by degree category are all below 10,000.

Self-employment

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what estimate she has of the number of self-employed people who are currently without gainful employment; what changes have taken place in these estimates over the past three years; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The most recent estimate of the number of people unemployed on the internationally agreed ILO definition who were previously self-employed is from the summer—June to August—labour force survey. This, together with estimates over the previous three years, is shown in the following table;

Great Britain (not seasonally adjusted)

	number
Spring 1990	111,000
Spring 1991	188,000
Spring 1992	279,000
Summer 1992	275,000

Unemployed People

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people in the United Kingdom are unemployed, economically active, but not receiving unemployment benefit.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 23 February 1993]*: The labour force survey shows that in spring 1922 there were 910,000 people who were ILO unemployed, and therefore economically active, but not receiving unemployment related benefits in the United Kingdom. Conversely there were 890,000 people receiving unemployment related benefits who were not ILO unemployed. In spring 1992, there were 2·732 million ILO unemployed and 2·717 million people claiming unemployment related benefits in the UK. These figures are not seasonally adjusted.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women have become unemployed in each region of the United Kingdom since 11 April 1992.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information requested can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library.

Work Permits

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many work permits for employment within the United Kingdom have been awarded over each of the last five years for which figures are available; and which were the top five countries of origin in each year.

Mr. McLoughlin: The number of work permits for employment excluding work experience approved for each of the last five years is as follows:

	Number
1988	29,283
1989	33,899
1990	39,343
1991	34,448
1992	34,259

These figures include employees of multi-national companies who are transferred to the United Kingdom.

The following table shows for the same period in descending order the five countries whose nationals were issued the greatest number of work permits:

1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
USA	USA	USA	USA	USA
Japan	Japan	Japan	Japan	Japan
India	Australia	Australia	India	India
Australia	India	India	Australia	Australia
Canada	Canada	Canada	Canada	Canada

Women Workers

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will set out the principal regulations governing women returning to work after childbirth, in each region of the United Kingdom; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The principal legislation giving qualifying women a right to return to work after maternity absence is contained in the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978 for Great Britain and in the Industrial Relations (No. 2) (Northern Ireland) Order 1976. In addition, the Public Health Act 1936 for England and Wales, the Factories Act 1961 for Scotland and the Factories Act (Northern Ireland) 1965 prohibit the employment of a woman in a factory within four weeks of giving birth to a child.

The Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Bill will provide important new rights for all women employees to take 14 weeks' maternity leave. When enacted, the relevant provisions will be brought into effect in Northern Ireland by Order in Council under the negative resolution procedure.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proposals Her Majesty's Government have to increase female availability for work.

Mr. McLoughlin: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made clear her intention to ensure that women are able to play as full a role as possible in the world of work. In Manchester on 20 January my right hon. Friend launched a series of regional events entitled "New Horizons for Women" to promote the whole range of opportunities open to women, including employment and training. The flexibility built in to many employment service and training and enterprise council programmes are ideally suited to the needs of women who wish to combine work with other responsibilities and our new out of school child care grant will particularly benefit women who wish to resume work after their children start school.

Youth Training

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment after deducting the cost of the training allowance paid direct to a 16 or 17-year-old on a Government training scheme, how much money is made available for the actual training.

Mr. McLoughlin: Training and enterprise councils and local enterprise companies are paid an overall price per youth training—YT—trainee week and national vocational qualification delivered, from which minimum training allowances must be paid. Information is not available on the overall amounts of training allowance paid out to 16 and 17-year-olds. Around one third of YT trainees are employed and are paid a wage. TECs also receive financial contributions from employers towards the cost of training.

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will list the estimates given to her by training and enterprise councils for each month since they were available, broken down for each region and for England as a whole, of *(a)* the total number of young people seeking a youth training place, *(b)* the number of young people who left school in 1991 who were seeking a youth training place, *(c)* the number of young people who left school in 1992 who were seeking a youth training place and *(d)* the number of young people in the special training needs category who were seeking a youth training place; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The reports sent to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State by TECs were not formal returns, and were not in the form requested.

Enterprise Allowance

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of enterprise allowance claimants are still pursuing the business of which they received an allowance a year after the allowance was exhausted.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information is not available.

Wages Council Rates

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many job centres are advertising jobs at rates of pay below the relevant wages council minimum; and what steps she takes to monitor the extent to which her Department's rules on the subject are followed.

Mr. McLoughlin: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mrs. Maria Fyfe, dated 25 February 1993:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to write to you direct to respond to your Parliamentary Question to her about the number of Jobcentres advertising rates of pay below the relevant Wages Council minimum and what steps she takes to monitor the extent to which her Department's rules on the subject are followed. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

Jobcentres do not advertise vacancies which offer rates of pay below the relevant Wages Council minimum. Jobcentres have comprehensive instructions giving guidance to staff on the action to be taken when a vacancy covered by a Wages Council Order is notified. If the employer is unwilling to pay the Wages Council minimum then my people are instructed not to accept the vacancy and to refer the case to the Department of Employment Wages Inspectorate. My managers check that the instructions are being followed as part of their standard managerial controls.

I hope this is helpful.

As decided by the Administration Committee of the House of Commons, Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary Questions will now be published in the *Official Report*. I will also place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Organic Farmers

3. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to provide assistance to organic farmers.

Mr. Gummer: We are considering the most effective way of providing aid for organic farming. I shall be submitting our plans for environmental measures to the Council in July.

EC Rules

14. **Miss Lestor:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he is having with his European counterparts about securing compliance with European Community rules as they relate to agriculture.

Mr. Gummer: I am persistent in demanding that the Commission produce evidence of compliance on all aspects of Community rules. I am willing to submit our evidence of compliance in the United Kingdom to the Commission and expect other member states to do the same.

16. **Mr. Darling:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from the National Farmers' Union on the question of the implementation of European directives as they relate to agriculture.

Mr. Gummer: I am in frequent contact with the National Farmers Union on all aspects of agricultural policy.

23. **Mr. McWilliam:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what resources are available in the United Kingdom for the enforcement of European directives as they relate to agriculture.

Mr. Gummer: Both staff and equipment are available for the necessary enforcement of European Community legislation on agriculture.

Food Regulations

15. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to reduce the burden of regulation on food retailers.

25. **Mr. Duncan:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to reduce the burden of regulation on food manufacturers and processors.

Mr. Gummer: I have previously written to the British Retail Consortium inviting comments on burdens which food regulations may place upon its members.

I am today circulating more widely a consultation document setting out a possible deregulation programme in the food law sector which would move to a less regulatory system, so reducing unnecessary costs to business, which often are passed on to consumers in higher prices, restrictions on choice and loss of international competitiveness.

We shall of course continue to give full weight to our food safety and consumer protection objectives.

Further action will depend on the results of these consultations, but I envisage some simplifications or repeal of some existing regulations.

Milk Producers

17. **Mr. Trend:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to assist milk producers.

Mr. Curry: Dairy farmers have benefited from the Community regime in recent years and the Government will continue to encourage their efficiency and profitability.

Intervention

18. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on trends in the level of intervention stores of food in the EC.

Mr. Curry: Trends in both cereals and beef intervention in the EC have been moving upwards since 1989. Butter and skimmed milk powder stocks, on the other hand, have recently been falling.

Sugar

19. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to report upon changes regarding the European sugar regime.

Mr. Curry: The Commission has proposed that the EC sugar regime should be reviewed by 30 June 1994 and its proposals on the future regime may therefore be expected later this year.

Set-aside

20. **Mr. Moss:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has to provide for the use of set-aside land for the production of energy crops.

Mr. Gummer: Non-rotational set-aside will be introduced this year and we expect this to allow for growing crops for non-food uses. I intend to press the Commission to allow woodland on set-aside, this will include coppicing.

Food Standards

21. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to provide information to the public as soon as his Department is aware of food or drink being sold that does not conform to standards laid down by his Department or the World Health Organisation.

Mr. Soames: We will continue to inform the public on matters relating to food safety and consumer protection whenever the need arises.

Lamb

22. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of United Kingdom lamb production is currently exported.

Mr. Curry: We forecast that 36 per cent. of UK lamb and mutton production, including live animals, was exported in 1992.

Cooked Meat

24. **Mr. Faber:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations his Department has made to the European Commission concerning the draft meat products directive as it affects the travel temperature of cooked meat.

Mr. Soames: The single market rules for trade in meat products are set out in directive 92/5/EEC which came into effect in all member states from 1 January 1993. This directive does not include any specific temperature requirements for the transportation of meat products. However, manufacturers are required to indicate on the packaging the recommended temperature at which products must be transported.

26. **Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received in the last six months from potato producers in the United Kingdom about his proposals for the future of the Potato Marketing Board.

Mr. Curry: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on 18 January 1993, *Official Report*, column *83*.

Surplus EC Food

27. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to widen the distribution of surplus EC food; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: I am reviewing the operation of the EC surplus food scheme in the United Kingdom. Any changes to the arrangements will be announced when the review has been completed.

Water Pollution

28. **Mr. Enright:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has held with the National Rivers Authority and the water authorities as to how best they can jointly resolve farmers' pollution difficulties.

Mr. Curry: The Department regularly meets the National Rivers Authority and the water industry to discuss water-related issues including pollution from agriculture.

Flooding

29. **Mr. Raynsford:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the land area in England which is at risk of temporary or permanent flooding in consequence of high tides and the erosion of coastal defences.

Mr. Gummer: It is generally considered that land lying below the 5 m Ordnance Survey contour is most vulnerable and there is some 8,000 sq km of such land in England and Wales.

However, not all such land is at similar risk of flooding, and in these and many other areas the risk of flooding or erosion is reduced by defence works which have been carried out with the assistance of grant aid provided by my Department, now running at some £60 million annually.

Haddock

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will consider introducing compulsory 90 mm square mesh panels, increasing the mesh size and increasing minimum landing sizes for haddock.

Mr. Curry: I am aware of the mounting concern that new measures will be needed to conserve stocks this year and I am considering what measures will command broad support from the industry.

Pesticides

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to publish the evidence given prior to 1985 on the safety of products reviewed by his Advisory Committee on Pesticides.

Mr. Soames: Measures to open up access to information on the safety of pesticides approved before 1986 were announced in August 1992. These will provide for access to all relevant studies submitted to the registration authorities with the application for the approval of a pesticide. To implement these new arrangements amendments to the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986 will be required. The necessary legislative proposals are currently being prepared.

Bananas

Mr. Channon: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement outlining the details of the European Community's new regime for banana imports.

Mr. Curry: The Agriculture Council on 9 to 13 February agreed, by qualified majority, a regulation for the common organisation of the EC banana market. This gives effect to the agreement reached on a United Kingdom presidency compromise at the December Council. The key elements of the new arrangements are:

> Continued duty-free access for traditional ACP supplies, up to a level of 857,700 tonnes, reflecting ACP countries' best ever sendings to the EC;
>
> A low tariff quota of 2 million tonnes for third country and non-traditional ACP fruit. Third country fruit would be subject to a duty of 100 Ecu/tonne; non-traditional ACP fruit would be duty-free;
>
> A tariff on all sendings outside the tariff quota of 850 Ecu/tonne (750 Ecu/tonne for non-traditional ACP).

Licences for access to the low tariff quota would be allocated:

> 66.5 per cent. on the basis of a three-year rolling average of past trade in third country and non-traditional ACP fruit;
>
> 30 per cent on the basis of a three year rolling average of past trade in EC and traditional ACP fruit;
>
> 3.5 per cent. to newcomers.

There remain a number of details to be resolved during negotiations on the implementation of the new regime. The new arrangements are due to come into force on 1 July 1993.

The new arrangements represent a good deal for United Kingdom interests. They complete the single market in bananas; they are compatible with the general approach on agricultural products in the GATT Uruguay round. And most importantly they fulfil our Lomé convention obligations to our traditional ACP suppliers in the Commonwealth Caribbean.

Radioactive Contamination (Irish Sea)

Mr. Lew Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what additional resources he is making available to his Department's radiobiology laboratories to assess radioactive contamination in the Irish sea.

Mr. Curry: In the present financial year, planned expenditure on scientific and technical work directly in support of the Ministry's statutory responsibilities for regulating discharges from nuclear installations is £2·6 million. In addition we shall have spent approximately £1·4 million on studies related to the behaviour of radioactivity in the Irish sea. We shall continue to fund the scientific and technical work necessary to support our responsibilities for the protection of the marine environment, fisheries and the marine food chain.

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when payments in respect of hill livestock compensatory allowances will be made payable; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Issue of payable orders in respect of claims under the 1993 scheme started on 10 February.

Potato Industry

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions have taken place with the European Commission concerning the injection of financial assistance into the potato industry in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: I am aware of the situation in Northern Ireland following the wet autumn and winter, but it is not our practice to give or seek aid in these circumstances. I understand that the European Commission has rejected similar disaster aid for the Republic of Ireland.

Whaling

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement regarding the policy of Her Majesty's Government on the proposal being made by certain countries for coastal whaling.

Mr. Curry: Our policy towards all forms of commercial whaling—including coastal whaling—has been clear and consistent. We shall not even contemplate the lifting of the present moratorium on commercial whaling—which was agreed by the International Whaling Commission and which came into effect in 1985-86—until we are fully satisfied that whale stocks are proved to be at healthy levels; methods used to take whales are humane; and effective procedures for the management of whale stocks and for their enforcement are in place.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what statements were made by the British International Whaling Commission Commissioner at the special meeting in Madrid of 19 February in respect of Her Majesty's Government's policies towards the possible resumption of commercial whaling;

(2) what protests he made at the exclusion of the International Whaling Commission commissioners from France, Ireland and New Zealand from the invitees to the special meeting held in Madrid on 19 February;

(3) who initiated the special meeting between *(a)* Japan and *(b)* Norway and various International Whaling Commission commissioners held in Madrid on 19 February; who decided which countries were to be invited; and what decisions were made.

Mr. Curry: At the invitation of the vice-chairman of the International Whaling Commission, a meeting of a number of IWC commissioners was held in Madrid on 17 and 18 February. IWC commissioners from Australia, Chile, Denmark, Germany, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, the United Kingdom and the USA were present.

Neither the UK nor other contracting parties to the commissioner have "protested" about the meeting itself or those nations invited to it. The meeting was purely informal. A range of issues was discussed, including the revised management scheme, whale sanctuaries, small cetaceans and their management, and aboriginal whaling. No decisions were reached. The discussions enabled the UK to explain its policies, set out at the 44th meeting of the commission in Glasgow, and since.

SCOTLAND

Youth Training

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the estimates given by LECs for each month since they were available of *(a)* the total number of young people seeking a youth training place, *(b)* the number of young people who left school in 1991 who were seeking a youth training place, *(c)* the number of young people who left school in 1992 who were seeking a youth training place and *(d)* the number of young people in the special training needs category who were seeking a youth training place; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: I understand from Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise that their local enterprise companies do not make monthly estimates of demand for youth training places.

Environment Protection Agency

Mr. Kynoch: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to establish a Scottish environment protection agency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: I announced in September 1991 that I had decided to set up a Scottish environment protection agency. We issued a public consultation document "Improving Scotland's Environment: The Way Forward" in January 1992, to which we have recieved more than 160 responses.

Under the proposals, the agency would assume the pollution control responsibilities of the three main regulatory bodies, the river purification authorities, the district and islands councils, in respect of waste management and local air pollution, and HM industrial pollution inspectorate. I was encouraged by the number and range of responses to the consultation exercise, several of which contained constructive suggestions. Generally, there is a recognition that the Government are determined to secure the most effective arrangements for protecting Scotland's environment from pollution. I have, therefore, decided that the major proposals in the consultation paper should not be amended.

Nevertheless, misgivings were expressed about the advisory committee structure which had been put forward originally. Having reconsidered these proposals, I believe we can secure scope for the delegation of responsibility within the agency to regional staff without prejudicing its overall control, and for ensuring a worthwhile role for the regional committees. I intend to commission further work on these aspects before legislation is introduced.

I have also decided in the light of responses made to me that it is logical to use this opportunity to give the agency enhanced powers to control water abstraction where such powers have been shown to be necessary, and I intend to issue a consultation paper on this subject shortly. Although I am satisfied that there is no widespread need for such powers, it seems sensible to give the agency the ability to apply controls in areas where problems can be identified.

We are proceeding with work on drafting the necessary legislation to create the agency and define its responsibilities. The Government intend to establish the new body as soon as possible, and legislation will therefore be introduced at the earliest opportunity.

Nimmo Smith/Friel Report

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 22 February, *Official Report*, column *447*, concerning the placing in the Library of material relating to the Nimmo Smith/Friel report, if he will give the reasons for his decision.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall write to the hon. Member.

Nurses

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of newly qualified nurses in Scotland in 1992 were given a national health service nursing job.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 18 February 1993]:* The exact information requested is not available centrally. The table shows the status of nurses who were final year students in Scotland on 30 September 1991 one year later.

It should be noted that the methods by which this information is collected do not permit account to be taken of certain students, for example those who have been unable to complete their training within the normal three-year period; those who, having qualified, may have chosen to have a break in service before seeking employment; those who have found employment as a nurse outwith the NHS; and those who may have qualified, joined the NHS and left within a census period. Those who qualify and work occasionally in the NHS, for example, bank or agency nurses, also cannot be identified and have therefore been counted with the "not employed" category.

Status of final year basic student nurses in Scotland one year later; year beginning 30 September 1991:

Status at 30 September 1992	*Headcount*	*Per cent.*
In post in NHS	1,263	54·1
Taking further training in NHS	26	1·1
Not employed in NHS	1,044	44·7
Total	2,333	100

Shipping Safety

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the outcome of the meeting of EC Environment and Transport Ministers on 25 January to discuss Community aspects of shipping safety.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 5 February 1993]:* I refer the hon. Member to the statement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport on 28 January, at column *796*.

At the meeting on 25 January I outlined the actions taken by my Department in response to the Shetland oilspill and drew some preliminary conclusions from that experience. At my invitation the EC Commissioner for the Environment and Fisheries, Mr. Yannis Paleokrassas, subsequently visited Shetland on 19 February, when he was accompanied by my hon. Friend the Minister for Agriculture and the Environment in the Scottish Office.

Further Education Lecturers

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will set up an independent review into the salaries of lecturing staff in further education colleges in Scotland.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 29 January 1993]:* I have no plans to do so.

DEFENCE

Standing Orders

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if it is a chargeable offence for serving members of the armed forces *(a)* to be in breach of unit standing orders and *(b)* not to have read unit standing orders.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is a chargeable offence under service law to fail to comply with any provision of unit standing orders of which the person concerned knew or might reasonably be expected to have known. Unless the unit standing orders in question themselves provided that they were to be read by the person concerned, or that there was a requirement to do so in some other orders, failure to read unit standing orders would not in itself be an offence but would provide no defence for failing to comply with them.

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence by what means unit standing orders are made accessible to all ranks serving in the armed forces.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Service personnel are required to acquaint themselves with standing orders which are prominently displayed within units on notice boards, in messes and such other suitable places as the commanding officer may direct.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will designate the deployment of British forces with the United protection force in former Yugoslavia as an operational deployment.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: British forces serving with the United Nations in the former Yugoslavia are deployed operationally. No advantage is seen in, or would attach to, a formal declaration of their status in the circumstances currently applying there.

Bosnia

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will take steps to improve the availability of telephones to service men in Bosnia to contact their families.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We attach a high priority to ensuring that service personnel are able to keep in contact with their families in the United Kingdom and elsewhere, including by telephone. The provision of telephone facilities in Bosnia for welfare calls depends to an extent on where service personnel are deployed and whether civilian facilities exist. We have recently increased the availability of military satellite links for welfare calls where civilian facilities are not available. The present arrangements are believed to be adequate, given the operational circumstances. The situation, however, remains under review.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the sleeping accommodation which has been used by the 200 REME personnel at Vitez, Bosnia, since November 1992; how many toilets and showers are available for those soldiers; and if he will make a statement on the delay in commissioning the purpose-made accommodation units on an adjacent site.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A total of 98 REME personnel and a mixture of 182 other troops from 1 Cheshire, national support element and 1 Cheshire light aid detachment live and work at the site known as Vitez garage. At Vitez garage there are four European lavatories, four urinals and two showers. The showers run with hot water 24 hours a day. There are plans to build a further 13 toilets, nine urinals and 10 showers in purpose-built units which are on site but have yet to be commissioned. Additional ablution facilities are available at the Vitez school site 2·5 kms away. The delay in installing 35 four-man purpose-built accommodation units at the Vitez garage site resulted from a revision of engineer priorities towards base hardening following the shelling of Tomislavgrad; long procurement lead times, both in the United Kingdom and Croatia, for units, electrical switchgear and wiring; and adverse weather conditions with permafrost, ice, snow and low temperatures (−30 degrees Celsius) delaying site preparations.

Army Pay

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish an indicative table showing the approximate net weekly pay of a lieutenant, a sergeant and a private soldier serving in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* Germany and *(c)* former Yugoslavia.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Rates of basic pay are not dependent upon location of deployment. It makes no difference whether a soldier is serving in the United Kingdom, Germany or the former Yugoslavia. The following are approximate weekly net rates of pay for the stated ranks:

	£
Lieutenant after 4 years	268
Private 1 Band 2 Scale B	177
Sergeant Band 5 Scale B	263

These illustrative net rates apply to married personnel and do not take account of deductions made for food and accommodation charges which do vary depending on a whole range of factors including the servicemen's rank, marital status and the type and size of service accommodation occupied. Food and accommodation charges have been waived in the former Yugoslavia in recognition of the conditions under which personnel are serving there.

HMS Andromeda

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence where the last refit of HMS Andromeda was carried out; and what it cost.

Mr. Aitken: The last refit of HMS Andromeda was carried out at Rosyth royal dockyard. The final cost certificate has not yet been cleared but the total cost is estimated to be about £30 million.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when HMS Andromeda is due to be retired from the fleet.

Mr. Aitken: It is not our practice to discuss pay-off dates for individual vessels.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the last refit of HMS Andromeda was carried out.

Mr. Aitken: Between August 1990 and December 1991.

HMS Sirius

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence why HMS Sirius has been retired from the fleet ahead of schedule.

Mr. Aitken: As announced by my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for Defence on 25 July 1990, at column *469*, we are moving towards a future destroyer/frigate force of around 40 ships. In order to do this we are paying off the older, more manpower intensive vessels such as the Leander class frigates, and introducing modern, more capable vessels such as the type 23 frigates. As part of this process HMS Sirius, at 27 the oldest of the remaining Leander class frigates, was recently retired from service.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total cost of refitting HMS Sirius at Devonport dockyard in 1991.

Mr. Aitken: About £25 million at current prices.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence between which dates the refit of HMS Sirius was carried out at Devonport dockyard.

Mr. Aitken: Between October 1989 and May 1991.

HMS Challenger

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when HMS Challenger last underwent a refit.

Mr. Aitken: HMS Challenger has never undergone a refit. Its last repair period was for docking and essential defects during the period April 1990 to July 1990.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence where the most recent refit of HMS Challenger was carried out; and what it cost.

Mr. Aitken: HMS Challenger has never undergone a refit.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for HMS Challenger in the future.

Mr. Aitken: HMS Challenger has no further operational role in the Royal Navy. Efforts to sell the ship continue.

Chipmunk Training

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the future of Chipmunk training at Plymouth airport; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are no plans to change the arrangements for carrying out Royal Navy flying training at Plymouth airport. The current contract for the management of this training will expire in March 1994 and a replacement contract is under negotiation.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total cost per annum of the Chipmunk training at Plymouth airport.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The estimated annual cost of Chipmunk training at Plymouth airport is £640,000.

Eurofighter 2000

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to reconfigure the development programme of Eurofighter 2000.

Mr. Aitken: The development programme for Eurofighter 2000 is now being revised to reflect the decisions taken at the quadripartite ministerial meeting on 10 December 1992. First deliveries of production aircraft to the Royal Air Force will be delayed until 2000, and the development programme and associated expenditure will be slowed down, to the maximum extent possible without increasing overall costs and risk, to match this timescale. While the key performance parameters of the aircraft will not be changed, the partner nations are reviewing with the manufacturers the list of possible changes to the aircraft's equipment fit, and changes to the operational requirement, which emerged from the two studies conducted last year. It will be for each nation to decide the extent to which such changes to the aircraft specification are compatible with its military requirements, and if it wishes to take advantage of the cost savings which they offer. These decisions will be reflected in the revised programme and amendments to the inter-government memorandum of understanding which, it is planned, should be signed in the second half of this year.

Correspondence

Sir John Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to reply to letters to him from the hon. Member for Exeter sent on 25 January, 3 February and 9 February concerning the choice of Glasgow for the site of the new Army personnel office.

Mr Archie Hamilton: I wrote to the hon. Member on 23 February.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 26 February 1993

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment by how much the numbers of unemployed claimants have changed since June 1987 in *(a)* London constituencies and *(b)* constituencies where a colliery has closed in the past five years.

Mr. McLoughlin: Information on colliery closures by parliamentary constituency is available only for the financial years from 1987-88 to 1991-92.

In the London parliamentary constituencies claimant unemployment has risen by 109,603 since June 1987. This compares with a fall of 28,134 in the parliamentary constituencies where a colliery has closed.

These figures are on the unadjusted basis and are therefore affected by both seasonal influences and by changes in the coverage of the count.

Consultants

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will list the contracts awarded by her Department to *(a)* Coopers and Lybrand management consultants, *(b)* Touche Ross management consultants, *(c)* Price Waterhouse management consultants, *(d)* Ernst and Young management consultants, *(e)* Chrichton Roberts Ltd., *(f)* KPMG management consultants and *(g)* Leopold Joseph management consultants, with the total cost of the contracts with each contractor, for (i) the past 12 months and (ii) 1991-92.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information in the precise form requested is available only at disproportionate cost. However, I am able to provide some limited information relating to contracts for 1992-93.

Coopers and Lybrand Management Consultants
Two contracts for Management of Change seminars following a review of the Department's Training Enterprise and Education Directorate.
Five contracts related to case studies and evaluation for learning initiatives and aspects of training.
A socio-economic overview towards a co-ordinated strategy for the Department's Office for Wales.
A review of the implications of contracting out to Careers Service providers.
Three contracts related to market testing in some branches of the Department.

Touche-Ross Management Consultants
Advice on aspects of market testing for part of the Department
Two contracts related to dissemination of information for flexible and open learning.

Price Waterhouse Management Consultants
Four Contracts related to some organisational issues in the Department's Training, Enterprise and Education Directorate, the Employment Service and Training Enterprise Councils (TECs).
Consultancy on tax issues arising from budget proposals

Ernst and Young Management Consultants
Three contracts related to strategy reviews and evaluation for information systems and TECs.
Four contracts related to market testing in some branches of the Department.

Chrichton Roberts Ltd.
None.

KPMG Management Consultants
A review of the training development arrangements in the Department's Training, Enterprise and Education Directorate.
A feasibility study on output related funding for TECs.
Two contracts related to market testing in two divisions of the Department.
A study of the distribution of the Health and Safety Executive publications.
A review of the roles and functions SEOs/business managers in the Department.
Two contracts for production and dissemination of extensions for manuals on key skills for the training of trainers.
Presentation of a training workshop on agencies.
Consultancy on a corporate plan for the Department's staff development branch.

Leopold Joseph Management Consultants
None.

Details of costs cannot be disclosed for reasons of commercial confidentiality.

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many contracts for consultancies were awarded by his Department over *(a)* the last 12 months and *(b)* 1991-92.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is not available except at disproportionate cost.

Restart Scheme

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many unemployed people have taken part in the Restart scheme in the Durham city area; and how many went on to full-time employment.

Mr. McLoughlin: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Gerry Steinberg, dated 26 February 1993:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency the Secretary of State has asked me to write to you direct to respond to your Parliamentary Question about Restart. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

It may help if I explain the scope and purpose of the Restart programme which was launched nationally in 1986. All people who have been unemployed for six months or more are asked to attend regular, six monthly, interviews with one of my Client Advisers. The aim of the programme is to ensure that all long-term unemployed people know about and get access to the employment and training opportunities available locally to them.

At each Restart interview the client will discuss with the adviser their individual situation and circumstances with the aim of reaching an agreement on the best way to return to work. This could be directly by submission to a job vacancy or else through a course of action which will improve their chances of finding work. For example training, a place in a Jobclub, the opportunity of self employment or a place on a Restart course which they can attend at any time. If people remain unemployed for two years or more and decline or fail to take up an offer of help at a Restart interview they are then required to attend a Restart Course.

We collect statistics on the number of Restart interviews and the outcomes of those interviews through our Area Offices. It is not, therefore possible to provide the figures you have requested for Durham City. However, for the period between April 1992 to January 1993 we conducted 28,525 Restart interviews in the County Durham Area and as a result 1,391 people subsequently started on a Restart Course.

Restart Courses are not simply about applying for jobs. Research has shown that many people suffer a loss of confidence and motivation after a long spell of unemployment. The Restart Course, which normally lasts one week, aims to help such people set new and realistic goals for themselves, to feel confident about achieving them and to develop an action plan. This will help them apply for jobs or other employment or training opportunities to help them back into work. A Restart Course should be seen as a stepping stone often a very necesary one towards more help.

Restart Courses have a proven track record of helping people. During the year April 1992 to December 1992, some 78,000 people nationally completed a Restart Course and of these 70,000, 90 per cent. went on to apply for a job or were referred to another opportunity. The figures for people who attended courses in Durham City are not available. However, in the County Durham Area for the period April 1992 to January 1993 1,289 people completed a Restart Course and of these 1,211, 94 per cent. applied for a job or were referred to another opportunity.

We do not collect regular information on the numbers of people who subsequently start jobs. However, a recent national survey showed that 9·4 per cent. of the respondents were either in a job or waiting to start one. Many more had, of course, gone on to join another programme such as Jobclub or training.

I hope this is helpful.

As decided by the Administrative Committee of the House of Commons, Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary Questions will now be published in the Official Report. I will also place a copy of this reply in the Library of the House.

Summerfield Ltd.

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when Summerfield Ltd. was granted a licence as an employment agency.

Mr. McLoughlin: Summerfield Limited has not applied for a licence to operate as an employment agency under the Employment Agencies Act 1973.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Divorce

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the timetable for the implementation of the Law Commission's proposals to reform the law on divorce.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor has no immediate plans for implementation of the Law Commission's recommendations for reform of divorce law. He continues to welcome views on these recommendations and will consult further before any measures on this subject are introduced.

Legal Aid and Advice

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the average payment for legal aid and advice during each of the last five years in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The average payment for legal aid and advice during each of the last five years was as follows:

	1987-88 £	*1988-89* £	*1989-90* £	*1990-91* £	*1991-92* £
England and Wales	236	269	299	342	377
Scotland	234	210	237	253	268
Northern Ireland	181	185	178	223	246

Separate figures for England and for Wales are not available.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many applications for legal aid were successful in each of the last five years in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The number of applications for legal aid granted in each of the last five years, in percentage terms, were as follows:

	1987-88	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*
Civil legal aid certificates					
England and Wales	67·1	63·8	61·7	69·2	75·2
Scotland	57·2	69·1	69·3	76·3	69·4
Northern Ireland	74·0	77·0	78·0	76·0	85·0
Criminal legal aid orders					
England and Wales	91·6	92·3	92·7	93·1	92·8
Scotland (summary proceedings only)	86·7	92·6	88·7	92·5	91·2
	1987	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
Northern Ireland (grants by magistrates' courts only)	96·7	96·8	97·0	97·6	98·1

Separate figures for England and for Wales are not available. Criminal legal aid in Scotland is granted in the first instance by the courts and in appeal cases by the Scottish Legal Aid Board. In Northern Ireland all criminal legal aid is granted by the courts. The information requested is held centrally in Scotland and in Northern Ireland only in respect of applications and grants of legal aid at summary level.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the average expenditure per head of the population on legal aid in each of the last five years in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Average expenditure per head of the population on legal aid in each of the last five years was as follows:

	1987-88 £	*1988-89* £	*1989-90* £	*1990-91* £	*1991-92* £
England and Wales	8·85	9·69	11·51	13·88	18·50
Scotland	8·46	10·61	10·59	12·59	15·27
Northern Ireland	5·57	7·77	7·38	8·24	9·47

Separate figures for England and for Wales are not available.

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the cost of the legal aid granted in R. *v.* Ward; and what was the value of the overseas assets shown by Mr. Ward.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The cost to legal aid of this case has yet to be determined. Information as to personal means is confidential.

County Court Judgments

Mr. Channon: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to inform hon. Members and the general public of the conclusions he reaches after his evaluation of the question of county court judgments carrying interest has been completed.

Mr. John M. Taylor: As is the usual practice of the Lord Chancellor's Department, any proposals arising out of the July 1991 initiatives to extend the provision of interest on county court judgments would be widely circulated and views sought from interested parties including the legal profession; county court user groups; advice agencies; business organisations and the judiciary. Again, following our usual practice, respondents to consultation would be informed directly of the outcome of the consultation exercise before implementation and there would be widespread general publicity.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Textiles

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what studies were carried out by his Department into the market for polyester textiles in the United Kingdom and the EC prior to authorisation of financial assistance for the Indonesian textile group Texmaco; and what were the conclusions of these studies.

Mr. Atkins: In February 1991 and again in February/March 1992, IDB carried out specific research into the European market for micro-denier polyester fabrics. These studies established that:

1. the world textile market is expected to show consistent growth through to the year 2000; and
2. there was an excess of imports over exports in the European Community market for micro denier polyester fabrics, the products which the company proposes to manufacture in Northern Ireland.

It was concluded, therefore, that with a competitive cost base in Northern Ireland the company could achieve its forcast share of the European Community market, primarily at the expense of imports.

Planning Applications

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the number of planning applications received in the last 12 months for each district council in Northern Ireland; how many of these were approved by the planning department; and how many were rejected.

Mr. Atkins: The available information relates to the number of applications received and the number determined in the period in question and is as follows:

Period January 1992-December 1992

District Council Area	*Number of applications received*	*Number of applications approved*	*Number of applications refused*
Antrim	563	503	61
Ards	859	782	133
Armagh	818	844	49
Ballymena	750	715	53
Ballymoney	327	336	8
Banbridge	510	471	26
Belfast	1,777	1,880	142
Carrickfergus	284	[1]269	[1]38
Castlereagh	390	342	42
Coleraine	757	718	31
Cookstown	509	437	42
Craigavon	809	683	88
Derry	932	900	60
Down	1,054	906	91
Dungannon	715	632	47
Fermanagh	1,152	1,027	69
Larne	336	305	34
Limavady	417	388	26
Lisburn	1,060	932	171
Magherafelt	635	578	74
Moyle	193	210	10
Newry and Mourne	1,278	1,176	58
Newtownabbey	533	477	40
North Down	643	581	62
Omagh	749	688	46
Strabane	469	442	41
Total	18,519	[1]17,222	[1]1,542

[1] Excludes December Figures.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many requests were received by the planning department for article 31 inquiries in the last 12 months for each district council in Northern Ireland; and how many of their requests were accepted.

Mr. Atkins: In 1992 six requests were received from Castlereagh borough council and in one instance article 31 was applied and one was received from Belfast city council which was refused.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many appeals were made to the planning directorate for each district council in Northern Ireland in the last 12 months; and on how many occasions the planning directorate supported the council's view.

Mr. Atkins: The information is as follows:

Period January 1992—December 1992

District council area	*Number of appeals*	*Number supporting council view*
Antrim	3	1
Ards	6	—
Armagh	2	—
Ballymena	15	—
Ballymoney	2	—
Banbridge	1	—
Belfast	2	—
Carrickfergus	5	—
Castlereagh	5	2
Coleraine	—	—
Cookstown	1	—
Craigavon	2	—
Derry	2	—
Down	—	—
Dungannon	8	—
Fermanagh	10	—
Larne	2	—
Limavady	—	—
Lisburn	15	1
Magherafelt	21	3
Moyle	1	—
Newry and Mourne	1	—
Newtownabbey	1	—
North Down	7	3
Omagh	12	1
Strabane	3	—
TOTAL	[1]127	11

[1] A decision has yet to be made in respect of 23 of these appeals.

Electricity Disconnections

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the total number of incidents where domestic electricity supply has been disconnected in each constituency in Northern Ireland, in the last 12 months.

Mr. Atkins: Northern Ireland Electricity does not hold information on electricity supply disconnections by parliamentary constituency.

Water Disconnections

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the total number of incidents where domestic water supply has been disconnected in each constituency in Northern Ireland, in the last 12 months.

Mr. Atkins: The water supplied to a property which is used solely for domestic purposes is not metered and is not subject to disconnection for non-payment of an account.

The water supply to a property which has mixed domestic and other use may be metered and would be subject to disconnection where an account remains unpaid.

A number of metered supplies which include a domestic content have been disconnected during 1992. Details are shown in the table.

DOE (NI) water executive division and sub-division	*Number of disconnections*
Northern	
Coleraine	4
Ballymena	6
Cookstown	1
Antrim	6
Magherafelt	1
Total	18
Southern	
Armagh	7
Dungannon	11
Craigavon	2
Newry	1
Total	21
Eastern	
Lisburn	7
Downpatrick	5
Total	12
Western	
Enniskillen	2
Omagh	16
Total	18
Grant total	69

Information on disconnections is not held by parliamentary constituency and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Money Lenders

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps are being taken to assess the extent of problems being created by the existence of illegal money lenders; and what steps are being taken to combat these problems.

Mr. Atkins: In Northern Ireland the Department of Economic Development's trading standards branch shares enforcement responsibility for the Consumer Credit Act 1974 with the Director General of Fair Trading.

The branch actively enforces this Act throughout the Province and takes appropriate enforcement action where breaches of the legislation are detected and supporting evidence is available.

Consultants

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many contracts for consultancies were awarded by his Department over *(a)* the last 12 months and *(b)* 1991-92.

Mr. Mates *[holding answer 24 February 1993]:* A total of 852 contracts for consultancies were awarded from April 1991 to March 1992 and 491, excluding figures for the Department of Economic Development which are not yet available, from April 1992 to date.

ENVIRONMENT

Sellafield

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many incidents involving the reportable release of radiation from British Nuclear Fuels' Sellafield site have taken place since 1979; and what steps Her Majesty's Government have taken to improve *(a)* safety and *(b)* speed of reporting of accidents at Sellafield to the appropriate authorities.

Mr. Maclean: Current criteria for reporting incidents at nuclear sites were most recently revised by the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy on 30 April 1987, *Official Report*, column *203*.

Information about reportable incidents prior to November 1986 is not immediately available. Since then, my Department has recorded four reportable incidents involving off-site releases of radioactivity from the BNF Sellafield site. A statement of reportable incidents at nuclear sites is published quarterly by the nuclear installations inspectorate, and copies are held in the House Library.

(a) Responsibility for the safety of nuclear licensed sites is a matter for the operator. The Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate ensures compliance with nuclear site licence conditions, and has a range of measures available to rectify and failure to meet the high standards of safety it requires.

(b) The Goodlad criteria, which are reviewed periodically, stipulate that incidents shall be reported within 24 hours.

Plague Pits

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment his Department has made of the location of plague pits for buried corpses in urban areas.

Mr. Maclean: The Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England holds records on archaeological sites which include some details of burial sites of plague victims. Any such sites discovered in the course of archaeological excavations must be reported to the Health and Safety Executive.

Community Charge

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total cost of administration in percentage terms of the community charge to date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: Charging authorities in England budgeted to collect about £23·5 billion of community charges in total for the years 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93. The estimated cost to authorities of collecting this sum is about £1·4 billion, which is 6 per cent. of the estimated yield.

Departmental Publicity

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the actual expenditure on departmental publicity to planning matters for each year since 1979.

Sir George Young: The information in respect of publicity relating to planning matters, excluding staff costs, is as follows:

Year	*Expenditure £*
1987-88	118,000
1988-89	51,000
1989-90	104,000
1990-91	65,000
1991-92	122,000
1992-93	[1]143,000

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[1] Forecast.

It is not possible to identify related staff costs. Expenditure figures for 1979-80 to 1986-87 are not readily available and could not be obtained without disproportionate cost.

Floating Helipads

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the provisions governing the granting of planning permission for floating helipads on rivers.

Mr. Baldry: There are no provisions governing the granting of planning permission which are specific only to floating helipads on rivers, as distinct from other development proposals.

Partnership for Change Conference

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the partnership for change conference to be held in Manchester later this year.

Mr. Howard: We intend to hold an international conference, "Partnership for Change", in Manchester in September on the implementation of the earth summit agreements. I have invited a small number of eminent people to join an international advisory group to advise me on the preparations for the conference, and in particular on themes, outputs and participants. The group is chaired by Dr. Martin Holdgate, director general of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. The members are: Mr. Delmar Blasco, Mr. Claude Fussler, Dr. Hiroya Ichikawa, Mrs. Yolanda Kakabadse, Dr. Ashok Khosla, Ms. Rachel Kyte, Mr. Warren Lindner, Mr. Michael Ndubiwa, Professor Michael Scoullos, Mr. Youba Sokona and Mr. Jan-Olaf Willums.

The group held its first meeting on 8 and 9 February and I am considering its detailed recommendations. A report of the group's discussions is available from my Department.

Manchester city council also intends to host a complementary international event, Global Forum, for all sectors concerned with sustainable development and the environment. Manchester city council and I have agreed that "Partnership for Change" should go ahead in September and that Global Forum should follow in the first half of next year, thus maximising the opportunities for an exchange of experience of the implementation of sustainable development.

Partnership for change will be a working conference of invited participants primarily from the local government, business and voluntary sectors on 20-22 September. Global Forum will be an open-access event encompassing many different activities over several days. My Department and Manchester city council will be working together closely in planning the two events.

Council Tax

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment to what extent eligibility for the single person discount for council tax purposes is affected by the receipt of income from the independent living fund.

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 23 February 1993]:* From 1 April 1993, payments to all those people who currently receive money from the independent living fund will be made from a new body, the independent living (extension) fund. Receipt of income from the fund will not affect eligibility for a single person discount for council tax purposes. A discount will apply to any single adult dwelling regardless of the resident's income.

Payments from the independent living (extension) fund will be fully disregarded for council tax benefit purposes.

DEFENCE

Standing Orders

Ms. Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the standing orders of each unit in all branches of the armed forces.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are over 2,000 ships and establishments within the armed forces and each is required to produce standing orders relevant to its own particular location and role. We have no objection in principle to publishing the standing orders for a specific ship or establishment, subject to security considerations, but to do so for every ship and establishment would entail disproportionate cost and effort.

UNPROFOR II

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current number of British soldiers deployed with UNPROFOR II; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: On 23 February 1993 there were 2,426 British soldiers deployed with UNPROFOR Bosnia-Herzegovina command.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 17 February, *Official Report*, column *255-56*, to the hon. Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor), what is the total number of personnel who will be replacing the forces currently deployed as part of UNPROFOR II in May.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The total number of personnel who will be replacing the British units currently deployed with UNPROFOR Bosnia-Herzegovina command is 2,188.

Government Contracts (Report)

Mr. Roger Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the report by the review board for Government contracts on its seventh general review of the profit formula for non-competitive government contracts.

Mr. Aitken: The Government have accepted the overall target rate of return on capital employed as recommended by the review board in its report. The new rate will be 19 per cent. compared with the current rate of 21 per cent., both on the basis of historic costs. It will be effective from 1 March this year. There are other points in the report which officials will be discussing with the CBI as part of our continuing drive to secure maximum value for money from our defence contracts. The report is now being printed and copies will be placed in the Library in due course.

Secondary Medical Care

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the review of United Kingdom secondary medical care in the armed forces has now been completed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The review of future requirements for secondary care in the armed forces has now been completed. It confirmed that the primary purpose of military hospital beds was to train armed forces medical services personnel for their roles in war. It concluded that around 1,500 hospital beds will be required in the United Kingdom. We aim to provide 1,100 to 1,200 of these in service hospitals and the remainder in wards staffed by armed forces personnel in NHS hospitals, subject to discussions with the NHS authorities concerned. There would then be a requirement for only four service hospitals in the United Kingdom.

Our aim in these discussions will be to examine the feasibility of establishing wards manned by armed forces personnel in hospitals in Salisbury and East Anglia, and at Plymouth, where such discussions are already in hand. we shall also be exploring the possibility of co-operating with the NHS in Catterick. In the light of the outcome of these discussions, we would aim to modernise and possibly extend the existing facilities in the service hospitals at Gosport, Aldershot and Wroughton. We would no longer require the service hospitals at Woolwich and Halton; or at Plymouth where we are well on the way towards establishing the joint venture with the NHS.

It is too soon to be certain of the implications for employment at the hospitals concerned but every effort will be made to reduce redundancies to a minimum and ensure offsetting employment wherever possible. We shall now consult the trades unions on details of our plans.

Somalia

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are for the withdrawal of the United Kingdom military contribution to the United States-led coalition operation in Somalia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In the light of the significantly reduced requirement for relief flights, following the major improvement in the humanitarian situation in Somalia, it has been decided that the two RAF C130 aircraft deployed in support of the US-led humanitarian relief operation in Somalia should cease flying operations in theatre with effect from 28 February and return to the United Kingdom as soon as practicable thereafter. This decision reflects the scaling down of the US presence in Somalia in preparation for the formal handover to UNOSOM II and follows consultation with the US authorities. The RAF operation, which involved the delivery of some 3,000 tonnes of aid, was highly successful and played a key part in alleviating a major humanitarian problem. Those involved, both in theatre and in support, can be congratulated on the professionalism and effectiveness of the United Kingdom effort.

Helicopter Support

Sir Jim Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the management of defence helicopter support.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Specialist offices providing support for the helicopters used by the armed forces are currently located in London, Yeovilton, Harrogate and Andover. Following consultation with the trades unions I have concluded that these should now be brought together at Yeovilton to form the Defence Helicopter Support Authority. The new authority, which will comprise some 170 staff, will be in operation by April 1994. This rationalisation will bring both operational and financial advantages and will place the authority within the area of main military helicopter activity and closer to the helicopter industry. Just under 80 civilian posts will move to Yeovilton from the other locations. We wish to retain skilled staff where possible and steps will be taken to avoid or minimise redundancies. Where these prove unavoidable staff affected will receive the appropriate compensation and will be eligible for the services provided by the MOD redundancy counselling and outplacement service.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Asylum

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what practices have been agreed by the immigration Ministers of the EC states on burden of proof and interpretation of particular articles of the Dublin convention in relation to asylum.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Immigration Ministers of the member states of the European Community meeting in London on 30 November 1992 noted a report from officials on work towards the implementation of the Dublin convention and asked that work on outstanding matters should be taken forward. In current work under the Danish presidency particular attention is being given to means of proof.

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what agreement has been reached by the immigration Ministers of the member states of the European Community on the calculation of time periods under the Dublin convention in relation to asylum.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Immigration Ministers of the member states of the European Community meeting in Lisbon on 11 June 1992 agreed conclusions on the calculation of periods of time under the Dublin convention. These stipulate that Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays are to be counted.

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the address and the name of the director of the Centre for Information, Discussion and Exchange on Asylum; which persons will have access to information supplied by the United Kingdom to CIREA; what information is to be held by CIREA; and what assessment CIREA has prepared of countries of origin of asylum seekers.

Mr. Charles Wardle: CIREA has no director. Its meetings are serviced by the General Secretariat of the Council. The information it receives is at present passed only to participants representing other member states of the European Community. Consideration is still being given to what information it should receive and circulate: it has concentrated initially on statistics and changes in national legislation. CIREA has not itself prepared any assessment of countries of origin of asylum seekers but will in due course discuss joint evaluations.

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration has been given by EC immigration Ministers to the preparation of a manual of practice for applying the Dublin convention in relation to asylum; and what aspects such a manual is intended to cover.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Consideration is currently being given to the preparation of a manual covering a range of practical questions.

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what conclusions have been reached by the immigration Ministers of the member states of the European Community on the transfer of asylum applicants and their applications under the Dublin convention in relation to asylum.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Immigration Ministers of the member states of the European Community meeting in London on 30 November agreed conclusions on the transfer of asylum applicants and their applications. All transfers are to be carried out in accordance with national laws and procedures. An applicant who is liable to transfer to a second member state may travel on his own initiative or accompanied by an official of the first member state.

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library the document requested by the Strasbourg European Council of Home Affairs Ministers meeting on 8 and 9 December 1989, relating to the substantive law and procedural law of asylum in the EC states.

Mr. Charles Wardle: No. This was a working document not intended for publication, and some of its contents are now out of date.

Bail Offenders

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the report to his Department by Patricia Morgan on offending while on bail; a survey of recent studies, in respect of the Northumbria police research into the subject; and what changes he proposes to make in Government policies as a result of the report.

Mr. Jack: The report referred to, published early in 1992 as paper 65 in the Home Office research and planning unit series, drew together and reviewed research into offending on bail carried out by a number of police forces, including Northumbria.

The report referred to the desirability of establishing agreed methods of producing reliable data, on a national basis, about the incidence and extent of offending on bail. This point is currently being pursued by the Home Office in consultation with the Association of Chief Police Officers. The Northumbria police are also involved in this work.

As I indicated in my reply to the hon. Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher) on 28 January at column 789, the incidence of offending on bail is, of course, a matter for concern and work is in hand to tackle the problem, including action research in five areas which is designed to identify the scope for improving the bail decision-taking process, thus minimising the risk of offending on bail.

Domestic Violence Units

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many domestic violence units there are in south Wales.

Mr. Charles Wardle: There are three family protection units covering the force area, which are responsible for both domestic violence and child abuse.

Criminal Records

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress with the establishment of the national criminal records system; and when he proposes to publish the consultation document on the use of information to be held by the NCRS.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Progress is well in hand towards the implementation of the first phase of the national criminal records system—the updating and retrieval of criminal records on the police national computer—in the spring of 1994. My right hon. and learned Friend expects to publish by the summer of this year a consultation document on the use of criminal records for employment and related purposes.

Firearms

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration he has given to establishing a national firearms board; and when he expects to reach a decision.

Mr. Charles Wardle: A public consultation paper was issued last year proposing that firearms licensing should be administered by a new civilian firearms control board. My right hon. and learned Friend is currently in the process of consulting ministerial colleagues and will make an announcement as soon as possible.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Know-how Funds

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a list of the current application of the know-how funds by *(a)* cost, *(b)* purpose of each project, *(c)* country where funds are to be used and *(d)* the British firms or institutions involved.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: A regularly updated list of know-how fund activities by country, cost, purpose and project status is already available from the libraries of the House. To break this down further to include details on each participating British firm and institution would involve disproportionate cost.

Privatisation Programmes

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries have received or will receive advice on privatisation programmes through the British aid programme.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Advice on privatisation is provided in response to Government requests and no central records are kept. However, the main beneficiaries of this advice have been and are likely to continue to be in eastern and central Europe and the former Soviet Union. Advice has been provided to Bulgaria, the Czech and Slovak Republics, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovenia and Ukraine.

Advice on privatisation to developing countries has been on a smaller scale. Countries benefiting in recent years include Guyana, Jamaica, Pakistan, Tanzania and Zambia.

It is not possible to predict which countries will request advice in the future.

Commonwealth Development Corporation

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library a copy of his reply dated 16 February to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West concerning the auditing arrangements of the Commonwealth development corporation.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I am arranging for the letter to the hon. Member from my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Slovenia

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what amounts of aid have been given to the Slovenian Government for the assistance of displaced people and refugees *(a)* as part of general European Community aid and *(b)* as direct British aid.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[holding answer 23 February 1993]:* Figures for direct European Community aid to the Slovenian Government for the assistance of displaced people are not readily available. The United Kingdom has not provided any direct aid to the Slovenian Government for the assistance of displaced people but we have instead provided support to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees who co-ordinates the international community's response to the humanitarian crisis in the former Yugoslavia. In 1992 the UNHCR provided a total of US$10,137,464 for the assistance of displaced people and other victims of the conflict in Slovenia.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the number of displaced persons and refugees in Slovenia.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[holding answer 23 February 1993]:* The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is responsible for co-ordinating the international relief effort to the former Yugoslavia. Her most recent report, dated 10 February, shows that there are about 75,000 displaced people and refugees in Slovenia.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Cycling Holidays

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if his Department will establish a campaign to promote cycling holidays.

Mr. Key : My Department does not fund promotional activities itself. However, boosted by Chris Boardman's gold medal at the Barcelona Olympics, cycling is growing rapidly as a sport and leisure activity. The Manchester velodrome and national cycling centre are under construction. It is for the English tourist board to decide how Government funding of promotional activities is allocated.

WALES

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his current estimate of the size of waiting lists in Wales for hospital treatments; and what it was at the equivalent period in 1990, 1991 and 1992, respectively.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The latest available information for waiting lists as at 31 March in each year is published in table 4.1 of "Welsh Hospital Waiting List Bulletin 1992 No. 2" a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

A similar table, giving figures as at 30 September was published in "Welsh Hospital Waiting List Bulletin 1993 No. 1" on 24 February 1993.

Dentists

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairmen of the Welsh family health services authorities concerning requests for help and information in relation to access to NHS dentists from April; what information he has on the total number of requests received by Welsh family health services authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Secretary of State for Wales met chairmen of family health services authorities and district health authorities on 7 July 1992 when general dental services were discussed. A further meeting is planned for 15 April 1993.

According to the fortnightly returns submitted by family health service authorities the number of people seeking assistance in finding dental treatment is as follows:

Fortnight ending	*Number of patients contacting FHSAs*
14 August 1992	742
28 August	754
11 September	715
25 September	644
9 October	681
23 October	673
6 November	714
20 November	632
4 December	569
18 December	582
1 January 1993	183
15 January	766
29 January	777
12 February	733

The information given in these fortnightly returns is intended for general managerial purposes and is not statistically validated.

Community Charge

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the current levels of outstanding community charge payments for each authority in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The latest available information for arrears of community charges relates to the position at 31 March 1992, and is given in the table.

Arrears of community charges at 31 March 1992[1]

	£000
Alyn and Deeside	1,866
Colwyn	1,148
Delyn	983
Glyndwr	890
Rhuddlan	1,069
Wrexham Maelor	2,711
Carmarthen	467
Ceredigion	801
Dinefwr	393
Llanelli	978
Preseli Pembrokeshire	439
South Pembrokeshire	521
Blaenau Gwent	1,395
Islwyn	1,046
Monmouth	1,229
Newport	3,734
Torfaen	1,115
Aberconwy	596
Arfon	1,117
Dwyfor	230
Meirionnydd	353
Ynys Mon	1,113
Cynon Valley	1,072
Merthyr Tydfil	547
Ogwr	1,130
Rhondda	498
Rhymney Valley	1,822
Taff Ely	1,676
Brecknock	279
Montgomeryshire	325
Radnorshire	113
Cardiff	6,560
Vale of Glamorgan	1,131
Port Talbot	704
Lliw Valley	449
Neath	804
Swansea	3,057

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[1] Including arrears for 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Council House Sales

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the total cumulative sales of local authority dwellings for each authority in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on the number of sales, following the reorganisation of local authority boundaries in 1974, is given in the following table.

Total Sales of local authority dwellings[1]

Welsh Districts	*1974-September 1992*
Aberconwy	1,778
Alyn and Deeside	2,048
Arfon	1,496
Blaenau Gwent	2,556
Brecknock	1,507
Cardiff	9,079
Carmarthen	1,464
Ceredigion	1,668
Colwyn	1,042
Cynon Valley	1,618

Welsh Districts	*1974-September 1992*
Delyn	1,945
Dinefwr	960
Dwyfor	418
Glyndwr	1,292
Islwyn	3,813
Llanelli	3,562
Lliw Valley	2,020
Meirionnydd	957
Merthyr Tydfil	2,364
Monmouth	2,571
Montgomeryshire	1,636
Neath	2,620
Newport	5,387
Ogwr	4,827
Port Talbot	4,046
Preseli Pembrokeshire	2,524
Radnorshire	603
Rhondda	810
Rhuddlan	972
Rhymney Valley	3,937
South Pembrokeshire	1,106
Swansea	4,628
Taff-Ely	4,256
Torfaen	4,044
Vale of Glamorgan	3,724
Wrexham Maelor	3,795
Ynys Mon	1,728
Wales[2]	94,852

[1] Excludes sales from New Towns.

[2] Includes 51 dwellings sold in 1977 which cannot be attributed to a district.

Source: Welsh Office local authority returns.

Assisted Areas

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to use unemployment statistics from December in each year when making assessments associated with his Department's review of assisted area status in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: Because seasonal factors have differing effects in travel-to-work areas, the unemployment statistics used in the review of assisted areas are annual averages.

Contaminated Land

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many contaminated land sites identified by his Department will also appear on the proposed new register of contaminated land sites.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Government are currently considering the outcome of the consultation exercise on contaminated land registers which was undertaken last year. An announcement on the way forward will be made as soon as possible. In advance of this it would not be appropriate to attempt to provide the information sought.

Rent Arrears

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the current levels of outstanding rents on council dwellings for each authority in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Local authorities' own forecasts of rent arrears for 31 March 1993 are as follows:

Local Authority	
Aberconwy Borough Council	55,000
Alyn and Deeside District Council	210,000
Arfon Borough Council	97,000
Blaenau Gwent Borough Council	96,201
Brecknock Borough Council	65,400
Cardiff County Council	1,000,000
Carmarthen District Council	172,000
Ceredigion District Council	140,000
Colwyn Borough Council	95,000
Cynon Valley Borough Council	22,500
Delyn Borough Council	137,000
Dinefwr Borough Council	129,587
Dwyfor District Council	33,320
Glyndwr District Council	215,000
Islwyn Borough Council	110,000
Llanelli Borough Council	249,[illegible]3
Lliw Valley Borough Council	[illegible]4,000
Meirionnydd District Council	42,000
Merthyr Tydfil Borough Council	75,500
Monmouth Borough Council	185,000
Montgomeryshire District Council	80,000
Neath Borough Council	217,000
Newport Borough Council	620,000
Ogwr Borough Council	812,000
Port Talbot Borough Council	130,000
Preseli Pembrokeshire District Council	270,000
Radnorshire District Council	26,000
Rhondda Borough Council	281,000
Rhuddlan Borough Council	95,000
Rhymney Valley District Council	530,000
South Pembrokeshire District Council	177,000
Swansea County Council	1,299,915
Taff Ely Borough Council	427,000
Torfaen Borough Council	408,000
Vale of Glamorgan Borough Council	164,000
Wrexham Maelor Borough Council	292,000
Ynys Mon Borough Council	158,000

Source: Housing Revenue Account Subsidy Second Advance Claim Forms 1992-93.

Council Tax

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received concerning council tax single occupancy discount; what reply he has sent; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I have received several representations.

Council tax bills are determined by the valuation band of dwellings, based on their market value at 1 April 1991. Bills also take account of the number and status of adult residents. It is thus a property tax with a personal element.

The personal element represents 50 per cent. of the full bill. If there are two adult residents, there is no reduction in the personal element. But if there is just one adult resident, there is a reduction of 50 per cent. in the personal element, which equates to 25 per cent. of the full bill.

These arrangements are a considerable advance on those which existed under rates, where single adult households received no discount at all.

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consideration he has given to increasing the single occupancy discount for council tax.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: None, since Parliament approved the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

TECs

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the members of training and enterprise councils presented to him when TECs were originally set up.

Sir Wyn Roberts: TEC members at the TECs operational dates are shown in the following table.

North West Wales TEC
Mr. Tefor Jones OBE
Mr. Barry Baynham
Mr. R. Hefin Davies MBE JP
Mr. Geoff Drake
Mr. Dilwyn Evans
Mr. Gwilym Humphreys
Mr. John R. Jones
Mrs. Sioned Llywelyn
Mr. Roy Luff LBE
Mr. George Newson MBE
Mr. Ioan Bowen Rees
Mr. Dafydd Roberts
Miss Enid H. Rowlands
Mr. Hugh Williams MBE

North East Wales TEC
John Troth
Kevin Lyden
Roland Blackburn
Pat Mansfield
Godfrey Williams
David Schwarz
Bett Symonds
Mike Pickering
Mervyn Phillips
Keith Evans
Harvey Davies
Charles Hogg
Tim Harris

Powys TEC
David Margetts BA
David Baird-Murray DL
Alan Barnish BComm IFPA
Mike Exton
Trevor Jones
Hon. Lindy Price
Mike Smith
Peter Swanson JP
Bernard Wakely BA
John Walker
Cyril Whitehurst
Roger Williams
Clair Coats BA

Gwent TEC
Geoffrey Canning
Geoffrey Drought
Jeremy Hallett
Steve Hoselitz
Roger Leadbetter
Allan Martin
Michael Perry
Pat Phillips
Stan Jackson
Bruce McDowell
Roger Jones
Alan Carr
Don Corbett
Leighton Quinn

Mid Glamorgan TEC
J. W. Phillips
J. Cornwall
D. W. Free
D. Morgan
R. J. Tree
R. Webster
R. Wilson
H. Thomas
Alderman R. Newman
E. Morgan
D. Jessop
W. Bailey
E. Roberts
Sir Donald Walters
P. Morgan

West Wales TEC
Peter Allen
Carl Hadley
David Davies
Wynfford James
Peter Scott
Bob Hastie
Peter Hancock
John Button
Mike Davies
Mike Rush
John Foley
Bob Donaldson
Michael Reilly
Huw Richards
Beverley Pold
Pamela David

South Glamorgan TEC
Roger Helliwell
David Jenkins
Barry Lane
Geoff Metcalf
John Soulsby
Robert Watts
Rita Austin
Laurence James
Michael Boyce
Joachim Burkhardt
Eric Crawford
Steve Dolan

Pupils (Expenditure)

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the expenditure on each *(a)* primary school pupil, *(b)* secondary school pupil and *(c)* average for all pupils, for the last financial year for which information is available.

Sir Wyn Roberts: In 1990-91 the expenditure on each nursery and primary school pupil in Wales was £1,308 and on each secondary school pupil was £1,953. The average expenditure on all pupils in nursery, primary and secondary schools was £1,570.

School Orchestras

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has had about the future funding of school orchestras in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: To date I have received 13 written representations from Members of Parliament and in excess of 500 from organisations and members of the public about the funding of the school music service in Wales.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

"One Girl's War"

Mr. Allason: To ask the Attorney-General what is the current legal status of "One Girl's War" by Joan Millar; and what are the legal costs incurred to date by the Treasury Solicitor.

The Attorney-General: The injunctions granted in England on 28 November 1986 to prevent publication of the book "One Girl's War" by Joan Millar were discharged by consent on 21 October 1992. In proceedings in the Republic of Ireland, although an injunction was originally granted against the publishers, it was discharged on 2 December 1986. The legal costs incurred to date by the Treasury Solicitor are estimated to be £35,000.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disability Allowances

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the turn-round of correspondence relating to disability allowance applications met his targets; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The arrangements for replying to correspondence relating to operational questions on disability living allowance is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Dr. Lynne Jones, dated 25 February 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the targets for the turnround of correspondence on Disability Living Allowance (DLA).

The Benefit Agency's published target is to respond to all letters from Members of Parliament on all subjects within an average of 20 working days of receipt. Whilst this target is generally being met for letters on matters other than DLA it is currently not being achieved on all letters about DLA and I accept that regrettably some very long delays have been experienced before a reply has been sent. I apologise for this. The delays are due to the backlog of correspondence that has built up in the DLA Unit following the greater than expected workload faced by the Unit in the early months of the DLA scheme.

A recovery plan for clearing the backlog of correspondence is in operation at the DLA Unit and I am pleased to say significant progress is being made. The correspondence sections, both at the DLA Unit and centrally, have been strengthened and our aim is to complete the clearance of the backlog during early March. Thereafter it will be our intention to respond to all future correspondence on DLA within the Agency's target of 20 working days. We have been meeting this target for the majority of letters on DLA received since the start of the year, and I can assure you that I am monitoring the position very closely.

I hope that you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the Official Report and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what guidelines he has established for the Benefits Agency to respond to requests for the release of medical records to unsuccessful applicants for disability living allowance and attendance allowance.

Mr. Scott: The information used to decide a claim for disability living allowance or attendance allowance is made available to the claimant on request. Only medical evidence that is considered, on the advice of a medical practitioner, to be harmful to a person is withheld.

Severe Weather Payments

Ms. Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to *(a)* reduce the number of consecutive days on which the temperature must be 0°C or below in order for severe cold weather payments to be made or *(b)* increase the ceiling on savings which can be held without disqualification for severe cold weather payments.

Mr. Scott: We have no plans to change any of the fundamental elements of the scheme.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Refreshment Facilities

Sir Harold Walker: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee why the Smoking Room was excluded from the scope of the inquiry into the House's refreshment facilities conducted by Food Services Associates.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: The consultancy brief issued to Food Services Associates was

"to examine food production and food service systems"

and to

"develop a strategic plan . . . for the re-organisation of food production and food service systems in the House of Commons".

Bars, including the Smoking Room, were excluded from the scope of the study except where changes proposed by the consultants for food service areas impinged on areas used for bars.

Sir Harold Walker: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee what estimate he has made of the cost of implementing the proposals contained in the report of Food Services Associates to reform the refreshment facilities of the House.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: The Food Service Associates report, which the Committee is currently considering, estimated the cost of equipment at £2·8 million. Before the Committee reports to the House, an estimate will be required of the total cost of any proposals, including equipment, building works, electrical and mechanical works, installation and ventilation.

EDUCATION

London Schools (Freehold Transfers)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has for ensuring the transfer of the freeholds from the London residuary body to the dioceses of London and Southwark, of former voluntary maintained schools with the Inner London education authority whose freeholds transferred to the London residuary board on the abolition of the Inner London education authority.

Mr. Forth: Following the abolition of the Inner London education authority there was no general need to transfer land used for the purposes of voluntary schools since it would have remained in the hands of the appropriate voluntary school trustees.

Disabled Students

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what are the latest statistics on the number of disabled students in further and higher education; and what future resources will be allocated to encourage more disabled people to enter these.

Mr. Boswell: A total of 42,000 students with learning difficulties and disabilities enrolled on further education courses on 1 November 1991. Information on the number of such students in higher education is not held centrally. My right hon. Friend's initial guidance to the further and higher education funding councils emphasised the need to facilitate access to further and higher education for students with learning difficulties and disabilities. Both the councils are taking account of the particular needs of these students in their allocation of resources to institutions.

Pupil Exclusions

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proportion of young people who are or have been excluded or suspended from school also have a statement of special educational needs; and of those, what proportion have statements which refer to emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Mr. Forth: Information on permanent exclusions has been collected by the Department over a two year period beginning with the summer term 1990 under the national exclusions reporting system (NERS). A preliminary analysis of year one returns showed that 12·5 per cent. of pupils permanently excluded had statements of special educational needs. We have no information as to how many of those statements refer to emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many of the young people who have been excluded or suspended from school and who are also statemented, have had to wait more than *(a)* three months, *(b)* six months, *(c)* nine months and *(d)* one year before appropriate placement and funding were provided.

Mr. Forth: This information is not collected centrally.

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many young people, by local authority area have been *(a)* suspended and *(b)* excluded from school in each year since 1988.

Mr. Forth: The Department has been monitoring permanent exclusions from English maintained schools over a two-year period beginning with the summer term 1990 under the national exclusions reporting system (NERS). A preliminary analysis of year one NERS data shows that some 3,000 permanent exclusions were reported. It is not possible to provide an area breakdown of the figure because of assurances given as to confidentiality. The Department does not collect information on temporary exclusions.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Disabled Civil Servants

Mr. Haselhurst: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the employment of people with disabilities in the civil service.

Mr. Jackson: The annual report on progress in the employment of people with disabilities in the civil service is presented in the magazine *Independent* published today.

The report shows that during 1992, 8,336—1·5 per cent. —registered disabled people were employed in civil service departments and agencies, an increase of 312 people over 1991. In addition to this, the civil service employs many more people with disabilities who choose not to register as disabled.

I am arranging for copies of *Independent* to be placed in the Library of the House.

HEALTH

Hospitals (Alcohol Sales)

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what percentage of hospitals have bars on hospital premises which sell alcohol for consumption by doctors.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Psychiatric Patients

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information she has on the cost to each health authority in England and Wales of providing psychiatric patients with beds in the private sector; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) and the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) on 23 February at column *555*. The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Information concerning Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mesothelioma

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been diagnosed as having mesothelioma in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: The number of patients who were first diagnosed as having mesothelioma in each of the last five years for which statistics are available is shown in the table.

The number of patients first diagnosed as having mesothelioma in 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986, and 1987, England and Wales.

Year	*Number*
1983	506
1984	567
1985	545
1986	642
1987	671

Dentistry

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures she will take to ensure that patients presenting themselves for treatment at dental surgeries are made aware of *(a)* the cost of the treatment prior to its commencement and *(b)* whether this treatment is available under the NHS.

Dr. Mawhinney: General dental practitioners are already required by thier terms of service to provide a treatment plan to patients registered with them under continuing care of capitation arrangements when they examine them for the first time. This treatment plan includes any treatment to be undertaken, an estimate of any national health service charge and any proposals for private care and treatment, including the cost to the patient.

The additionally required to provide a new or revised treatment plan when they propose to undertake complex treatment, the details of which are listed in regulations, and on any occasion when the patient so requests.

Alcohol and Drug Rehabilitation Services

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been done to inform residential alcohol and drug rehabilitation services that they are included in local authority purchasing plans.

Mr. Yeo: It is the responsibility of each local authority to assess the needs of its population for community care services, including for residential services for problems associated with the misuse of alcohol and drugs and to enter into appropriate contractual arrangements with service providers.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many residential alcohol and drug rehabilitation services she expects to close within the first four months of community care.

Mr. Yeo: The Government and the local authorities have made clear the high priority they attach to the provision of services for people who misuse alcohol and drugs. The funds being made available to local authorities through the community care special transitional grant fully reflect existing levels of service provision and there is therefore no reason why services which appropriately meet the needs of this important client group should not be maintained. Special monitoring arrangements for independent sector residential services for people who misuse alcohol and drugs are being established in the first three months after the full implementation of the community care reforms on 1 April 1993.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what decision has been reached on fast track assessment by the working group convened to discuss residential alcohol and drug rehabilitation services.

Mr. Yeo: At our request, the local authority associations have convened a working party, on which independent sector service providers are represented, to prepare good practice guidance on fast track assessment and on out-of-area referrals, which will enable them to issue advice to their members. It is expected that this will be available during March.

Tobacco Advertising

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment the authors of her Department's discussion document, "The Effect of Tobacco Advertising on Tobacco Consumption" came to in respect of the specific study of the effect of an advertising ban in the United Kingdom, as opposed to the review of studies from elsewhere in the world; and whether she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Department of Health's discussion document "Effect of Tobacco Advertising on Tobacco Consumption" did not make any estimate of the effect of an advertising ban in the United Kingdom.

Anaemia

Ms. Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what guidelines she has issued to health authorities and family health services on the monitoring and detection of iron deficiency anaemia in children;

(2) what information she has on the number of children under the age of five years suffering from iron deficiency anaemia.

Mr. Sackville: No guidelines have been issued. Iron deficiency anaemia is a recognised risk in this age group but the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy, in considering dietary reference values for the population in 1991, reported that more information was needed on the iron status of different groups of the United Kingdom population, including infants and children.

The Government have set up a national diet and nutrition survey to monitor the nutritional status of representative groups of the population in an eight year cycle. A survey of pre-school children is currently underway. An expert group on the weaning diet is now considering the nutritional needs of infants and young children and is expected to report by the end of 1993. We will then review the need for guidelines to the national health service.

Respite Care

Ms. Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information she has on the extent of charging by local councils for respite care; and if she will provide more funds for community care to councils so that they can provide this service free of charge.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not held centrally.

The Government take the view that local authorities should seek to recover the economic cost of providing a service wherever this can be done without causing hardship to the service user. In residential settings local authorities are required, by section 22 of the National Assistance Act 1948, to make charges, including the discretion to make a reduced charge to residents for the first eight weeks of their admission. Where non-residential respite care is provided, local authorities have discretionary powers under section 17 of the Health and Social Services and Social Security Adjudications Act 1983 to charge.

We are making available in 1993-94 a ring-fenced special transitional grant of £565 million to local authorities. This also includes £140 million for authorities' new responsibilities which makes allowance for improved respite care services to support carers.

Child Protection Services

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action has been taken on the recommendation of the second report of the Health Committee of Session 1990-91 on child protection services that her Department and local authorities should conduct an urgent review of the relationship between changing levels of need and of resources in London with a view to establishing the validity of the standard spending assessment formula in relation to the capacity of London authorities to meet their responsibilities; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: The standard spending assessment formulae are being reviewed with the help of the local authority associations to take into account new information derived from the 1991 census and data from other sources. The review will be completed by autumn 1993 and is likely to affect standard spending assessment formulae for the financial year 1994-95. The review will take into account the outcome of research sponsored by the Department into avoidable and unavoidable factors affecting unit costs in London.

Suicide

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information she has on the five most common occupations of people committing suicide; what information she has on the number of farmers who have committed suicide in each year since 1979; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 23 February 1993]:* The most recent information available from the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys concerns the numbers of deaths which have occurred during the period 1979 to 1990, combined, and is shown in table 1. The numbers, however, are simply numbers of deaths where the stated occupation was of a particular type and consequently do not take any account of the actual numbers employed in those occupations. A large number of deaths in a particular occupation therefore may simply indicate that more people are employed in that occupation rather than that employment in that occupation may lead to an increased likelihood of suicide.

As a consequence of the limitations of working with numbers of deaths, without reference to the numbers employed in the occupation group, or groups, of interest, the OPCS favours the use of proportional mortality ratios. A PMR gives an indication of how a particular occupation's mortality from a specific cause differs from the collective experience of all occupations for that specific cause. To cite the case of male farmers aged 16 to 64 years of age for the period 1979 to 1990, inclusive, the PMR of 187 suggests that the number of deaths was nearly twice that which would have been expected, 100 being taken as the experience of all males aged 16 to 64 regardless of occupation. Table 2 shows the five highest PMRS by occupation.

In the case of both tables the information refers to males only aged 16 to 64 years. Information for both males and females, many of whom do not state a specific occupation, for the same period could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Both tables show the corresponding numbers of deaths and PMRs for comparative purposes.

Table 1

The five most common occupations (ranked according to the number of deaths) of males aged 16-64 years recorded as having committed suicide or where the death was undetermined (E950—E959 and E980—E989, 1979-90 (combined) England and Wales.

Occupation	*Deaths*	*PMR*
Clerk and cashier (not retail)	1,342	97
Occupation not stated (to include those seeking employment)	1,323	136
Driver of road goods vehicle	1,029	82
Machine tool operator	927	106
Metal working production fitter and fitter/machinist	790	82

Table 2

The five most common occupations (ranked according to Proportional Mortality Ratio) of males aged 16-64 years recorded as having committed suicide or where the death was undetermined (E950—E959 and E980—E989), 1979-90 (combined) England and Wales.

Occupation	*PMR*	*Deaths*
Vet	364	35
Pharmacist	217	51
Dental practitioner	204	38
Farmer	187	526
Medical practitioner	184	152

Using data on occupational collected at death registration for the years 1979-90 the Proportional Mortality Ratios (PMRs) for men aged 16-64 years have been calculated. The PMR gives an indication of how a particular occupation's mortality from a specific cause (in this case E950—E959 and E980—E989) differs from the collective experience of the same age-group as a whole for that specific cause and regardless of occupation. Thus a PMR of 364 for Vets suggests that this particular occupation group experiences more than 3½ times the number of deaths from suicide and undetermined deaths (E950—E959 and E980—E989) than would have been expected.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of registrations of deaths with a verdict of suicide ICD E950 to E959 in each county in England and Wales in each year since 1979; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 23 February 1993]:* The exact information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, the number of deaths from suicide—E950 to E959—is readily available by county of residence and is as follows.

Number of deaths from suicide (E950 to E959) for each county in England and Wales, 1979 to 1985

	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*
ENGLAND AND WALES	4,195	4,321	4,419	4,279	4,279	4,315	4,419
Greater London	648	644	707	627	652	610	585
Greater Manchester	269	244	281	258	251	217	257
Merseyside	110	95	131	112	125	125	87
South Yorkshire	83	55	68	72	97	69	94
Tyne and Wear	119	85	122	103	84	81	72
West Midlands	202	221	203	235	216	215	211
West Yorkshire	231	219	164	184	155	172	161
Avon	68	66	67	67	52	61	59
Bedfordshire	29	28	33	40	34	35	32
Berkshire	44	59	59	46	41	64	62

	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*
Buckinghamshire	36	47	51	52	47	54	57
Cambridgeshire	49	49	51	34	46	47	59
Cheshire	82	80	79	72	72	70	88
Cleveland	42	61	33	49	41	32	43
Cornwall and Isle of Scilly	43	35	46	41	40	50	58
Cumbria	31	44	32	45	28	44	49
Derbyshire	56	66	48	46	67	71	70
Devon	85	101	89	84	98	126	97
Dorset	57	64	67	57	46	72	74
Durham	48	62	62	49	49	54	60
East Sussex	50	67	98	75	93	85	81
Essex	117	124	136	140	145	123	165
Gloucestershire	41	36	50	43	40	38	47
Hampshire	117	122	145	144	114	130	139
Hereford and Worcester	45	61	63	49	56	56	68
Hertfordshire	55	71	72	75	69	66	76
Humberside	66	70	73	86	71	71	86
Isle of Wight	10	18	15	12	12	11	6
Kent	109	138	128	116	132	122	133
Lancashire	151	158	139	157	133	148	135
Leicestershire	73	59	78	66	65	81	88
Lincolnshire	47	43	50	50	50	56	51
Norfolk	61	66	85	72	62	76	71
Northamptonshire	50	52	21	13	37	60	42
Northumberland	19	24	21	27	28	20	30
North Yorkshire	53	61	69	57	84	60	68
Nottinghamshire	93	96	91	99	88	99	102
Oxfordshire	33	41	39	31	38	33	41
Shropshire	27	27	35	16	34	26	35
Somerset	30	35	53	36	43	47	46
Staffordshire	89	86	59	64	71	74	87
Suffolk	51	58	51	54	61	54	70
Surrey	77	64	63	69	79	85	89
Warwickshire	41	42	52	39	50	40	49
West Sussex	64	64	57	74	62	72	81
Wiltshire	42	62	58	49	48	53	48
Clwyd	26	41	26	40	30	35	37
Dyfed	43	35	29	41	33	32	11
Gwent	31	19	27	33	31	33	23
Gwynedd	20	18	25	20	16	22	25
Mid Glamorgan	38	43	39	47	51	40	36
Powys	4	10	11	10	17	13	10
South Glamorgan	53	44	35	45	53	50	30
West Glamorgan	17	26	21	35	25	24	22
Outside England and Wales[1]	20	15	12	22	17	11	16

[1] **Deaths of individuals not normally resident in England and Wales.**

Number of deaths from suicide (E950 to E959) for each county in England and Wales, 1986 to 1991

	1986	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
ENGLAND AND WALES	4,126	3,986	4,220	3,717	3,950	3,893
Greater London	526	536	564	479	506	456
Greater Manchester	247	224	234	204	197	243
Merseyside	115	104	124	98	106	85
South Yorkshire	87	76	80	75	78	97
Tyne and Wear	78	58	63	68	66	65
West Midlands	214	167	222	191	192	190
West Yorkshire	159	167	168	147	149	161
Avon	50	64	70	52	59	61
Bedfordshire	37	31	38	34	36	44
Berkshire	54	37	46	51	60	51
Buckinghamshire	43	60	48	53	42	49
Cambridgeshire	70	57	63	61	53	60
Cheshire	62	61	59	60	63	66
Cleveland	40	39	62	36	31	42
Cornwall and Isle of Scilly	37	49	53	43	51	43
Cumbria	39	48	32	29	40	40
Derbyshire	59	74	72	66	57	77
Devon	115	105	103	121	88	106
Dorset	59	60	42	56	70	43
Durham	57	49	54	50	42	38
East Sussex	88	60	70	65	78	83
Essex	132	129	157	121	133	124
Gloucestershire	36	33	61	32	44	37
Hampshire	129	122	124	110	125	146

	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Hereford and Worcester	56	63	46	56	62	52
Hertfordshire	78	71	58	60	53	61
Humberside	86	80	92	63	66	58
Isle of Wight	3	8	7	7	13	6
Kent	116	115	108	109	136	108
Lancashire	160	140	109	108	128	122
Leicestershire	73	63	68	76	63	63
Lincolnshire	42	55	61	48	59	52
Norfolk	64	74	68	59	66	64
Northamptonshire	43	46	54	54	69	56
Northumberland	30	14	24	23	18	12
North Yorkshire	59	69	55	58	55	47
Nottinghamshire	76	88	98	76	72	79
Oxfordshire	36	29	45	54	58	38
Shropshire	41	32	34	23	27	28
Somerset	49	43	37	41	61	46
Staffordshire	66	67	65	45	65	55
Suffolk	50	52	59	46	69	53
Surrey	77	82	96	75	68	82
Warwickshire	41	45	40	46	31	33
West Sussex	55	54	86	45	52	59
Wiltshire	43	45	49	41	53	49
Clwyd	16	31	32	30	26	45
Dyfed	32	28	25	25	32	31
Gwent	31	27	30	22	27	23
Gwynedd	25	26	13	20	26	25
Mid Glamorgan	59	46	44	33	33	43
Powys	17	7	14	7	19	15
South Glamorgan	32	34	42	35	30	38
West Glamorgan	22	33	41	18	28	25
Outside England and Wales[1]	15	9	11	12	19	18

[1] Deaths of individuals not normally resident in England and Wales.

TRANSPORT

Disabled Drivers

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of road accidents involve disabled drivers; and what proportion of the overall driving population are disabled drivers.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Statistics are not available for disabled drivers.

Cycle Helmets

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what studies his Department has commissioned on the safety benefits of cycle helmets; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The Transport Research Laboratory report, "Pedal Cycle Accidents—A Hospital Based Study", indicates that if helmets were universally worn over 4,000 casulaties would be prevented and the severity of over 3,000 serious casualties would be reduced. Child cyclists, in particular, would benefit from wearing helmets.

The Department is also carrying out further research into the design of protective headgear for pedal cyclists and motorcyclists.

Puffin Road Crossings

Mr. Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the success of the experimental puffin road crossings scheme; what was the cost of establishing the scheme; how these costs were met; and what plans he has to extend the puffin road crossings scheme to other areas of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Assessments at two trial sites have shown puffin crossings to be successful in allowing more time for pedestrians to cross, particularly disabled and elderly people, without increasing delays to traffic. The Department is currently funding installations at 25 sites in England at an average cost of 8,800 each. They will begin to come into operation this spring. Further installations are expected later in the year and early next year. Regulations will be laid to enable local authorities to install puffins.

Road Building

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received on the use of porous asphalt in road building; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Since I announced in July 1992 that the Department would be taking steps to reduce road noise, I have received many representations from local authorities, representatives and from the general public for the use of porous asphalt on road schemes. Assessments are being carried out to establish whether the conditions for the use of porous asphalt are suitable and the benefits outweigh the higher cost including the need for more expensive winter maintenance and more frequent surfacing.

Minibuses

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how minibuses are treated as a category in the compilation of accident statistics; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if the Government will in future treat minibuses as a separate category in the compilation of accident statistics.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Since 1989, it has been possible to link the vehicle registration mark of vehicles involved in personal injury road accidents recorded by the police to vehicle data held at the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority in Swansea. This link allows the identification of minibuses involved in road accidents according to vehicle construction definitions held at DVLA.

Twyford Down (Private Detectives)

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the cost of hiring Bray private investigators to examine the background of persons protesting against the road through Twyford Down.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: My Department has not employed Bray's Detective Agency (Southampton) Ltd. to examine the background of persons protesting against the M3 through Twyford Down. They have been employed to serve papers on people who have trespassed on the Department's land and to photograph trespassers. To date the agency has been paid approximately £7,000 for this work.

A1 (M) Bypasses

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the operational costs of the bypasses for the A1(M) for *(a)* Bartley, *(b)* Chester le Street, *(c)* Darlington, *(d)* Durham and *(e)* Newton Aycliffe.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The 27-mile, 43 km, A1M from the North Yorkshire County Durham boundary to south of Tyneside was built as a single strategic route, not as a series of bypasses and opened in sections over the period between 19[illegible]5 and 1969. The average annual route maintenance cost over the last five years was £0·5 million per year. The average major maintenance over the same period was £2 million per year.

Driving Licences

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what charges are payable to the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency for renewing a personal driving licence; and when these charges were introduced.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Since 1 February 1992, the fee for the three-yearly renewal of an ordinary motor car driving licence from age 70 has been £6. The fee to renew large goods and passenger-carrying vehicle licences at age 45 and five-yearly thereafter up to age 60, when annual renewals are required is £21.

There is no charge for licences renewed for medical reasons.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Valued Added Tax

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to revise VAT leaflet 701/10/85 explicitly to include printed educational matter designed to be stored on ring binder collections as one of the zero-rated items.

Sir John Cope: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has no such plans. Revision of VAT leaflets, including VAT Leaflet 701/10/85, is a matter for the Commissioners of Customs and Excise as part of their responsibilities for care and management of the tax. I refer the right hon. Member to my reply to his other question of today's date on the VAT liability of printed educational matter.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if VAT applies to printed educational matter designed to be stored on ring binder collections; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Cope: Collections of printed matter including that of an educational nature supplied with ring binders in their complete state are zero-rated as loose-leaf books, but the relief has not hitherto extended to such items when supplied in instalments. Customs and Excise has recently reviewed the position and now considers that such products should be within the zero rate. It has taken administrative action by extra-statutory concession to allow this.

Ministers' Cars

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the provisions of Inland Revenue booklet 480 of 1992 apply to Ministers of the Crown in respect of *(a)* availability of a car for private use, *(b)* provision of a chauffeur in connection with a car made available for private use and *(c)* provision of [illegible] amount of petrol for private use of a car; what steps are taken to ensure that such fringe benefits for Ministers of the Crown are correctly entered on P11D forms; what was the approximate aggregate yield for each available year since 1988-89 of each of those benefits; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Ministers of the Crown are subject to the same tax provisions as other employees. The rules for cars, chauffeurs and petrol apply to them in the same way as to others. It is the responsibility of each employer to give the Inland Revenue at the end of each tax year particulars of any benefits in kind provided to employees. Departments are aware of their obligations as employers. The Inland Revenue reviews their compliance with these obligations as it does with other employers. The yield from benefits in kind provided to Ministers of the Crown is not available.

Sovereign Debts

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes he proposes to the regulations used in determining the provisions allowable for tax purposes against sovereign debts held by banks.

Mr. Dorrell: The original regulation made in December 1990 which set out the rules to be used in arriving at the maximum tax deduction available for doubtful sovereign debt follow broadly the existing Bank of England guidelines, commonly known as the Bank of England matrix. The Bank intends to make certain improvements to the matrix to make it simpler and easier to operate; these changes are to have effect for periods ending on or after 30 June 1993. We have decided that similar changes should be made to the regulations used for tax purposes.

The Inland Revenue is today making available in draft form the amending regulations. I am placing a copy in the

House of Commons Library. Further copies are available on request from the Inland Revenue, to which representations on the draft regulations should be sent by 8 April 1993.

The amending regulations are subject to the affirmative resolution procedure and will be brought before the House in the usual way in due course.

Economic Recovery

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has established a programme to utilise the additional Community funds for economic recovery agreed at the Edinburgh European Council; and if he will list the projects to be submitted for funding.

Sir John Cope: The Edinburgh declaration covered many national and Community measures, the cumulative effect of which is intended to boost confidence, growth and jobs, so as to promote recovery. Such recovery would bring with it many new projects, particularly in the private sector, but it is of course impossible separately to identify all those arising as a direct result of the proposals agreed at Edinburgh. One particular proposal agreed was the establishment of a special 5 billion ecu facility within the European investment bank to provide finance for infrastructure projects within the Community. The EIB has already approved a number of loans from this facility, including some projects in the United Kingdom.

Agricultural Partnership Tenancies

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress the Inland Revenue has made in resolving the jurisdictional problems over the valuation of agricultural partnership tenancies and the role of the special commissioners; and if he will make a statement on the current practice of the Revenue in such cases.

Mr. Dorrell: The Inland Revenue is awaiting the judgment from the lands tribunal on one such case. This judgment may help to clarify the question of jurisdiction. Meanwhile, the Inland Revenue is, when requested, deferring action on similar cases.

A number of representations have been made about this issue and we are keeping the position under review.

Consultants

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many contracts for consultancies were awarded by his Department over *(a)* the last 12 months and *(b)* 1991-92.

Mr. Nelson: The Treasury introduced a new computerised system for purchasing goods and services during 1991-92. The records for that year are incomplete. Sixteen consultancy contracts are recorded as having been awarded in 1991-92; 47 have been awarded so far in 1992-93. Comprehensive information for 1991-92 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Savings Accounts

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what arrangements now exist for individuals to invest in savings accounts separate sums below £20.

Mr. Nelson: A large number of financial institutions offer savings accounts which allow customers to invest less than £20.

European Investment Fund

Mr. George Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps are being taken to revise the terms of the EC treaties to take account of the decision at the Edinburgh European Council relating to a European investment fund; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: The Council of Ministers has agreed that an intergovernmental conference should be called for the purpose of agreeing an amendment to the statute of the European investment bank which will enable the governors of the bank to establish the European investment fund. The statute of the European investment bank is a protocol to the treaty of Rome. Once agreed, the amendment will need to be ratified by member states.

Currency Trading

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimates he has made about the percentage of currency trading in the London financial markets which is necessary for settling accounts in traded goods and services.

Mr. Nelson: The Bank of England has estimated, in the November *Quarterly Bulletin*, that daily turnover of foreign exchange trading in London is around $300 billion. However, it is not possible to estimate the value of trade in goods and services to which this is related because a large but indeterminate proportion of foreign exchange trading in London is connected with trade between third countries. Furthermore, it would be misleading to suggest that the only foreign exchange transactions necessary for trade in goods and services are those settling accounts; much trade would not take place at all were the foreign exchange markets not able to facilitate the hedging of currency risks associated with trade and with investment.

White-collar Civil Servants

Mr. Butterfill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he is taking to control the growth in the number of white collar staff in Government Departments.

Mr. Portillo: Departments' use of staff resources is controlled through limits placed on their running costs expenditure. Running costs provision and staffing plans are set out in the statistical supplement to the 1992 autumn statement (Cm. 2219). These imply a fall from 569,000 civil servants in 1992-93 to 553,000 in 1995-96. The Government have also announced, in the "Citizen's Charter: First Report" (Cm. 2101), market-testing targets covering activities currently performed by over 40,000 civil servants.

Family Incomes

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 11 January, *Official Report*, columns *545-58*, concerning the proportion of households of different types within each quintile group of equivalised disposable income, if he will publish similar figures for decile groups.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 25 February 1993]:* The figures are given in the table:

Percentage of household types within each decile group of equivalised disposable income, 1979 and 1989

Household type	*Decile groups of equivalised disposable income* *Bottom*	*2nd*	*3rd*	*4th*	*5th*	*6th*	*7th*	*8th*	*9th*	*Top*	*All*
1979											
One adult with children	7	4	4	3	3	2	2	1	1	1	3
Two adults with children	15	16	27	37	46	40	38	28	20	16	28
Non-retired without children	15	8	18	28	29	36	45	56	69	76	38
Retired	62	69	45	21	11	10	4	5	4	3	23
Three or more adults with children	2	3	6	10	11	13	11	10	6	4	8
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
1989											
One adult with children	11	10	7	5	3	2	1	1	1	1	4
Two adults with children	18	13	12	27	34	32	31	27	23	20	24
Non-retired without children	21	17	18	29	37	44	51	59	63	72	41
Retired	47	57	59	32	21	13	10	8	9	5	26
Three or more adults with children	3	4	4	7	6	9	7	6	4	2	5
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

The figures in the table are rounded and may not add up to 100.
Source: Central Statistical Office, based on Family Expenditure Survey.

Family Expenditure

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the average expenditure by a family with one earner and two children on *(a)* average earnings, *(b)* 50 per cent. of the average earnings and *(c)* 150 per cent. of the average earnings on (i) food, (ii) domestic fuel, (iii) newspapers and books, (iv) fares, (v) children's clothing and footwear and (vi) all items which are currently zero rated for VAT, giving the most recent available data.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 25 February 1993]:* The estimates given in the table are derived from the 1991 family expenditure survey. The estimates are based upon a sample of 50 households grouped around each level of earnings. Because of the small sample size the figures are subject to considerable sampling variations. The figures are rounded to the nearest 10p.

Average expenditure of households with one earner and two children from the 1991 family expenditure survey

£ per week

	(a) *Average earnings* £	*(b)* *50 per cent. of average earnings* £	*(c)* *150 per cent. [illegible] average earnings* £
i Food	55·80	41·50	64·20
ii Domestic Fuel	11·70	13·40	13·20
iii Newspapers and books	1·60	1·40	6·40
iv Fares	1·00	3·00	2·20
v Children's clothing and footwear	6·80	6·20	8·40
vi All items[1] zero-rated	79·70	66·90	97·30

[1] Item (vi) includes items (i-v), NHS prescription charges and payments for NHS medical appliances and Water and Sewerage. Expenditure on 'Construction of new dwellings' which is also zero-rated, is not included as no figures are available.

Income Tax

Ms. Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the latest figures for how many *(a)* working and *(b)* non-working people who do not pay income tax in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 25 February 1993]:* The latest estimate is that about 21·2 million people over 16 do not pay income tax in 1992-93, of whom about 4·1 million have some earnings.

Banks (Winding-up Orders)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has to require banks to declare annually the number of winding-up orders they have obtained.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 23 February 1993]:* I have no such proposals.

Official Entertainment

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much was spent on official entertainment in his Department during 1991-92 and 1992-93 to date.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 24 February 1993]:* Expenditure on official entertainment for 1991-92 was £86,162. For 1992-93 expenditure to date is £253,609. The large increase in 1992-93 results from a number of one-off events, including ECOFIN meetings during the United Kingdom presidency.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Consultants

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the contracts awarded by his Department to *(a)* Coopers and Lybrand management consultants, *(b)* Touche Ross management consultants, *(c)* Price Waterhouse management consultants, *(d)* Ernst and Young management consultants, *(e)* Chrichton Roberts Ltd, *(f)* KPMG management consultants and *(g)* Leopold Joseph management consultants, with the total cost of the contracts with each contractor, for (i) the past 12 months and (ii) 1991-92.

Mr. Goodlad: The tables list the contract for consultancies awarded by the diplomatic and aid wings of the Department during 1991-92 and during 1992-93 up to 31 January 1993.

Coopers and Lybrand
(a) DIPLOMATIC WING
1991-92
Strategic Study—Value = £61,000

1992-93
(i) Market Testing General
(ii) Long Hours and Working Practices
(iii) Market Testing Support on Information Systems
Total Value in 1992-93 £71,000.

(b) Aid Wing
1991-92
Former Soviet Union: St. Petersburg Free Enterprise Business Plan
Ghana: Integrated Personnel/Management Payroll Database Study
South Africa: Municipal Finance Consultant: World Bank Urban Sector Mission
Anguilla: Annual Audit
Guyana: Assistance to Divestment Programme
Czechoslovakia: Advisory Assistance to Prague and Bratislava Stock Exchanges: Phase II
Tanzania: Accounting Assistance
Tanzania: Industrial Sector Credit: Privatisation Workshop
Zambia: Accounts Team Phase II: Technical Assistance to the Bank of Zambia
Czechoslovakia: Assistance to the Prague and Bratislava Stock Exchanges
Poland: Study of Options for Tax Incentives
Zambia: Technical Assistance to the Bank of Zambia
Nepal: Civil Service Reform
Hungary: Electricity Pricing, Regulation and Industry Restructuring Consultancy
United Kingdom: Market Testing of ODA Headquarters
Total Value in 1991-92 = £1·71 million.

1992-93
Ghana: Health Sector Preparatory Consultancy: Human Resource Development
Former Soviet Union: Property Privatisation Project: Supervisor: Russia
Hungary: Phase II: Support for the Hungarian Electricity Sector
Poland: Conduct of Council Business: Loan Government Assistance Project
Egypt: Project Review: Egyptian National Institute of Transport
Czechoslovakia: Advisory Assistance to Prague and Bratislava Stock Exchanges
United Kingdom: Review of Office Services: Market Testing
Kenya: Parastatal Reform: Preparation and Appraisal: Phases I, II and III
Bangladesh: Short Term Consultancy: Project Support
Bangladesh: Bangladesh Power Development Board Action Plan
Turks and Caicos Islands: Review of Revenue Study
United Kingdom: Privatisation Proposals.
Ethiopia: Structural Adjustment Reform Programme: Public Sector Retrenchment
Tanzania: Tanzania Railways: Information Technology Strategy Study
Tanzania: Tanzania Railways: Asset Revaluation Study
Tanzania: Tanzania Railways: Support to Finance and Supplies Department
Poland: Financial Management for Local Government
Tanzania: Personnel Control Study: Personnel Controls and Information Systems
Tanzania: Chief Advisor: Parastatal Reform
United Kingdom: Market Testing: Service Specification: Overseas Pensions Department
Zambia: Assistance with the Establishment of a Revenue Board
United Kingdom: Review of Crown Agents (I) and (II)

Total Value is 1992-93 = £6·0 million

Touche Ross
(a) Diplomatic Wing
1991-92 Nil
1992-93 Nil

(b) Aid Wing
1991-92
Hungary: Assistance to Budapest Stock Exchange in the Establishment of New Trading
Zambia: Adviser: Privatisation of Public Enterprises
Romania: Climate Change Study
Global: Management and Operational Plan to Interim Multi Ozone Fund
Total Value = £0·43 million
1992-93 Nil

Price Waterhouse
(a) Diplomatic Wing
1991-92 Finance Accounts System—Value = £0·27 million
1992-93 Finance Accounts System—Value = £0·21 million

(b) Aid Wing
1991-92
Czechoslovakia: Organisation and Business Review of Agrobank—Value = £39,000
1992-93
Malawi: Further Assistance to Department of Statutory Bodies
Tanzania: Tanzania Railways: Review of Pensions
Total Value = £0·33 million
Ernst and Young

(a) Diplomatic Wing
1991-92
Heavy Baggage Contract—Value = £20,000
1992-93
Overseas Estates Procurement—Value = £59,000

(b) Aid Wing
1991-92
Czechoslovakia: Slovak National Insurance Co. Privatisation
Czechoslovakia: Voucher Privatisation—Secondary Market Study: Consultant Advisor
Czechoslovakia: Voucher Privatisation Programme
Czechoslovakia: Assistance with Privatisation Policy: Stage 2

Total Value = £1.74 million

1992-93
Czechoslovakia: Voucher Privatisation—Secondary Market Study II

Total Value = £0·18 million

Chrichton Roberts Ltd

(a) Diplomatic Wing
1991-92—Nil
1992-93—Nil

(b) Aid Wing
1991-92—Nil
1992-93—Nil

KPMG Management Consultants

(a) Diplomatic Wing
1991-92—Review of Career Planning—Value = £0·35 million
1992-93—Nil
(b) Aid Wing
1991-92
Guyana: Public Service Review Phase III
Ghana and Kenya: Country Studies: Climate Change
Uganda: Civil Service Reform
Guyana: Public Service Review Phase II
Tanzania: Debt Reconciliation
Czechoslovakia: Privatisation of the CESKA Insurance Company
Poland: Assistance to Insurance Division of Ministry of Finance

Total Value = £2·03 million

1992-93
Poland: Agricultural Development Fund
St. Kitts: Offshore Financial Services Consultant

United Kingdom: Review of Services Provided by OACD
Romania: Procurement Advice for Information Systems
India: Singareni Colliery Spares Management/Incentive Study
United Kingdom: Market Testing of Natural Resources Institute
United Kingdom: Development of Costing Module at Natural Resources Institute

Total Value = £0·38 million

LEOPOLD JOSEPH MANAGEMENT CONSULTANTS
(a) Diplomatic Wing
1991-92 Nil
1992-93 Nil

(b) Aid Wing
1991-92 Nil
1992-93 Nil

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many contracts for consultancies were awarded by his Department over *(a)* the last 12 months and *(b)* 1991-92.

Mr. Goodlad: The numbers of contracts for consultancies awarded by the diplomatic and aid wings of the Department in 1991-92 and 1992-93 to 31 January 1993 are as follows:

	1991-92	*1992-93*
Diplomatic wing	396	482
Aid wing	948	883
Total	1,344	1,365

Haiti

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further steps are being taken by Her Majesty's Government in support of the restoration of human rights and democracy in Haiti.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We continue to support the efforts of the United Nations and the Organisation of American States to broker a settlement. Along with EC partners we issued a statement on 15 December 1992 condemning continued human rights abuses and demanding a return to constitutional order; and on 21 January 1993 issued a further statement in support of United Nations-Organisation of American States efforts and rejecting recent elections in Haiti as invalid and undemocratic.

Iraq

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will state the time scale for the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction in Iraq; and what steps are being taken to ensure that the location of such weapons becomes known to the United Nations inspectors.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Nations Special Commission on Iraq and the International Atomic Energy Agency are charged with the elimination of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. They will continue to conduct inspections until they are satisfied that all prohibited weapons, components and facilities have been destroyed, removed or rendered harmless.

The international community continues to press Iraq to comply with its obligation to make full declarations of all WMD-related items. Individual Governments provide further information as to the possible location of such items.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Consultants

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many contracts for consultancies were awarded by his Department over *(a)* the last 12 months and *(b)* 1991-92.

Mr. Eggar: The information requested is as follows:

Period	*Number of consultancy contracts awarded*
1 March 1992—23 February 1993	880
1 April 1991—31 March 1992	1,179

Note: The figures do not include contracts issued by those executive agencies which have delegated authority to engage consultants.

Airline Product Development Subsidies

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what provision in the US/EC agreement on limitation of airline product development subsidies is made for spillover effects from defence programmes; and what monitoring mechanisms for this agreement are in place.

Mr. Sainsbury: The agreement limits all indirect Government support which benefits the development or production of civil aircraft, whether or not such support was originally directed towards military projects. These limits are 3 per cent. of annual commercial turnover of the civil aircraft industry, or 4 per cent. of the turnover of any one firm.

The agreement provides for an annual exchange of information between the parties and twice-yearly meetings.

Most-favoured Nations

Mr. Hendry: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what countries have most-favoured nation status with the European Community; what trading advantages this provides; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: Article I of the general agereement on tariffs and trade requires GATT contracting parties to apply their external trade regimes, including customs tariffs, to all other contracting parties in the same way and without discrimination. The advantages of this so-called most-favoured nation provision are clarity and certainty of rights and obligations in international trade. The European community grants basic most-favoured nation status to all countries, although a number of countries, particularly developing countries, enjoy preferential trading status with the Community under special arrangements for that purpose.

Coal Research Establishment

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent discussions he has had about the future of the coal research establishment.

Mr. Eggar: Clean coal technology and the future role of the coal research establishment in developing this technology is under discussion as part of our work on the coal review. My Department's chief scientific adviser on science and technology has visited the coal research establishment.

Leyland DAF

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his oral answer of 17 February, *Official Report*, column 313, when was the contact of the Minister of State with his Dutch opposite number to which he referred; which Dutch Minister he contacted; and if the contact was by meeting or by telephone.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 24 February 1993]:* My right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry spoke to his opposite number, Mr. Koos Andriessen, the Dutch Economic Affairs Minister, by telephone on 4 February 1993.

Mineworkers' Redundancy Payments

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the current mineworkers' redundancy terms will also apply to miners at the 21 pits in the coal review if any are made redundant after 27 March; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 24 February 1993]:* As my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade made clear to the House on 20 January, the issue of redundancy after March 1993 will be dealt with in the White Paper.

Textiles

Mr. Cryer: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures he has taken to implement the RETEX scheme of European Community assistance to regions heavily dependent on textile and clothing employment.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 25 February 1993]:* The United Kingdom has sent to the European Commission two programmes under the RETEX initiative for the eligible textile areas of Great Britain and Northern Ireland respectively. The Commission has not yet replied.

A call for applications has already been made and once the Commission agrees the programme, projects will be considered by the RETEX programme monitoring committee for approval.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations his Department has received from the apparel and textile industry on export promotion issues; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 25 February 1993]:* Ministers and officials have many contacts with a wide range of industry bodies which give rise to discussions on export promotion issues and we always take careful note of their views.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures are being taken by the European Community to combat fraudulent evasion of quotas on textiles; what estimates are available on the extent of fraudulent trade; what similar information is available on measures taken in the United States of America; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 25 February 1993]:* The European Community has agreed, for the first time, a budget of 500,000 ecus to deal with suspected fraudulent trade in textiles and clothing. It will fund the activities of EC anti-fraud squads which will pursue cases on the basis of information supplied by member states to the Commission. In addition, the EC has agreed with certain supplier countries intensified monitoring of trade in goods where fraud is suspected. There are no official estimates of fraudulent textiles trade involving the European Community. As regards the USA, my Department has recently passed to Her Majesty's Customs and the European Commission an indication from the United States customs service that it would welcome co-operation in tackling fraudulent textiles trade.

Spring Ram Factory, Bradford

Mr. Cryer: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the first payment was made for the development of the Spring Ram factory in Bradford.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 25 February 1993]:* I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave him on 9 February 1993, *Official Report*, columns 568-69.

Tobacco

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received concerning the impact of the European single market on the retail tobacco trade; what is his assessment of its impact; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 25 February 1993]:* My right hon. Friend has not received any specific representations about the impact of the European single market on the retail tobacco trade. The Government are well aware of the concerns of the trade, and the United Kingdom producers, about the possible implications of the single market and are keeping a close watch for any abuses. However, it is too early to be sure what impact there may have been on the retail trade.

Expo '92

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals he has received for the future use of the British trade pavilion used at the Expo '92 exhibition in Seville; and what decisions he has taken.

Mr. Needham *[pursuant to the reply, 16 February 1993, Official Report, col. 135]:* I am pleased to announce that contracts to sell the pavilion were signed today, Friday 26 February 1993. The purchasers are Asiansky TV, who will dismantle the pavilion and relocate it in Brent as the key feature of an Asian centre development.

Somerset University

Mr. Bayley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 9 February, *Official Report*, column *563*, when he approved the use of the name

"Somerset University" under the Business Names Act 1985; and whether the statement submitted to him by the owner of that business stated that a written request for an opinion had been made to the Secretry of State for Education.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The use of the name was approved on 9 November 1988. The regulations which specified the word university as requiring the approval of the Secretary of State did not come into effect until 1 January 1983, and did not apply to names in use before that date. Since there was evidence that the name had been in use before that date there was no requirement for the owner of the business to submit a statement from the Department of Education and Science.

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INDEX TO THE
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SESSION 1992–93

15th February, 1993—26th February, 1993

SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc, between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instrument etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading Speaker's rulings and statements.

Other contributions by Speaker and deputies appear under the heading Speaker.

Opposition Day Debates, Estimates Day Debates and Standing Order No. 10 applications are listed under those respective headings and under subject headings too.

The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates etc* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

Abbreviations

Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Com = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

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